

HOLY HELP FOR THE HOPELESS WHO OVERCOME FEAR BY FAITH

Hebrews 11:23-27

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when a fear of someone or something determined what you did or did not do. Does fear often or seldom motivate your actions?

Fear and its first cousin worry are powerful and influential emotions. What you fear and what you worry about determine what you do and what you do not do perhaps more than any other single emotion. For most of us, most of the time, fear and worry are troubling emotions. They prevent us from doing what we know we ought to do. They make doing the right thing unpleasant through their gut churning, dry mouth producing, nervous twitch creating and joy robbing presence.

You cannot live the Christian life without figuring out how to face and overcome fear. Being a follower of Christ requires that you do scary things like love your enemy, sell your possessions and give to the poor, when someone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other cheek, be insulted because of the name of Christ, die to your right to a happy life on earth, bless those who persecute you, confront and seek to help other Christians who are trapped in sin, offer hospitality to others without grumbling, lend to others and do not expect to get repaid, share the gospel with people who view Christ as their enemy, submit to the governing authorities, love your wife, submit to your husband, honor and obey your parents, etc. It is simply not possible to be a Christian without having to do things that you are afraid to do and so you and I have to figure out how to overcome our fears. As we think about the life of Moses with the author of the letter to the Hebrews we are going to see how trusting in Jesus Christ as our high priest and mediator and once for all sacrifice will enable us to not be paralyzed by our fears.

STUDY

1. Review Exodus 1:8-2:10. What was the context within which Moses' parents hid him for three months "by faith"? What was there to fear in the king's edict?

The context in which Moses' parents exercised faith in God and his promised Messiah is the context of extreme racial hatred. The majority race, the Egyptians, have enslaved the minority Hebrews. Not only are they oppressing them through slavery but they also, out of fear of their growing population, have begun a program of state sponsored infanticide. All male Hebrew babies are to be thrown into the Nile River and thus drowned. The entire Egyptian population is engaged in this violent pogrom against the Jewish people. It is a plan designed to both keep the Jewish people as slaves and to destroy their racial unity by creating a situation where Jewish women will be forced to marry non-Jewish men and thus to have children who will not be fully Jewish but yet slaves. So during this reign of terror and the daily reality of watching the baby boys of their friends and neighbors ripped from their arms to be thrown into the Nile River that the parents of Moses witness his birth and then by faith they hide him for three months.

2. Why did they hide Moses? What does this mean? (NOTE: the phrase "they saw he was beautiful" (ESV) or "they saw he was no ordinary child" (NIV) actually translates a Hebrew phrase which says, "they saw he was good". Compare to Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 17, 21, 25, 31. Remember the description of faith from 11:1—faith acts as if all that God has promised to us in Christ is actually already in existence.)

The reason the parents of Moses hid him was because by faith they saw that the child was good or beautiful or as the NIV has it, "no ordinary child." What is it that they "by faith" saw when they saw this baby and thus motivated them to hide him at great risk to themselves and their other children Aaron and Miriam? Please don't miss this, they did not hide the baby out of natural parental concern for the child's safety but by faith because they saw something in this child.

Seven times in Genesis 1 we are told that God saw what he had made, that it was good; just like Moses' parents saw that he was good. In some way that we are not told about, these parents when they saw this child saw that God's favor rested upon him in an extraordinary way. They believed that he was in some way connected to God's plan to remake his world into that original "good" world. They knew that somehow and somehow he was going to be involved in the salvation of God's people. This vision of the goodness or beauty of Moses is their seeing in him the focus of God's promises to save his people and give them their own land. Thus their preserving Moses' life is viewed as an act of faith in the Savior who was going to come into the world to rescue God's people from their slavery to the world and the powers of evil in the world. In short, they saw Christ as they saw their child. They saw God's purposes being fulfilled in and through their son and the one whom he foreshadowed.

3. What are some ways that this account of Moses' birth foreshadows the birth of Jesus?

This reference to the conditions of Moses' birth is also an accurate summary of the birth of Jesus. Did not Mary and Joseph see that the baby Jesus was good, that is, that he was the promised Messiah and Savior of the world as the angels had told them both and the shepherds had confirmed after witnessing the angel choir? They saw in him the restoration of the world to its original condition (see Mary's song in Luke 1:46ff) What happened after Jesus' birth? Did not an evil tyrant command that all the Jewish baby boys in the region of Bethlehem be killed? Did not the parents take the baby Jesus and hide him in Egypt, just like Moses was hidden? What the author to the Hebrews wants us to see is that the parents of Moses saw the foreshadowing of the Messiah when they saw their baby and it was because they saw Christ in the midst of this horrible darkness that they acted to protect Moses.

