

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

FAITH'S CHOICE

Hebrews 11:23-26

By

Steven J. Cole

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Hebrews Lesson 40

Faith's Choice
Hebrews 11:23-26

We all have to make choices in life, and often those choices result in significant consequences. In 1920, the management of the Boston Red Sox made the bad choice to sell Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees. After joining the Yankees, in 10 out of the next 12 seasons Ruth hit more home runs than the entire Red Sox team! Boston had not won a World Series since 1918, when Ruth was on the team, until this week!

In 1938, Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel sold all their rights for a comic book character that they had invented for \$130. The character's name? Superman! In 1955, Sam Phillips sold to RCA Victor Records his exclusive contract with a young singer named Elvis Presley, thus forfeiting royalties on more than a billion records (*Reader's Digest* [7/85], p. 173). Bad choices!

Our text tells us about two good choices that greatly affected world history. The first choice was relatively routine at the time. Two slaves in ancient Egypt chose to defy the king's edict to kill all male Hebrew babies by hiding their son. That son turned out to be Moses, the great deliverer of his people. The second choice was that of Moses himself, and it was more difficult. He chose to give up his position of influence and wealth in the Egyptian court in order to side with the enslaved people of God. Both choices were motivated *by faith* and their lessons have eternal consequences for us. Both choices teach that...

The choice to obey God by faith will result in short-term suffering, but also in eternal blessings.

1. The choice of Moses' parents to obey God by faith resulted in short-term suffering, but also in eternal blessing (11:23).

Moses' parents are not named in Hebrews or in the original story in Exodus 2. Exodus 6:20 names Amram as the father and Jochebed as the mother of Moses and Aaron, his older brother by three years. But since the Jews often called ancestors from many

generations back, “father” or “mother,” we can’t be certain that these were the immediate parents (Walter Kaiser, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelein [Zondervan], 2:308). The oldest child in the family was a sister, Miriam.

The Jews had gone from the privileged position they enjoyed in Egypt under Joseph to the despised position as hard labor slaves. Because of his fear that the Jews were multiplying too rapidly, Pharaoh had issued the command to throw all newborn Jewish boys into the Nile River.

In such dire circumstances, this Jewish couple had a “beautiful” son (Heb. 11:23 is based on Exod. 2:2, LXX). Since most parents would think that *every* child they have is “beautiful,” there must have been something exceptional about Moses. Stephen (Acts 7:20) calls him “beautiful to God” (literal translation). John Calvin points out that since Scripture forbids us from making judgments based on external appearance, Moses’ parents must have seen something in this baby boy to make them hope that he would be the promised deliverer of his people (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], on Heb. 11:23, p. 292). Because they thought that God had destined him for such a great role, they defied the king’s edict and hid him for three months. That choice, based on faith, entailed short-term suffering, but eternal blessings.

- A. The choice of Moses’ parents to obey God by faith resulted in short-term suffering.

Verse 23 says, “they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” So why did they hide their son if they were not afraid? Why not just take him out in public view, if they were trusting in God? Faith is not opposed to using prudence. Trusting God does not mean taking reckless chances. While they did not fear the king’s edict in the sense that they defied it, they no doubt did fear not only for the life of their baby boy, but for all their lives. If Pharaoh’s guards had caught them, they would have executed the entire family for insubordination to the king. So their “by faith” choice to hide their son exposed the entire family to the risk of death.

Imagine how carefully they had to live! If the baby cried at any time of the day or night, they had to muffle him while they tried to calm him down. They couldn’t risk having their children play with

other children in the neighborhood, for fear that they would let something slip about their baby brother. If Pharaoh's police roamed the neighborhood looking for newborn baby boys, the family sat in silent terror.

The choice to obey God by faith always involves a certain amount of up-front risk. Remember, this couple did not know the end of the story when they made their decision! They all could have been slaughtered because of what they did. Although it would have been agonizing to throw their baby boy into the river, they could have rationalized it by saying, "What else could we have done? We probably would have been caught and our whole family would have died. He would have lived a miserable life as a slave, like the rest of us. We just have to submit to the government authorities!"

