

"Moses: The Key to Courage"

Hebrews 11:23, 27-29

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Folks, it is not just cowardly lions who need courage. Psychiatrists tell us that being able to overcome fear is one of the most important psychological needs human beings have. And I am convinced it is those trusting the Lord who are best able to overcome their fears. Or to be more accurate, those who trust the Lord will learn to be afraid only of things that they should be afraid of. As Captain Ahab said in *Moby Dick*, "I don't want anyone on this boat who is not afraid of whales." A wise person has some fear.

As a pastor, I might say, "I want anyone in this church to be afraid of living in rebellion against the living God." It is not brave, but foolish to dare to oppose the Lord. Yet all of us I suspect could use a little less fear, and a little more courage in our lives.

The model of courage we explore today surrounds the life of a man named Moses. This summer we have been studying Hebrews 11, what I call the "Faith Hall of Fame." Today we come to the Moses exhibit. Within Judaism he was often seen as the greatest faith hero because he led the Israelites out of Egypt and received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Yet for the New Testament writers, including the author of Hebrews, the greatest Old Testament saint is not Moses, the lawgiver, but Abraham, the man who lived by faith. However, Moses too was a man of faith. He, his parents, and his people had a faith that enabled them to overcome fear in the face of great opposition. Let's pause and pray the Lord would use His Word to help us develop that type of courage in our lives.

I want to focus on three examples of faith-based courage. We begin with Moses' parents. **Hebrews 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.**

Many of us are familiar with this story that is recorded in the first two chapters of the book of Exodus. You maybe have read this passage before. Of perhaps you have watched the movie the Ten Commandments, or The Prince of Egypt.

About 400 years earlier, Jacob and his family had left Canaan and taken refuge in Egypt because of a severe famine. His son, Joseph, had been a great ruler in that land. Descendants from Jacob, his 12 sons, and their families now number over a million people. They are called Israelites (after Jacob) or Hebrews. The Egyptian Pharaoh begins to see them as a threat, so he makes them slaves.

He also gives a command that every Hebrew baby boy that is born should be thrown into the Nile River and killed. However, when Moses is born, his parents refuse to do this. Apparently, he was a good-looking baby, and his striking physical appearance convinced his parents that this child was a special gift of God.

So defying Pharaoh's order, they hide their infant son in their home for three months. When it becomes no longer practical to do that, Moses' mother puts him in a basket and places him along the bank of the river. There he is found and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and grows up as the prince of Egypt.

What impresses the author of Hebrews is the courage of Moses' parents. "They were not afraid of the king's edict." They knew if they are caught hiding the baby that not only will their son be killed, but they will be executed as well. Moses' parents risk their lives for the sake of this little boy. Their faith in the Lord meant they overcame their fear of Pharaoh and what he could do to them.

Let's skip down now to verse **Hebrews 11:27 By faith he (Moses) left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.** Now this is kind of a tough verse to understand. It apparently refers to Moses leaving Egypt and going to Midian after he had killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. Our text says, "He left not being afraid of the anger of the king."

Yet, this is difficult to reconcile with **Exodus 2:14b, 15a Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian.** Now, those verse do not

explicitly say Moses was afraid of Pharaoh's anger, but what Hebrews says seems like a strange interpretation. Yet maybe the writer has something else in mind. The last phrase of Hebrews 11:27 may be the key to correctly understanding what is being said. "For he endured as seeing him who is invisible." This points to a close relationship Moses has with the Lord. After killing the Egyptian, one plausible option for Moses would be to lead a slave revolt. The Israelites were so numerous that might have had a reasonable chance of overthrowing their Egyptian masters. The anger Moses felt as he watched his people suffer may have made this an attractive choice.

Yet his relationship with the Lord enables Moses to realize this is not God's will. It would be forty more years. 40 before God would deliver His people from bondage. It was the Lord's will that Moses head out to the Midian desert and wait...Wait a long time. Before God would use him to lead Israel back to Canaan.

So, I think what impresses the author of Hebrews is that Moses is not afraid to wait. He trusts God enough that he has the courage to follow God's timetable and is not afraid of what Pharaoh might try to do as he waits.

