

A FAITH THAT SURVIVES FIRE_1

A Faith that Risks

In this church, just as we have been singing, Jesus is all to us. (applause)

All faith has risk, and the reason that it has risk is because when you stop to think about it, you are trading in that which you can see for that which you can't see. But it's a viable faith that's a good faith, and that's what we're going to study today.

If you have your Bibles I want you to turn to Hebrews 11 where we have the story of Moses. And I do hope that you bring your Bible to church, preferably an actual Bible and not just a cell phone, students. But nonetheless this is what it says in Hebrews 11 beginning at verse 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. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God 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. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

What an interesting statement! What we’d like to do today is to look at three different aspects of faith that takes a risk that changes our lives and puts us on a trajectory of fellowship and an eternity with God.

First of all, we’d like to look at the radical decision that Moses made. Your Bibles are open. Let’s look at the text. First of all we have to look at the question of what it was that Moses said no to. The answer is that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. When Moses left the palace and identified himself with the people of God that were being persecuted by the Pharaoh, he knew in his heart that he was leaving the throne behind. What he was leaving behind was, first of all, the prestige. As Moses went down the Nile River I am sure that it was to the strains of beautiful music in the days that he was in the palace. And ahead of him there were people who were running and they were saying, “Bow the knee. Bow the knee. Moses is coming.” Women would hold up their children and say,

"There's big Moses. Be like him." He left all that behind. According to Josephus he was the next one to be slated to be the next Pharaoh of Egypt. And then the Bible says that in addition to that he left behind the treasures of Egypt.

Many years ago here in Chicago there were the treasures of King Tut that were brought to one of the museums. I didn't have an opportunity to see them but I do know from descriptions that they were expensive and expansive.

Now think about Moses. What did he leave behind? What did he say no to? Basically he said no to the American way of life. I mean, after all, isn't it all about money and fame and power? Isn't that what people are sacrificing their lives to achieve? Moses said no to all of that and it was thrown into his lap because, to quote the words of one commentator, "The cream of Egypt was put into his cup." Moses said no to all of that, the things that people want most in life in America.

Now what did he get in exchange? What did he say yes to? If we were to interview him and we were to say, "Moses, what did you get in return for all that you left behind, and what did you say yes to?" he would tell us first of all

that what he substituted for what he left behind is first of all mistreatment with the people of God. That's in verse 25. "I knew when I walked out of there I was going to be despised. I knew that I would be identified with my people and all that they were going through, and that's the route I chose."

Later on, of course, when Moses becomes the leader, leading the children of Israel out of the desert into the promised land, or almost the promised land, you discover that he had so many hardships, so many difficulties with people complaining, hundreds of thousands of Hebrews on his case because they were out of water and needed bread. And they were always blaming him. Furthermore, something else that happened is his own sister, Miriam, teamed up with his friend and his associate by the name of Aaron, and they criticized his wife. They were angry (Numbers 12). So what Moses said is, "I exchanged it for mistreatment with the people of God."

You say, "Moses, surely there's some other reason why you made this decision. What did you actually get in return?" And Moses would say, "Yes, there is something else, and what I decided to get in return is nothing less than the

reproach of Christ." Verse 26 says "He considered the reproach of Christ (Some translations say the disgrace of Christ) as greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt." Moses said, "The reproach and disgrace that goes with identifying with God's people is really my treasure. You can take all the treasures of Egypt and pile them on one side, and the reproach of Christ on the other, and I have chosen the other side, the reproach of Jesus." That's the decision that Moses made.

What could be his motivation? Why would a man throw it all away for nothing but trouble, disgrace and criticism? Well, we have to look at the motivation that he had. The text says very clearly here, "He considered the reproach of Christ greater than the wealth of Egypt for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt not fearing the anger of the king for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."

By the way, isn't that an interesting phrase? How do you see that which is invisible? By definition the invisible can't be seen, but Moses saw it through faith.

