

An Extreme Faith
Hebrews 11:23-29

Philippians 4:1-20

Matthew 6:24-34

Responsive Psalm 118:1-9

Today we will be looking at verses 23-29 of chapter 11, which is this Authors account of Moses who he lists here in this lineage of the faithful. One thing to note before we start reading our text this morning is the significance and importance being put upon their faith, and not really their deeds. For if we were to look back into the life of these men, we would find that they were not these perfect examples to live by, but were indeed flawed men who struggled with sin just as the rest of us. There is a tendency to look at these heroes of the faith and put them up on pedestals as holy men who could do not wrong.

On one hand, they are definitely worthy of notice and of mention, even the author here as seen fit to use them as examples of faith to teach what a godly faith is, but I think it is also important to remember that these men were men, who also sinned, who also at times doubted. The reason that this is important is because it puts the emphasis on God's work through them, not on the work that they had done, not on their actions but on God's work in their lives. These men, were only special because God chose to make them so, they are only listed here in scripture because it was God who chose to use them in this way.

In the Christian circles there is much debate and many books written on the importance of works, or the necessity of works, or the purpose of works as to whether they are justified, or sanctified by them. Now of course there are works involved, just looking at these examples here the past few weeks we see that there is some sort of action, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, Noah, built an ark, Abraham relocated his family, was going to sacrifice his son, and here in what we read today, Moses lead the people out of Egypt, into Canaan, the land promised that would be given to Abraham as an inheritance. But in each of these, it is prefaced by the phrase, "By faith"

It was not these works or these actions that gave them faith, or justified them before God, these actions were a work of that faith, they flowed out of, they were because of...it was not the other way around as some would argue. As it was stated in Genesis, Roman's Galatians, and James. "Abraham believed God, it was accounted to him for righteousness." Abraham was not righteous because of what he did, but because of what he believed, and because of what he believed he did what he did.

This seems very nuanced, but really it has pretty big ramifications upon the believer, for the difference is either you are justified by your faith alone, or, it is also your works which gain you merit before God. This faith is not a synergistic work, it is not God did this, now I must do this...on the contrary God did it all. For without God's work, I would not have the faith needed to respond to what he did, for it is he who has granted me the faith, my faith is only by virtue of his gifting it to me. There is no synergy here, I don't work up the faith to believe, God did, and I can do no other than to respond.

With this in mind, let us read this account here about Moses, starting in verse 23 and reading to verse 29. We all know the story, when Moses was born the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and it was the rule of the Egyptians that stated, any male child born among the slaves would be killed. But it says here, by faith his parents hid him for 3 months. We don't have a lot of details of this, and there has been some speculation that his parents couldn't kill him because he was just too darn cute...but I think that make that argument as a sole purpose in their hiding them is to negate the most important fact that it says, by faith they hid him.

There is some reason, or some purpose that they believed that he was worthy of hiding, worthy of saving which ever it was it had to do with their faith, it was because of their faith they put him in a basket on the river where Pharaoh's daughter found him, adopted him and raised him as her own, as an Egyptian. The title of the sermon this morning is Extreme faith, if we look at each of these accounts the faith of these who are listed is a belief in the impossible. Noah, building an ark for an impossible flood that would come and destroy all who were not secure inside the ark. Abraham, having a son well beyond the age of child bearing, a thing deemed impossible even by Sarah who laughed, or Abraham's belief that God would do the impossible and raise Isaac back from the dead if he were to sacrifice him on the alter. Moses's parents hiding their son, who ended up being the one to lead the people out from under Pharaoh.

Each and every one of these accounts are impossible and to believe in what they were told would have been seen to be extreme, if not foolish and crazy. Yet they had this faith, this extreme faith which was foolish enough to believe God.. of course I don't mean it is foolish to believe God, what I mean is that it appeared foolish to do so but they believed none the less. For they believed the promises of God were of far more value than the world had to offer. We see that here with Moses, verse 24, "By faith Moses, when he came of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The reproach of Christ a greater reward, a greater treasure than all of the treasures of Egypt. He believed it was better to be numbered as one of the slaves, to be disgraced, discredited for the sake of Christ than it was to be the grandson of the Pharaoh.