The third example of courage is Moses and the entire nation of Israel, now probable 1.5 million people. Forty years after leaving Egypt, Moses returns and tells Pharaoh, "Let my people go." If you have read Exodus 7-13, or have seen the movies, you know about the negotiations with Pharaoh and the plagues that God send upon the Egyptians. The story culminates in Exodus 14. Pharaoh had finally consented to let the Israelites leave Egypt, but he changes his mind.

He sends his great army to pursue the people and drive them back to Egypt. The Israelites, camped along the Red Sea, are initially terrified as the Egyptians approach, but the Lord intervenes in a miraculous way. He uses a strong wind to part the water and make dry land in the middle of the Red Sea. This gives the people of Israel a path to walk through safely, but when the Egyptians try to follow them, the water comes crashing down and the entire Egyptian army is destroyed.

What impresses the author of Hebrews is the faith and courage of the people. **Hebrews 11:29** By

faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. Can you imagine stepping out onto a path that has immense walls of water on both sides, with nothing visible holding them up? I remember driving through a tunnel in Boston that goes under the harbor thinking "What will happen if a wall breaks?" If I would have been an Israelite, I might have been tempted to take my chances fighting the Egyptians than walk on that path with all the water there.

Yet, thought they were a group that could complain a lot and be very fickle, these people trusted the Lord to keep that path through the sea dry. Because of their faith, they had no fear of the water.

Well folks, these are some wonderful Old Testament stories. Again, they are not myths or fairy tales. They are real history, accurate accounts of events that really did happen about 13, maybe 1400 years before Jesus was born. And they contain great examples of faith-based courage. Let's consider two lessons for us concerning faith and courage in our lives today.

The first lesson we learn from the story of Moses is that we should not be afraid of other people. Moses' parents, who didn't fear Pharaoh, are a great model for us. God's people have often demonstrated real courage in the face of opposition. We need to be willing to do what is right, even if we know someone else will be upset. Even if the person who may get upset is very important, very powerful, or has the ability to do us great harm. We still should not be afraid to do what is right.

During the past 30+ years since the fall of Soviet Communism, many stories have come out of the former Soviet bloc, telling of the courage demonstrated by Christians facing opposition and persecution.

My favorite is one that happened in Russia when Leonid Brezhnev was in power. A group of about 20 Christians was meeting secretly in an apartment as they did twice each week. There was a knock on the door, and when the host opened it, four soldiers, brandishing their automatic rifles, burst into the room. They pointed their guns at

the people and ordered them to put up their hands.

Then they said, "All of you who are willing to renounce your Christianity and pledge your loyalty to the communist party, may leave and go back to your homes. Then we will deal with the rest of you." One man walked quickly to the door and four others soon joined him. When those five had left the room, one of the soldiers slammed the door shut. Then the soldiers put their weapons on the floor and the said, "Put your hands down. We too are believers in Jesus Christ. We have come to worship with you. But we only dare worship with those who are willing to die for Him."

Friends, would you have the courage to stay in their room? Or would you have denied the Lord Jesus, thinking you could save your own skin? Or would you say, "I sure hope I'd have the courage to stay in that room, but how do I know until it happens?"

Maybe none of us here will ever be asked to risk our lives for the Lord, yet many Christians do that every day, especially in the Islamic world, but also in place like Nigeria, India, and China. It is certainly possible that in the not-too-distant future Christians in the United States will suffer physical harm or imprisonment because of their faith in Jesus.

A few years ago, people going into a Baptist church in San Francisco one Sunday evening were pelted with rocks by radical LGBT protestors who did not like the speaker inside. Yet, even if that type of thing doesn't happen, each of us will still face some opposition because of our faith in Jesus. It might be other students at school who laugh at you because you go to church. Maybe it will be someone at work who labels you a "bigoted, religious extremist," because you don't have a pride flag on your Facebook page. It might be a boss who refuses to give you a promotion you deserve, simply because he doesn't like "born again Christians." It could be family members or neighbors who exclude you from their social gathering because they are uncomfortable with some of your lifestyle or moral standards.