Two things! First of all, what motivated him was the reproach of Christ because he said to himself, "To be

identified with the people of God is such an honor that I prefer that to Pharaoh. I prefer the face of God to the face of Pharaoh, and so I chose the people of God and their affliction."

But then the text says, "He looked forward to the reward." Did he receive a reward? Yes, we'll discover that he received a reward. Well I'll tell you right now what the reward was. Moses was not allowed to go into the land because of disobedience and then God said to him, "You can't go into the land," but eventually Moses makes it to the other side. He really does, because you remember on the Mount of Transfiguration centuries later there are Moses and Elijah with Jesus in the land. He looked forward to the reward.

Now you and I know more about rewards on this side of the cross with the New Testament than Moses knew during his lifetime. He knows a lot more now, of course, now that he's actually in the presence of God. But Moses didn't have the revelation that we do regarding the land and regarding what the reward for faithfulness in the land would bring about.

What are rewards from the standpoint of the New Testament? You know sometimes I've heard people say, "Well, these are medallions we're going to put on the crowns," and then I've even heard Christians say, "Well, you know, it doesn't matter much whether or not we are faithful in this life, because if we are faithful and we get a crown, aren't we just going to throw these crowns at the feet of Jesus anyway?" implying it's not very important. "We'll throw them at the feet of Jesus and then we'll just get on with eternity."

Well it's a long subject but I don't believe that rewards are crowns. They are not medallions that we are going to throw at the feet of Christ. And if we do throw them at the feet of Christ we'll have to pick them up later, the Bible says, because we are going to rule with him forever if we are faithful. I think that rewards are positions of responsibility within the kingdom, responsibility that God gives us, the ability to rule, and there are some people who will not rule over the same territory, nor will they be entrusted with the same responsibility as others. Jesus indicated that in the parables.

You know one day I had a man say to me, "You know I'm a Christian but I am a carnal Christian." He said, "As far as I am concerned I figure as long as I get to heaven and sit in the back row that'll be fine with me." And that's why I always watch those of you who are in the back row.

(laughter) I once read a psychological journal dedicated to understanding people who always choose the back seat in church, but the front seat at a baseball game.

So he said, "As long as I get to sit in the back row..." and I said, "To use your analogy, what if Jesus wanted you in the front row (and God bless those of you who are in the front row) but the reason that you are in the back row is because of unfaithfulness to Jesus Christ. You displeased Him in your life, and that's where you are. Doesn't it bother you to be satisfied with the back row, to be satisfied with a lesser reward when you have the opportunity of having a greater reward because you are living your life for Jesus Christ?"

I'll tell you, my friend, I want to talk to you today heart to heart - not just mind to mind, but heart to heart. God is so generous that if we understood the doctrine of rewards it would change the way in which we live. It would

change our ability to handle persecution and difficulty. You know the Apostle Paul said, "The suffering of this present world is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Now I have to say to the young people present, you are not old enough to know this, but there used to be scales, and I remember them in a little store in Canada, where you'd put a one-pound weight on this side, and then you'd put enough meat on the other side to make it balance, and then you knew that you had purchased a pound of meat. Doesn't that sound ancient? But that's the way it was.

The Apostle Paul is saying, "Look, on one side of the scale put all the suffering of this present world." Put cancer, put an unjust lawsuit on this side. Put physical difficulties, relational difficulties, a broken marriage, the inability to be able to pay your rent - take all of the suffering, all of the pain, all of the hurt that people have done to you on one side of the scale. And then on the other side, Paul says, put the glory that shall be revealed in us. Paul says they are not worthy to be compared. The scale would go plunk. It's like putting an ant on one side, and an elephant on the other. It is unworthy of comparison.

And don't miss Paul's point. What he is saying is that the more suffering, the greater the glory. The more you suffer for Jesus Christ, the more you will inherit. And Moses knew that because he looked forward to the reward. He believed in another world. He believed in the invisible world, and that's why he made the decision that he did.

