

Faith Demonstrated by What We Refuse and Choose!

Every one of us who belong to Jesus, is involved in a battle. And most of that battle goes on inside of us. We are in a fight for faith, and to keep faith. Nearly every day, in some way, our confidence in God is challenged or tested. This fight never completely goes away. At the very end of his life, Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”. Paul had to fight till the day he was beheaded by Nero. Hebrews tells us we must hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm till the end!

AB Simpson said, “Satan's objective in all his attacks upon you, is to destroy your trust. If he can get you to lose your simple confidence in God, he knows that he will soon have you at his feet.”

It is confidence in God that overcomes the world and the devil. And we know what that feels like in our soul. Faith brings victory and hope, and a deep sense of well being. Confident trust in God opens the doors of your heart so the Holy Spirit can come in and fill you with his peace and joy and power. But...When we throw away our confidence, for a day or even an hour, darkness and defeat settles in our heart... and it seems that Satan has his way with us.

This should ignite our passion to pursue a life of faith. And there is no better place in the scripture to “learn faith” than Hebrews 11. Because it not only TELLS us what faith is, it SHOWS us what faith is in the lives of people just like us! A couple of weeks ago we said that faith LOOKS like something. It is not merely mental! It is not a list of things you can rattle off that you believe. It is clinging confidently to God in your heart. Then we think, and talk, and live out of that place of faith. Real faith ALWAYS shows!

James said “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds”. His point was you CAN’T show your faith without outward actions. It’s impossible! Because you CAN’T SEE FAITH! BUT you can see the effects of faith in what a person lives for, in the things they value, in the way they talk, in what they love, in what excites them and in what they give themselves to.

You CAN detect the presence OR absence of faith, in another person quite easily! AND... If you listen to your own words and internal thoughts, and watch your own life, or even look in the mirror, you can detect if YOU are living from a place of faith or not.

A couple of weeks ago we read how Isaac and Jacob SHOWED their faith in speaking blessing over their children. We read how Joseph SHOWED his faith by speaking confidently that God would bring the Israelites out of Egypt. These men SHOWED US how important “what we say” is to our life of faith. IF we have faith in God we will speak with hope about the future. We will speak of God’s goodness and mercy and loving-kindness!

Now, in Hebrews 11:24-27 we see what faith looks like in the life of Moses. Verse 24 “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, REFUSED to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, He CHOSE to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

*Moses showed his faith by refusing something, and choosing something. He refused the glory of Egypt, and the pleasures of Egypt. Instead he CHOSE to suffer with God's people.

OUR faith is shown in what we refuse and in what we choose!

*What you CHOOSE is what you REALLY believe in!

Many people say, "well yes, of course, I believe God, but I've got to do what makes me happy". And they choose a relationship or something else that is clearly not God's best for them. They do that because they really believe that is what will make them happy.

Andrew Murray said "What we love, and live (for), (is what) we believe in". If we are choosing the world it is because we believe in the world; we believe that it is better and it's rewards and pleasures are better. If we are choosing God, it is because we believe in him. We believe HE is better and his rewards and pleasures are better.

Moses was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. This woman was probably Hatshepsut, who eventually became the only woman Pharaoh in Egypt. She raised Moses as her son, to become the next Pharaoh. Egypt was at the pinnacle of power and Moses was at the center of it of all. Everything was falling in place for him.

But....Moses REFUSED the riches and pleasures of Egypt, and CHOSE to suffer with a down-trodden group of slaves who HAD absolutely nothing, EXCEPT that they were God's people.

Verse 26 explains Moses' FAITH by which he made this choice.

"He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." He chose what he chose, BECAUSE he believed it was a better deal! He believed it was in his best interest!

His choice made NO SENSE to Pharaoh's daughter. It made no sense to anyone else in Egypt. BUT, to Moses it was the ONLY REASONABLE choice to make! Because Moses saw that being an outcast with Christ would bring greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt. He simply chose the greater blessing. He actually BELIEVED that the riches of God were greater than all the wealth and glory and comforts of the world. So he chose God!

He did this because, "He was looking to the reward"! The NIV says "he was looking ahead to his reward". Faith looks ahead to how things will turn out in the end! Andrew Murray said, "Faith looks at everything as (we will see it) when the judgment day is past and the glory begun". WE are essentially people who look to that day, when each person will receive his or her own reward from God. And we make our life choices based on that. That is living by faith!

Moses refused the sinful pleasures of Egypt because he believed that pursuing God, had MORE PLEASURE than sin could ever offer him. But here's the amazing thing. He believed God was the greater pleasure, even though choosing God would mean sharing in the oppression and suffering of God's people!! He believed knowing God, even in such horrible circumstances as slavery, was better than all the pleasures of sin. Sam Storms said, "It was from his desire for a greater pleasure that he said, "No" to a lesser pleasure".

CS Lewis said, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child, content to play with mud pies in a slum because he does not know what it means to have a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily

pleased.” IE We fill our lives with such small pleasures and most people miss the one great pleasure for which we were created, to know and enjoy and experience communion with the Living God. Moses didn't do that! He went after God, because he believed God was the greatest pleasure!

But there is certain road we must go down to receive these riches of knowing God. And that road is the way of suffering or abuse. Moses had to accept the reproach of Christ”. The NEB translates this “the stigma that rests on God's Anointed”. A stigma is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting, (it is) an undesired differentness. A stigma reduces (you) from a whole and normal person to a tainted and discounted one”. That is how the world regards you as a follower of Christ! And it is the path you must go down in order to fully know and experience and enjoy God!