Friends, whenever this type of opposition comes, it is easy to just curl up and keep quiet about your faith. It is easy to laugh at the dirty jokes and blend in with the ungodliness around us. It is very

easy to be afraid of what other people will think or say or what they might even do. It takes courage to stand up for what is good, right, and true, and beautiful.

My guess is that most of us want to stand up for the Lord, but sometimes we are just too scared. We don't have the courage. Christians who are not afraid of what other people may think, say or do are empowered by faith in future grace. By that I mean they recognize that whatever it costs to follow Jesus today, it is well worth it, because in the future the Lord will generously pour out His grace into their lives. Following Jesus is an investment that may not yield immediate benefits, that will bring only a modest return in the short run, but that in the long run will result in unimaginable profit.

As a Christian, you don't have to be afraid of people who laugh at you, shun you, call you names, or even kill you because one day, one day, it will be worth it all. All the embarrassment, trouble, and even pain we experience for the sake of Jesus will be insignificant. Remember what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:11, 12a** **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."**

Folks, I suspect that every time we experience opposition because of our loyalty to Jesus, a deposit is made in our heavenly account. When we are tempted to be afraid of other people and what they may think, say, or do, we need to remember that. We need to allow our faith in future grace to empower our courage so that Pharaohs, Communist soldiers, gals at school or guys at work cannot intimidate us.

The second lesson we learn from this story of Moses is we should not be afraid to trust God. When the Lord calls us to move to a new home or tells us to walk between two walls of water, we should trust Him. We need the courage to give up control of our lives and leave things in God's hands. Now, the thought that we actually have control over our own lives is really an illusion. We do not. But God always does. Napoleon once boasted, "I make circumstances" yet, at the battle of Waterloo made very clear, "man proposes, but God disposes."

Yet we like to keep the illusion of control. This is why many people prefer driving a car to flying in a plane. All the studies show one is much safer in a plane and the probability of having an accident is much greater when you are in a car. But most of us like driving better, because then we control the steering wheel. In the plane we are totally dependent on the competence and judgement of the pilot. That is why some folks are “back seat” or passenger seat drivers. They don’t have confidence in the person with the steering wheel.

Folks, it takes real courage to say, “Yes God, you be in control. You are the driver. I’m going to sit in the back seat, and I’m going to shut my mouth and let you drive.” Giving up control involves doing things God’s way, obeying His commands.

When someone hurts us, our natural response is to try to get even or at least stay mad at that person. Yet, if we trust God, we will seek to forgive that person. When you realize your income is barely keeping up with your expenses, your natural response may be to hang on tightly to every dollar you have. Yet, if you trust God, you will be willing to share whatever you have with those less fortunate than you and give some money to support the Lord’s work.

Most important, as you recognize that your life on this earth is only temporary, as you prepare for what comes after death, the natural inclination is to try to earn God’s favor by being a nice person, doing good things and being more religious. Yet God says “That is not what I want. I want you to stop trusting in your own self and, instead, put your trust in my Son, Jesus Christ. Receive the salvation that is possible because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.”

Friends, it takes courage to give up control and trusting in yourself and instead place your confidence in the Lord Jesus. But this is what each of us needs to do.

So, we need courage to not be afraid of people and also the courage to trust God. So how do we get this type of courage? I think the best place to start is to ask God for it. Pray that He would help you be more courageous, less afraid of what others think and less afraid to let go of our desire and efforts to control everything and instead trust the Lord.

You also need to allow your faith in God’s character to empower that courage. Folks, it is good and important to remember that God is too wise to ever be mistaken, and too good to ever be unkind. We need to remember that nothing is too hard for the Lord. If He tells us to make a left or right turn in life, that is the best road for us to take, even if it seems like a bit of a detour. As we read the Bible, we need to keep our eyes open so we can see His wisdom, goodness, and power more clearly.

If we do that, our courage will grow. And if we find that we are still afraid to trust Him, we need to turn our eyes upon Jesus. We need to see the compassion and power He demonstrated during His ministry on earth. And then we need to gaze at the cross where He willingly suffered and died in our place, so that we might experience abundant life now and through eternity.

As we see more clearly, through Jesus, who the triune God really is, I think it will help us develop the courage to not be afraid of others and the courage to give up control and entrust our lives to Him.

May the Lord help each of us to grow in our courage.