This faith that we have, is like that of these people listed here in this chapter, it is an extreme faith, we are a people who believe in a God who makes the impossible, possible. For he even says so himself, for with man it is impossible, but for God, all things are possible. This past week I listened to a sermon by Charles Leiter on the providence of God, and it relates to our study here in Hebrews as well for the providence of God, and his sovereignty is exactly what our faith hinges on.

In his sermon he argued that the providence of God is so sure, and so finite, and that he is such a sovereign God, that there is not one piece of dust out of place in this world, for if there was even a spec of dust somewhere that he did not allow, then he would not be God, for to be God he must be sovereign and in control of his creation. We even see this in scripture, Matthew 10, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?" These birds are practically worthless, 2 of them for a penny basically, and he says, "but not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your fathers will." Think on this a minute, not one worthless sparrow will die...apart from God's will. God's will even includes the death of birds, and they die when he wills them to. He goes on to say, "the very hairs on your head are numbered." This isn't a mere knowing how many we have, but even that number is ordained, he has numbered it.

Do you believe this? It sounds quite extreme that even as much as the birds, or the hairs on our head are known and are within the will of God. But if it wasn't, he would not be all knowing, he would not be a sovereign God who is in control if one spec, or one mite was out of order. Those of us who believe this, this truth is a great comfort, for he even says in the following verse, "do not fear therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows." If one of these birds doesn't even die outside of God's will, then we should rest and take hope knowing that nothing that we are experiencing, is outside of God's will for our life. Yes, that even means the suffering, and the trials, as we have been studying now for the past few years, the subject that keeps coming up is God's sovereignty in our suffering, and that our suffering, persecution, temptations, and trials all play into his ultimate sovereign will and plan.

They are used to teach, to reproach, to witness and minister not only to us, but to those around us. Resting in him, during any hardship is a witness to all those who are near. This faith is an extreme faith, which believes in an all powerful God, yes, a God who is able to even change the hearts and minds of people to accomplish his will. Do you believe this to be true? If not..then why do we pray? If we do not believe that God is in control of even the slightest molecule, why do we pray for healing? IF we do not believe that God can direct the hearts and minds of mankind, then why do we pray?

Do you see how this faith, is not just a mere ascent or belief that there is a God, but rather that it is this God truly is God who is active, and involved in his creation. One of the criticisms we get as Calvinists is on this issue of prayer, or of witnessing. If everything is already ordained and planned out by God, then why pray? It's a valid question, And the simple answer is, because God ordained it that we should pray! It is that great mystery of God's will being played out in our wills. As Leiter said in his sermon, think of every little detail and every little thing that had to have taken place over a 1000 years for you to be here. But that's not all, he knew you before the foundation of the world! So your birth was not just some happy accident, your existence wasn't the mere consequence of 1000's of generations, but God knew you, God knows you, and, fellow Christian, God chose you before the world was!

We look at the faith of these men and woman listed here in this chapter, and we marvel at their strength and at their belief...but the reality is, that is each and every one of us. This faith given to us, is not a faith that will fail, it is not a faith that will falter, but rather it is a faith that will endure, and yes, even hope in the impossible, for if we do not hope in the impossible, if we do not hope and believe that God can change the hearts and minds of people then what are we even doing here? IF we do not believe that each and every thing that happens to us is already known by God, and not only that, falls inline with his sovereign will...then what are we doing here?

Why worship, why believe in a God who is not in control, who is not actively participating in the world he creates, why believe, why have faith and trust in an ineffective God. If God is not in control of man's hearts, and able to change man's mind, then we do we pray that he does, or will? We see throughout all of scripture, the faithful praying to God, and God hearing and answering. Has their prayer changed God's mind? I would argue no, but rather it is their prayer itself is the will of God, and he has chosen to play out his plan, and his will through such things as prayer, through such things as the witnessing and ministering of the word. He has chosen to use our flawed, stammering tongues as his vessel to reach this lost and dying world.

