

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
June 23, 2013**

Hebrews 11:24-26

Choosing to Suffer

- 1. Moses Chose Suffering**
- 2. Children of God and Children of the World**
- 3. How do we approach suffering?**

Hymns: 735 – 322

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

Today, as we speak about Moses, I'd like to do a little pretending. But first, here is a little setup. Moses was born as a Hebrew, in slavery to Egypt. At the time of his birth, the Egyptian leaders were fearful of the growing strength of the Israelites, so every male born to an Israelite was to be killed at birth. However, Moses' mother couldn't do it. Instead, she put her boy in a basket in the Nile River and prayed for the best. By God's grace, the basket was found by Pharaoh's daughter and she fell in love with this little baby boy. The result was that Moses was raised as Egyptian royalty, with all the luxuries, education and training that came with it. Acts 7 tells us that "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." (Acts 7:21-22) Now here is where I would like you to imagine. Can you imagine how much different things would have been if Moses had remained in the palace of Egypt and continued in Pharaoh's good graces. Here is what would've happened. Eventually Moses would have risen to a position similar to the one that Joseph had attained 400 years earlier. By God's grace and guidance, Moses would have been blessed with so much success that Pharaoh would appoint him as his top advisor in all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh would look to Moses as his closest confidant and would trust him in everything that he did. Finally, the time would come when Moses could go to Pharaoh and

show him that enslaving 2,000,000 Israelite foreigners in the land of Egypt was not worth the trouble. They were becoming too numerous and powerful. They were a drag on the Egyptian resources. The Egyptian dependence on their labor was resulting in a young generation of Egyptians who didn't know what hard work was and who would be ill-prepared to lead Egypt in the future. And because Pharaoh trusted his friend and advisor Moses, he would let the people of Israel go with his blessing. And the Israelites would have set off to claim their homeland in peace and with confidence in this mighty man, this trusted advisor to Pharaoh who was now leading them. There would be no 10 plagues and the trouble and destruction they brought. Pharaoh's heart wouldn't have been hardened. And he and the rest of his army wouldn't have all lost their lives, having been swept away by the gushing waters of the Red Sea. More importantly, there would have been no desert rebellion, complaining, and wandering for the people of Israel. With the wisdom, power, and access that came from living among the people of Egypt and in the luxury Pharaoh's court, things would have been easier. Not just for Moses and the people of Israel, but also for Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Of course, we know that it didn't happen that way. But do you think Moses ever played that game of "if only?" Do you think he ever wondered if things would have been easier as he incurred Pharaoh's wrath again and again during the ten plagues? Do you think he ever wondered if things would have been easier as he toiled in wilderness during the Exodus? If only he had stayed in the life that he had in Pharaoh's palace, things would have been easier. If only he had chosen to remain in his life of privilege with all of its advantages, things would have been easier.

Instead, Moses chose suffering. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "**Moses, when he had 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 pleasures of sin for a short time.**"

The writer to the Hebrews tells us something very interesting here. He says that Moses chose to be mistreated. That implies that Moses also could've chosen to remain where he had been. He could've chosen to remain in Pharaoh's palace. He could've chosen to remain where he had all the luxuries that life as a prince in ancient Egypt would afford him.

But he did not, and the writer to the Hebrews tells us why. "**He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures**

of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”

God had blessed Moses with many physical blessings, blessings that came from being raised as Egyptian royalty. He was privileged in many ways that he would not have been had he been raised as a Hebrew slave. He received the best of Egyptian care and nutrition. He received an education in one of the most advanced civilizations of all time. He was trained to be a warrior and leader. And there is nothing wrong with labeling any of those as blessings. In fact, God would use those blessings as Moses served him and the people of Israel.

However, a time came when the earthly blessings that had come into Moses' Egyptian life instead threatened as a source of harm. The threat was that the blessings that resulted from being a child of Egypt could be more treasured than the blessings that would come into Moses' life from being a child of Israel, a child of God. That life of luxury could lead Moses to greed and gluttony. The time in Egyptian culture, while shaping a strong leader, could also lead Moses to foreign gods and pagan practices. Every day that Moses spent being more indoctrinated with Egyptian culture and being lavished with more Egyptian prosperity meant that he was being pulled further and further away from who he was and what he had as a child of God.