All who seriously follow God will find themselves in the role of an outcast. Moses knew that very well! But he considered “the reproach of Christ” greater riches. The message for us is to embrace the stigma of Christ to know the power and riches of Christ.

Romans 8 says, “If we suffer with him we will be glorified with him”. That's why Paul said he was willing to be regarded as a fool for Christ's sake.

He said, “We are considered the scum of the earth. I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.” 1 Cor. 4:9,10

None of us have suffered the kind of reproach Paul suffered. But we are a part of THAT stigmatized group! We are part of those people, who are different, tainted, discounted, discredited. Increasingly in our culture, all who are committed to Christ will end up looking like fools for Christ. The point is this: If you want the reward of Christ you must CHOOSE to suffer dishonor with the people of God.

We do not choose this simply because we have a martyr complex, or wish to suffer, or like to be different. We choose this for the same reason Moses chose it! We choose it because we see THE RICHES that will be ours, BY aligning ourselves with the reproach of Christ.

The thing that pushes the world and its sinful pleasures out of our hearts is NOT simply telling ourselves that everything in the world is worthless junk. Rather it is seeing and experiencing the infinitely greater pleasures and treasures in Christ. Some Christians, I think, actually believe THIS WORLD has the best stuff, and they feel like they gave up a lot to follow Jesus. That is NOT Christianity. We ACTUALLY believe God is far better! We actually believe WE are the ones who are well off! We actually believe we are the ones blessed forever and ever with endless treasure and pleasure in the presence of God!

Sam Storms “You weren’t created for the passing pleasures of this world. You were created and designed by God to enjoy to the max a happiness and joy and deep soul satisfaction that is more enduring

and more delightful and more exciting than anything this world's passing pleasures can give you".

Personal applications:

*Biblical faith is always refusing certain things and choosing certain things, based on who God is and what God says. We show our faith by what we refuse and what we choose throughout each day. It is NOT ONLY, major life choices that reflect our faith!

We show our faith in what we REFUSE to say to our spouse, or in a phone conversation with a friend or family member. (Such as sharp words or angry outbursts) And we show our faith in what we CHOOSE to say instead. Paul said, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." That is an act of faith!

We show our faith in refusing some kinds of entertainment, music, TV shows, movies, books. We refuse things that are vile and raised up against God. And choose things that will edify and please God, and are acceptable to God, because we believe God is there and he is a rewarder of those who seek after him and the things that please him.

We show our faith by refusing to allow attitudes of complaint and criticism and harshness and self pity to fester in our hearts, and instead we choose godly, loving, forgiving, thankful attitudes.

*We show our faith by refusing to live for the world's approval and acceptance, and choosing to throw in with the people of God, even if it makes us look foolish.

Martyn Lloyd Jones tells of how he went to a play in London with some friends in the 1920s. They all enjoyed the evening, but when he walked out the doors of the theater there was a Salvation Army Band playing hymns on the street doing evangelistic work. (In those days the Salvation Army still had a powerful evangelistic ministry on the streets) Martyn said, "Suddenly I knew, these were my people". He had experienced the pull of the world, but now he was feeling the pull of God's people. And he said, "These are the people I belong to and I'm going to belong to them." He didn't mean he would join the Salvation Army. He meant that he had experienced the difference between the pleasure of the world and throwing in with the people of God, even if there was a reproach or shame in that. Throwing in with God's people is throwing in with the Lord. And he knew he couldn't be happy with anything less than the Lord and his people. At that time he was studying to be a medical doctor, but he chose instead to go into the ministry and became one of the most effective Bible teachers, the church as ever had.

*The opportunity to make the most money, to have the most comfortable lifestyle, to achieve the greatest positions, is not always the choice of faith. Sometimes God calls us to something that will require that we refuse these things in order to go God's way!

FF Bruce point out that Moses could easily have rationalized that "he could do more for the Israelites, by remaining in Pharaoh's court and using his influence on their behalf, than by renouncing his Egyptian citizenship and becoming a member of a depressed group with no political rights.". But no matter how much he might have

rationalized that choice, IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THE CHOICE OF FAITH!

*There are some of you, listening to this message, who have choices to make! There are options in front of you, two ways you can go. ONE choice you can make, is based on faith in God and in what God values; it is a choice that is clearly best for you in light of Eternity.

The OTHER choice you can make is based on confidence in the world; it will give you security; it is a choice that the world will applaud. People, friends and family, will tell you did the right thing. It is the safe choice. Now the question facing you is: “Will you make your choice by faith in the world...or will you believe God and believe that what he has for you is best?”

*John Brown (commentator from 1800s) said, “Believe as Moses believed and you will find it easy to choose and act as Moses did.”

Refusing the pleasures of sin and walking away from the acceptance of the world is much easier when you actually believe that, IN GOD there IS great treasure and pleasure for you now, and forever! - It's greater than all the riches of Egypt, or America, or anything you could possibly imagine. You will share in the glory and the inheritance of God's own Son and reign with him forever and ever. He will be your God, you will be his. You will see his face and be with him for ever.

If you keep your eyes on the prize, it will deliver you from making a lot of bad and harmful choices! If you believe that immense treasure and pleasure comes to those who seek God, and you will find you

are able to refuse the world, the flesh and devil and choose the things of God. And you will know that you have, by far, the best deal.

Pray: Father, open the eyes of our hearts to see the pleasure and the treasure of knowing you. Open the eyes of our heart to see the reward ahead of us! Help us to see the glory that will be ours from sharing in the reproach of Christ. Help us to set our heart of this heavenly treasure, and to make our choices and decisions based on that!! Change us forever from this time in your Word. Amen