But instead, they chose to obey God and risk the consequences. They feared the unseen God, who is the author of life, more than they feared the king's edict of death. If someday our government mandates, as the Chinese government does, that we must abort all babies beyond one per family, as God's people, we would have to risk obeying God by defying the government. It could result in imprisonment, loss of income, or other hardships, as many Chinese Christians can testify. The choice to obey God by faith often results in short-term suffering.

B. The choice of Moses' parents to obey God by faith resulted in eternal blessings.

Their son grew up to be the greatest leader in Jewish history. He delivered the Jews from slavery. Under divine inspiration, he wrote the first five books of the Bible. The seemingly small choice to save this one little life had huge consequences for world history! We may never know what eternal blessings will flow from our choice to obey God by faith. But His blessings flow through such choices.

C. The choice of Moses' parents was to obey God *by faith*.

The author states that *faith* was at the heart of this important decision. God often works through the faith of unknown parents or grandparents to raise up an unusually gifted leader to accomplish great things for God. Except for their well-known son, this couple would have lived in obscurity as lowly slaves. But God used their

courageous faith in a mighty way. Zecharias and his wife, Elizabeth, were childless, elderly, but faithful people. God used them to bear John the Baptist and to rear him to be bold in faith. Mary was an obscure Jewish girl who was willing to believe God's word, even though it meant ridicule for her to conceive a son without a husband. God used her to bring forth the Savior.

Years ago, I was reading the autobiography of the great British preacher, Charles Spurgeon. As I was jogging in the woods one day, I prayed a "go-for-broke" prayer: I asked God to bless my ministry as He had blessed Spurgeon's ministry. Spurgeon was the most phenomenal pastor of the 19th century. Thousands packed his church each week. They measured attendance by how many were turned away! Thousands came to faith in Christ under his preaching. Hundreds of pastors were trained at his pastor's college. Orphans were cared for at his orphanages. He has more books in print by volume than any other author in history, and God still uses them greatly. So my prayer was no small prayer!

But right after I prayed, the question popped into my mind, "What about *John Spurgeon*?" He was Charles' father. He was a faithful pastor in a small English town. If he had not been the father of a famous son, John Spurgeon would be unknown in history. There have been thousands of godly, faithful pastors like him, but only a few like his son. The Lord was saying, "Be as faithful as John Spurgeon in shepherding My flock and in leading your family. I'll determine whether to use you as I used Charles Spurgeon."

As parents, we should live by faith and ask God to make our children "beautiful for Him." At first, like Moses' parents, we have to protect them from this evil world. We teach them His ways and pray for their salvation. Eventually, we have to launch them, trusting God to take care of them. Even after Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses from the river, his parents must have prayed for many years, "Lord, keep him from the many spiritual dangers in Pharaoh's court and teach him to follow You!" Obey God by faith and entrust your children to His care. He may use them mightily for His kingdom!

2. Moses' choice to obey God by faith resulted in short-term suffering, but also in eternal blessing (11:24-26).

There's a lot of history packed into these three verses! I can only touch on some of the lessons.

- A. Moses' choice to obey God by faith resulted in short-term suffering.

When Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to be identified with God's people, he chose to suffer in at least four ways.

- (1) Moses chose to suffer the pain of alienation and misunderstanding from his adoptive family.

Pharaoh's daughter had rescued Moses from death, adopted him as her own son, and raised him in the splendor of the palace. If he had even survived in his natural family, he would have been doomed to a difficult life as a slave. Instead, he grew up enjoying the most luxurious living conditions imaginable. Acts 7:22 says that he "was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds."

Imagine the hurt feelings and misunderstanding that must have swept over Pharaoh's daughter when Moses chose to walk away from everything that she had provided and identify himself with these slave laborers! Pharaoh must have been outraged when he heard about it: "The ungrateful wretch! After all that we've done for him!" When you choose to follow Jesus Christ, which may involve walking away from the education and comfortable lifestyle that your family has provided for you, you will suffer the pain of alienation and being misunderstood.

- (2) Moses chose to suffer the loss of the world's honors, pleasures, and wealth.