And so the time came when Moses could no longer live as a child of God while remaining a child of Egypt. And so he chose the suffering that would come from joining a nation that was stuck in slavery. He chose the suffering that would come from being an adversary of Pharaoh, not an associate. He chose to go from the top of the pyramid to the bottom. But he knew that the suffering that he would endure wouldn't compare to the blessings that God would deliver to those who were his children by faith. The blessings that God had promised to his people were greater than the treasures of Egypt. Moses treasured the forgiveness that God promised through the Messiah. He treasured the salvation that would be won by God's Chosen One. He treasured the eternal glories of heaven. Protecting this treasure was most important to Moses and its promise went ahead of any pleasure or ease of life that he might enjoy in Egypt. The reward that came by faith was most important.

Like Moses, our lives are filled with physical blessings. While we do not live the lavish lifestyles of Egyptian princes, the everyday luxuries that we have as US citizens in the 21st century make our

lives easier than most in human history. God has not called us to suffer great physical persecution for his name. We have not been driven from our homelands. We have not been separated from our families. Life situations might make life hard or uncomfortable, but can any of us say that life is difficult because we are Christians? God has seemingly allowed us many of the comforts of this world while also giving us the blessings of faith. We get to live as children of God and children of this world at the same time.

But here is the question that Moses' situation must cause us to ask. "Is that even possible?" Moses got to a point where he realized that he could not live as an Egyptian while also living as God wanted him to. Can we? Can we live as children of God while also enjoying the things that come from being children of this world? Or is that just what we have convinced ourselves of because we like all the things of this world? Perhaps this is the question that might force us to answer definitively: Do we hide from suffering as Christians in order to protect the joys of this world?

Consider these:

- If my TV, computer or iPad keeps me from opening up my Bible and having personal devotion and growing in my faith, shouldn't I choose suffering without that device for the good of my faith?
- If my boat, or my camping, or any other leisure activity keeps me from making it to church, shouldn't I choose suffering without that fun for the good of my relationship with God?
- If a potential promotion at work keeps me from sharing Jesus with a person at work, shouldn't I choose suffering without that promotion for the good of Christ's kingdom?

It is pretty easy to find many ways in which we could be suffering for God, but which we hide from. It is even easier to excuse those actions and explain why it wouldn't be wise for us to choose that suffering. What would we have said if Moses had stayed in Pharaoh's court and not chosen to suffer? What would God have said? Is our hiding and excuse-making any different?

With that failure in front of us, we first of all give thanks that we have a Savior who did not hide from suffering or make excuses like we so often do. We give thanks that we have forgiveness for all of the excuses that we've made and all the struggles we have hid from. And assured of that

forgiveness, we carry out our discipleship with renewed determination.

Certainly, we do not need to go and seek out suffering or find crosses that make our lives miserable and hard just so that we can feel like good Christians. We don't need to suffer a certain amount of persecution and hardship before we can be considered a faithful follower of Christ.

However, as Christians, we do need to make sure that our eyes are always on the real reward. And that means that we are on guard, because as long as we have blessings in this life, Satan will use them as a source of harm. He will use them to change our image of real wealth. He will use them to steal our focus.

Keeping our eyes on the real reward also means that we will be ready to take the more difficult road. It means, that like Moses, when the time comes to pick suffering for the good of our faith and for the good of God's kingdom, we will do so. We will value our status as children of God over what we are as children of this world.

And we can do that because we know the blessings that are there for the children of God. It is first of all forgiveness, won for us through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. It is salvation, given to us by God out of his love. It is eternal riches, promised to those who live and die in faith.

And we know that through the suffering that we might encounter, God is making the rewards that much sweeter. Through suffering, he is making the rewards that much surer as we grow in our faith.

As Christian people, we can give thanks for every blessing that God brings into our lives, we can give thanks for all of the comforts that he gives to us in life, and the astonishing thing is that we can do the same for any suffering that he brings into our lives, because we know that our real reward, our real joy is waiting for us in heaven.