I have said it before, and I will say it again... I think that we as christians tend to have a small understanding of God's sovereignty, we shouldn't...but I think we do, often doubting, or not believing. This faith is extreme, it is an absolute trust in our God, it is an absolute belief that no matter what falls on our plates, no matter what is put before us we know, and believe that it is not outside the will of God, and it's very purpose is to serve his will. Look at Moses here, By faith, when he became an adult he refused to be known as the son of Pharaohs daughter, and instead chose to be marked as in Israelite, turning his back on that worldly kingly inheritance, and instead chose to suffer with the people of God.

This is not a choice that one makes who does not believe in the ultimate supreme sovereignty of God. Knowing that it is better to side with this God who is Lord of all, then to take the temporary reward offered in this life. This gift of faith that we have been given, to believe upon such a mighty God is a precious treasure, for it is only in this faith that one truly finds peace, and happiness.

Moses like all of those of faith who came before him and all who follow him was motivated by the prospect that this faith goes beyond the trials and afflictions of this present time, and recognizes the glories that is to come, the substance of the things not yet seen, he was looking to Christ, the promised Messiah. Just as those who came before, when God spoke, he listened, believed and obeyed. Verse 28, "By faith he kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

In much the same way, with the same faith we also keep the passover, but it is not the sacrificing of a lamb and spreading the blood over our door posts as it was for Moses and the Israelites, for that was a shadow of the salvation, of the covering of the blood from the perfect lamb which was slain. We now are covered by the blood of Christ, having our sins forgiven, having our trespasses forgotten so that we are not cursed with death, but are blessed with eternal life in the presence of our Lord and savior.

God requires the impossible, and enables us to accomplish it. In each of these examples here we see this, so to it is with our faith. Of ourselves, belief and faith in God is impossible, for it is a belief and a trust in a nature outside of our own, it is a belief and a trust in the invisible, in the unseen, but even if we were to see Jesus, we would yet still not believe unless we were first given this faith to believe. If we look at the account of Jesus ministry, he was seen, and heard by 10's of thousands, but yet only a handful believed. The promised Messiah had come, this promised seed to Abraham in whom all the nations shall be blessed, the one who had come to establish his kingdom, the true holy nation of Israel, the one in whom Moses deemed it worthy to suffer for, was rejected and despised by the physical descendants of Abraham.

So the reality is that seeing is not believing, for many saw him, but did not know him. Many heard him, but did not believe him. For they were not given this faith to see, to hear, and to believe. Truly what a gift from God this faith and ability to believe is, and it is not one that we should take for granted, or in pride claim for our own but instead we worship and praise God for his mercy and grace toward us, for reaching out and making us to believe.

Do you have this faith? Then I challenge you to live by it! Moses chose this inheritance over that which was offered by Pharaoh, Abraham looked to this inheritance over the land he was promised, Our faith, is a far reaching glorious truth which seeks after the God of truth, the one who not only promises that he will keep us, provide for us, love us, and care for us..but is a God who is able to accomplish all that he has promised despite how impossible it may seem to us.

What a glorious and awesome gift we have been given, to know, to believe, and to trust, to be the adopted children of the almighty sovereign God, the creator and king. We must remind ourselves these truths, we must remind ourselves of his power and his mercy, we must believe as these people listed here believed that God is faithful, that God will provide. What greater peace or hope is there then to know that the God of this universe saw you, he loved you, he chose you, he adopted you, he desires you to know him, to believe him, to love him. Who are we to fret, who are we to worry for as scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give all things? Who shall bring a charge against the elect? For it is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and further more is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

My friends, my brothers and sisters, I urge you to live boldly for Christ, to rest in him throughout what ever this life may throw at you. For he is the only one who will deliver, and he shall, for his promises that he will. Nothing will separate us from his love, nothing will separate us from his care, even death, something regarded by man as the ultimate, finite end, something that is to be feared, something to dread, is a blessed thing in the eyes of our Lord for all those who are in him. For to be absent this body, is to be present with him.

What do we have to fear? What do we have to doubt? Believe upon him, and all of these things will be added to you, God has made the impossible, possible for you, he has given you the faith to believe, the faith to trust, will he not like wise provide in all else? In all things trust him, pray, and live boldly believing in him who provides, in him who is able to do that which seems to be impossible to us.