As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses enjoyed a position of honor higher than almost anyone else in Egypt. When he identified himself with the Jewish slaves, he became the object of contempt and scorn. As a family member in Pharaoh's court, Moses enjoyed whatever pleasures anyone could seek. He lived in luxury (picture the splendor of King Tut's tomb!). He ate the best food available. He wore the nicest, newest clothes. If he had wanted, he could have enjoyed the pleasures of the most beautiful women in Egypt. He had wealth to buy anything he wanted or to live without

working for the rest of his life. But when Moses chose to obey God by faith, he instantly lost it all!

It's not necessarily sin to enjoy a position of honor and the comfortable life that wealth provides. Joseph enjoyed both while following God. But when God called Moses to give it up and lead Israel out of bondage, at that point it would have been sin for him to continue living as he was. Also, the Bible does not deny that sin brings *passing* pleasure. If it didn't, we would not be tempted by it! But finally, it brings eternal misery. Don't be deceived!

- (3) Moses chose to suffer being identified with a despised bunch of slaves.

As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses ran in the top circles of Egyptian society. He knew everybody who was anybody. He frequently ate at the king's table. People sought out Moses as an influential man. But he chose to give up all that status and live among these wretched slave-laborers!

- (4) Moses chose to suffer the world's reproach.

Imagine the gossip in Egyptian high society! "He did *what?* *Unbelievable!* What an idiot!" Ridicule is a powerful thing. People go to great lengths to cover up embarrassing mistakes that would cause them shame (*e.g.* Watergate, or Bill Clinton's lies about his private life). But Moses *chose* a course that he knew would bring him the world's reproach!

Why would a man knowingly choose such suffering? Was he a masochist? Was he insane? No, actually he was quite shrewd. Like the man who sold everything he had to buy the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46), Moses gained something better:

- B. Moses' choice to obey God by faith resulted in eternal blessing.

Note briefly three blessings that Moses' choice gained:

- (1) Moses' choice gained the blessing of the company of God's people.

He chose "to endure ill-treatment with the people of God." They weren't much to look at—a sweaty bunch of raggedly dressed slaves. They would later give him a lot of trouble, grumbling about

the conditions that he led them into. Some would challenge his leadership. Eventually their grumbling frustrated Moses so much that he sinned by striking the rock in anger, so that the Lord kept him from entering the promised land. But in spite of all the problems he experienced with them, they were *the people of God*. It was a far greater blessing to endure ill-treatment with them than to live in the worldly, superficial society of Pharaoh's court. Even though the church has some difficult people in it, it's far better to journey toward heaven with God's people than to live among the self-seeking people of the world!

- (2) Moses' choice gained the blessing of the greater riches of Christ.

He considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." *The reproach of Christ* is a startling phrase! It probably means, "reproach similar to what Christ endured when He was despised and rejected by the world." How much Moses knew about the promised Anointed One, we cannot know for sure. But Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day (John 8:56). Moses knew that God promised to raise up a prophet like him, who would speak His word (Deut. 18:15). He knew of God's promise to Eve, that one from her seed would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). He also no doubt knew that the sacrificial system pointed ahead to a Redeemer. And so Moses considered that any reproach that he endured for identifying himself with God's Messiah was far more valuable than the worldly treasures he could amass in Egypt.

The major way to combat the temptations of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16) is to see the infinite value of possessing Jesus Christ. When you see what a treasure Christ is, everything else fades away.

- (3) Moses' choice gained the blessing of the eternal reward in heaven.

Moses "was looking to the reward" (11:26). If this refers to some earthly reward, Moses was badly mistaken. His earthly "reward" after he gave up the treasures of Egypt was to wander in the barren wilderness for 40 years with a bunch of complaining people. The reward that he looked for was, "the better country, that is, a heavenly one" (11:16). When Moses appeared on the Mount of

Transfiguration with Elijah and Jesus, it was his first time to set foot in the promised land. But I have a hunch that he was thinking, "Okay, nice place. Now, can we get back to heaven?" The rewards of being with Jesus in heaven are far greater than any earthly rewards. What enabled Moses to let go of all the glitter of Egypt and to endure ill-treatment with the people of God was that he was looking to the reward of heaven. Are you?