So what we have before us is first of all that radical decision and a very powerful motivation, and then we find he did experience a miraculous victory. I'm going to read very briefly. It says in verse 28, "By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood," and then in verse 29 he crossed the Red Sea - the Passover. Because of his faith the people of God were protected from the anger of God.

Do you remember what the Passover was all about? Passover meant that blood was put on the lintel of the door place, and then it says, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." That's why it's called the Passover.

Now you know, in Israel there may have been a firstborn son who was protected by the blood who had emotional problems. He may not have even been the best son that one can

imagine. Maybe he gave his parents trouble. But at the end of the day all that mattered was whether or not there was blood on the door. God said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you," and what a wonderful picture that is of redemption. At the end of the day what really matters is the blood of Christ.

I've told you about a well-known Christian leader who was dying, and the people tried to encourage him. They said, "Look at all that God has done through you. You did this and you did that," and there was no peace in his heart until they reminded him that no matter what he had done or what he had not done, at the end of the day he is saved by the blood of Christ, and that is the way in which we get to heaven. It's the blood that saves us. (Applause) So I need to ask you. Are you trusting that blood? Have you trusted the blood of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins?

You know on Wednesday night we had a marvelous prayer meeting, and one of the songs that we sang was the one by Horatio Spafford (not Stafford but Spafford), and we sang it together several times. I thought that the tiles of the ceiling were going to fall down.

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to cross and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul.

So that's what the blood on the door represented. So as a result of Moses' faith the people's lives were spared and then they went across the Red Sea, and you know that story.

Now what I'd like to do is to answer this question. Why should your lives be changed forever because you've heard this message? Whenever I prepare a message I always ask myself the question, "Why should anyone listening be changed for the rest of his or her life? After all, that's what the Word of God is to do. Some of you are making very important decisions. Some of you are young and you are making decisions. Some of us are a little older, and at the end of the day what we need to do is to nail down the life-changing lessons that this passage of Scripture teaches us, so here we go.

Lesson number one that I want you to remember is simply this. We stand with Moses in choosing between the visible world and the invisible. Did you notice that little phrase,

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"? The Bible teaches very clearly that there is pleasure in sin but it has two negatives. Number one, it is here but it is fleeting. Robert Burns was absolutely right when he said,

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower; its bloom is shed;
Or, like the snow-fall in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever."

One of the things about the pleasures of sin is that they are fleeting, and secondly, they always have a bad aftertaste. Moses was not willing to get involved in the pleasures of sin. He said no to all of the women who were available to him in the palace, and all the wealth that was available to him as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose other pleasures, and we have to keep in mind that God is not against pleasure. What God wants us to do is to see the higher pleasures.

In Thy presence there is fullness of joy.

At Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

The pleasures of God have no bad aftertaste and they go on forever and ever.

Jonathan Edwards was a preacher who was voted out of his church. He was America's premier theologian back in the 1700's, and his biographer said of him that his happiness in God was beyond the reach of his enemies. Wow! What they were saying is that he found that there were pleasures at the right hand of God that no one could take from him. But we all stand with that. Our world is awash with pleasure. Earlier this year I spoke on the whole business of technology and the kind of entertainment that people watch. It's everywhere. We stand with Moses and we must decide that we are going to choose the invisible world of God, His attributes and the enjoyment of God at His right hand.

There's a second lesson we must learn and that is that every sacrifice we make here on earth merits a reward. And God is exceedingly generous. Have you been unjustly fired perhaps because of your Christian testimony, because of your integrity? I remember speaking to somebody in the hallway of the church here about that a couple of years ago. They had been released from their work because they wouldn't do some of the shenanigans they were asked to do.

And I said to them, "Are you rejoicing?" They said, "Rejoicing? You know I have to pay the bills and all of that," and I said, "Yeah, I know that. That's a very realistic way to look at it, but this is what Jesus said, 'Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven.'"