How did Moses do what he did? What is the essential thing?

C. Moses' choice was to obey God *by faith*.

Faith was the only thing that enabled Moses to choose God and heaven above the treasures of Egypt. He believed God and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But, we would be mistaken if we thought that he just closed his eyes, shut off his brain, and took a giant leap of faith.

(1) Moses' choice of faith was carefully considered.

He made this choice after "he had grown up" (11:24; Exod. 2:11). Stephen tells us that he was 40 (Acts 7:23). Perhaps he had lived in Pharaoh's court long enough to become thoroughly nauseated with the superficiality that he saw every day. The word *considering* (11:26) refers to "belief resting on external proof," especially, "careful judgment" (G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* [Charles Scribners' Sons], p. 119). Moses carefully weighed in the balance what the world had to offer on one side and what God had to offer on the other side. The world's side was momentarily attractive, but lightweight. God's side was momentarily difficult, but satisfying in the long haul. Moses chose to believe God and reject the world. So must everyone who wants to go to heaven (1 John 2:15).

(2) Moses' choice of faith was a critical choice with far-reaching consequences.

The crisis that pushed Moses over the line to renounce Egypt and choose ill-treatment with God's people was when he saw the Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew slaves (Exod. 2:11). Moses' response was not an impulsive reaction that he later regretted. He had been considering, weighing, the greater riches of Christ against the lightweight treasures of Egypt. So when the moment came, he acted decisively by killing the Egyptian and taking his stand with

God and His people. That critical choice affected not only Moses, but many generations of Jews after him.

In *Common Sense Christian Living* ([Thomas Nelson], p. 161), Edith Schaeffer tells how her husband, Fran, came from an unbelieving home. His parents did not want him to go to college or to become a pastor. But at age 19, he tearfully chose what he believed God was leading him to do, in opposition to his parents. Years later, his parents became Christians. Fran felt that they never would have believed if his choice had been the opposite one. And, his choice led to his children becoming Christians, not to mention the thousands of people that have benefited from his many books. Your choice to trust Jesus Christ affects your eternal destiny, but it also has far-reaching consequences for your children and their children, as well as for many with whom you will have contact.

(3) Moses' choice of faith required weighing the short-term against the long-term.

"He was looking to the reward." Faith banks on eternity. In the short-term, Moses had to endure ill-treatment with a bunch of refugee slaves in the wilderness. But in light of eternity, as Paul put it (Rom. 8:18), "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." He also wrote (2 Cor. 4:17), "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." If you want to believe the gospel, you must weigh the passing, momentary pleasures of sin against eternal punishment in hell. Weigh momentary affliction against eternal joy in heaven. Then choose!

Conclusion

In an excellent sermon on this text ("Faith's Choice," in *Home Truths* [Triangle Press], 2:169-192), 19th century Anglican pastor J. C. Ryle lamented that there were so many worldly and ungodly persons in the church. They go through the rituals and they say that they believe, but in practice, they daily prefer the world to God. He asks why they live as they do. His answer (p. 189, his italics) is, "*They do not believe.... They have no faith.*" He explains further (*ibid.*),

In short they do not put implicit confidence in the words that God has written and spoken, and so do not act upon them. They do not thoroughly believe in hell, and so do not flee

from it; nor heaven, and so do not seek it; nor the guilt of sin, and so do not turn from it; nor the holiness of God, and so do not fear Him; nor their need of Christ, and so do not trust in Him, nor love Him. They do not feel confidence in God, and so venture nothing for Him.

What about you? Have you made faith's choice? Do you believe what God has said about sin and about the Savior? Have you weighed in the balance the treasures of Egypt against the greater riches of Christ, and chosen to renounce the world and trust Christ?

Discussion Questions

1. How would you answer someone who said, "I want to enjoy the things of this world for a while; then I'll trust in Christ"?
2. How can we keep the greater riches of Christ in view when the world's treasures parade by us daily?
3. When is it right to defy governmental or parental authority?
4. Could Moses have had more influence by remaining in Pharaoh's court? When is it time to separate from worldly friends?

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