Let's talk about the sensitive issue of money. When we as pastors talk to a congregation and we tell them that the end of the fiscal year is coming, and we have a shortfall that is going to impact ministry, many of them say, "Well, that's just the way it is. You know the pastor needs money, the church lights have to be on, ministry has to continue." And what we forget is that that is such a small part of giving. What we forget is that, and let me say it plainly, if you are not generous, almost surely you are not a Christian. It's unthinkable to me that somebody would receive the grace of God freely and understand the high cost with which we were redeemed and then not in turn be generous.

But nonetheless people forget that when we are stingy, when we are not generous, we are robbing ourselves of eternal reward. All throughout the New Testament you have this emphasis, and then the devil comes along with a big lie and says, "Oh you can't take it with you." What a lie! Of course you can take it with you. All throughout the New Testament we are told how we can do that. What you need to do is to transmute it into something that you can take with you. That word transmute means that if you go to Walgreens with a twenty dollar bill and buy some aspirin that'll help you a great deal more than the twenty dollar bill. You can't swallow the bill so you transmute it into aspirin, and in the very same way if we take out investments and transmute them into something that will meet us on the other side, we take it with us.

I love to tell that story about the princess in Europe who had a crown and she was a Christian. She wanted to be able to sell the jewels in her crown so that she could build an orphanage. And of course her husband said no, but eventually she convinced him.

You have often heard me say that when it comes to television oftentimes it is the man who wants the remote

control, and I've explained why. It's because to a man even remote control is better than none at all.

So she convinced him. She sold the jewels and built an orphanage, and then she came back one day and when she heard the children singing she said, "I found my jewels. I found my jewels." And she took them with her because the Bible says we should invest our money in such a way that when we die there are those in heaven who welcome us into everlasting habitations. And Jesus said, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much" and we will be rewarded for it.

Remember that story about the wealthy Rajah in India riding along in his chariot, and then you have the beggar who was there. And the beggar was very upset because he thought, "Why doesn't this rich man give me money?" So he stood there along the road and to his surprise the wealthy man got off, looked at him and said, "Beggar, give me some of your rice." The beggar was angry but he gave the wealthy Rajah one grain of rice.

The Rajah said, "Beggar, give me more of your rice.

Gingerly and still angry the beggar gave him a second grain

of rice, and then a third. And at that point the beggar was so angry he went off in a huff. The Rajah got on his chariot and left.

But a little later the beggar looked into his bowl of rice and noticed that there was something that glittered. He looked more carefully and it was a grain of gold the size of a grain of rice. He found just two more. He thought to himself, "If only I had known, I would have given him my entire bowl of rice."

Friends, if we could see into the world to come, if we could see into eternity, we would be so generous we would be looking for places to give our money. We would have so much income as a church and for our missionaries and for the advancement of the Gospel that I'd have to stand up here and say, "Folks, enough already."

The day for which I have prayed has not yet happened."

(laughter)

Every investment, every penny that you give will be rewarded. Jesus said, "A cup of cold water, if given in my name, will be remembered in the day of judgment." And so we

must keep in mind that every sacrifice has its implications and rewards.

And now we come to the "bottom" bottom line. The bottom line is simply that eternity often reverses the decisions of time or the verdict of time. We could put it this way and say that heaven sometimes reverses the verdict of earth.

You think, for example, of Moses. Now from one standpoint it looked as if he was a loser, turning his back on the world to follow God with all of the problems. But look at what he inherited. Look at him there on the Mount of Transfiguration, and interview him now and ask him if the suffering was worth it. Of course it was.

If we look through the text the next person that is mentioned is the harlot Rahab. We all know her story. She was a prostitute and there she was in Jericho and earth said what about her? Well, she was a woman of the streets. You can imagine how she had been betrayed by men - all of the humiliation, the self-hatred, and the things that were said about her. But you know that because she believed in Jehovah and was therefore forgiven, she shows up here in

the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which is the place where you have all the heroes of faith of all things.

And this isn't the only place where she is in the New Testament. You read Matthew 1 and she is in the genealogy of Jesus. And furthermore, I never realized this until recently and I've read the genealogy often. She was the mother of Boaz who married Ruth, and they had a child by the name of Obed, and Obed in turn became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, and on and on it goes because God says, "I want people to know from the outset that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Even prostitutes on the street can become a daughter of God." And so what we have here in the Scriptures is a reminder of how eternity reverses the verdict of time.

You know sometimes I've asked young people this, and we are so glad that we have so many of them here today. I want to ask you this question. What would you rather do? Would you like to be somebody who has a lot of wealth, who can go on any cruise they want, eat in any restaurant, have any clothes that they want, live in the finest home, and who is loaded with bling because they have so much money? Would you like to live that way or would you prefer to be a

beggar on the street, trying to eke out an existence? And of course it's a no-brainer. Right? I mean why even ask the question?

One day Jesus was confronted with Pharisees and the Bible says they were lovers of money. So Jesus told them a story. He told them about a rich man who ate at a wonderful table and had all of that wealth, and then he said that there was a beggar who came and the dogs actually licked his sores. But both of them died. The poor man was carried into Abraham's bosom, which is really another word for paradise. The beggar had a wonderful experience on the other side, but what happened to the rich man was he ended up in Hades in torment.

Jesus didn't tell that story to teach us how to get to heaven. That's clear. What He did was to say that eternity sometimes reverses the decisions of time, and that's why it is so critical for us to know God. If you are here today and you have trusted Christ as Savior, I want to be very clear and say that this life with all of its trials, all of its difficulties and all of its heartache is the worst it will ever get. After you die it's going to be paradise and it's going to be glory. (applause)

But if you don't know Christ as Savior this is as good as it will ever get. It'll never get any better because if you die without Christ, from here on it is going to be nothing but heartache, nothing but torment, nothing but isolation, nothing but yourself, your sin and eventually hell. Wow! No matter how much you have in this life remember that eternity often reverses the decisions and the values of time.

A couple of years ago I was speaking in California and some folks said to us, "You know there's a cemetery just across the way and that's where Frank Sinatra is buried." So we went and we found the grave of Frank Sinatra. Actually we couldn't find it but somebody pulled up in a big SUV, and we said, "We're looking for the grave of Frank Sinatra." So he pulled out his iPhone and knew, I guess, what to type in and pushed a button and said, "Now what you need to do is to go along this path about a hundred feet and then turn right and it'll be there." I guess everything is on the Internet today.

If we could just feed the Internet into our brains, students, you wouldn't even have to go to school because

it's all there. (applause and laughter) I'm assuming that you'd have a very good filtering system, by the way.

There we stood at the grave of Frank Sinatra. One of the things that impressed me, first of all, is that the gravestone was the same height and size as all of the others, so at the end of the day, you basically die and death is the great equalizer. But on his tombstone were the words, "The best is yet to come," because Frank wrote a song by that name. "The best is yet to come, baby. Won't it just be fine? The best is yet to come. Someday you'll be mine. The best is yet to come."

I looked at that and I thought, "I'm not going to judge Frank Sinatra. He's in the presence of wherever eternity ended up for him, and he'll be judged by God." But I thought to myself, "Those who do not know Christ as Savior, who have never savingly believed on Him, who have only made a profession but never have been born again, on their tombstone should be written, 'The worst is yet to come.' But for those of us who know Christ as Savior it is true that no matter how bad life is, the best is yet to come because eternity reverses all of the suffering of time."

I urge you today to make a radical decision. Students, fling away your life for Jesus Christ. Just give it to Him. Take the risk of faith and be like the Apostle Paul who said, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." There's really nothing at the end of the day except Jesus and eternity. Look forward to the reward because eternity is on its way.

Let's join together as we pray.

And our Father, we pray in these moments, that Your Holy Spirit would speak to us and help us to make wise decisions. May we be willing, oh Lord God, to choose the path of Moses, to be willing to suffer mistreatment and hardship because we see the invisible world. We pray that as we sing this chorus together now in the next few moments that it may be sung as a prayer. But we need Your help. We can't do it on our own. Would You come and help us and speak to us even as we sing? In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.