4. How does their seeing Christ in seeing the baby Moses actually enable them to not be paralyzed by fear but to act courageously?

They knew their efforts could not fail, no matter how furious was the king because of God's promise to save the world by a Savior. They saw the certainty of God's promised salvation and thus were able to

act. God's promised salvation cannot be thwarted even by the most violent and evil actions of men. A murderous, racist regime cannot halt God's plan to save his people. Therefore we never need be afraid, no matter how dark things become. Christ is always present and always at work saving his people. Their goal was to be "saved" by God and not to live a pain free life on earth and thus the king's hatred and his cruel actions were not feared because these could not prevent God from accomplishing his salvation.

5. Describe how seeing that no one and nothing can prevent Christ from saving his people could help you to overcome a particular fear you have.

Only faith in Christ can conquer fear because those who trust Christ see Christ no matter how dark the circumstance.

6. Describe in your own words what Moses did by faith after he grew up (vv. 24-26).

For forty years Moses grows up in the household of Pharaoh, enjoying all the rights and privileges and luxuries of the household of the most powerful man on earth. When he grew up Moses looked at all that he had in the way of privilege and power as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and he looked at the plight, the misery of the people of God and he chose sharing the misery of the people of God over the pleasures of the Egyptian court. He renounced his allegiance to and affection for his adoptive mother and the Egyptian court and became a slave.

7. How does this action of Moses foreshadow Christ (see Philippians 2:5-8)?

Just as Jesus renounced his right to be treated as God and to enjoy all the pleasures and privileges of being God in order to completely identify with his captive people in order to rescue them, so also Moses renounced his right to be treated as a prince of Egypt and identified with his captive people in order to save them.

8. How did faith in Christ and his coming salvation enable him to view the situation he was in?

Moses knew, from the testimony of his parents that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he was going to come to the aid of Israel and take them up out of Egypt into the land of promise. He also knew, based on their testimony that he was the one God had chosen to lead the people out of Egypt. What Moses saw in the physical world was a powerful Egyptian king and nation cruelly oppressing his people. What he saw in the visible world was the opposite of what the word of God had promised. It appeared that all the power and pleasure belonged to Egypt and all the weakness and misery belonged to Israel. However, what faith sees is the certainty of what is promised. Moses was absolutely convinced that what God had said was going to happen; would happen. Therefore, it was a no-brainer to renounce his allegiance and affection for his adoptive mother and all the power and prestige of his position and join with the people of God in their misery.

9. What does it mean that he viewed life as a prince of Egypt as sinful and temporary (fleeting, short lived)?

When the text tells us that Moses' life as a prince was sinful it is not saying that simply being a prince in Egypt was sinful. We know that because Joseph was a prince in Egypt for close to 75 years and God never told him that it was sinful for him to be one. Also, Moses has been in the house of Pharaoh for some 35 years and he hasn't been sinning all that time by being there. God put him there. However, it would be sinful for him to remain in that house. He knew that God had called him to go lead Israel out of Egypt and thus to remain as a prince would be sinful. He would be choosing the pleasures of a sinful life over loyalty to God and his people. God was calling him to leave his current position and to take up another and for him to not leave would be preferring the pleasures of sin to God. He knew that it was only through the descendants of Abraham that the all the nations of the world would be blessed. He saw that the pleasures of living as a prince of Egypt were temporary but the promised reward of belonging to Christ was permanent. He knew that God's reward of life with him forever could only be obtained through the Messiah and the only way

to be joined to the Messiah was to be joined with his people. He looked at the situation in this way, he had two choices: Temporary pleasures of sin and then eternal misery cut off from God and his people, living under the curse of God OR temporary mistreatment with the people of God and then eternal pleasures with God and his people in the new heavens and the new earth.

10. How does it strike you that Moses viewed being a slave as better than being a prince in Egypt?

11. What are some ways in which you are voluntarily and happily choosing to suffer because you are “looking to the reward?” What are some “pleasures of sin”, some worldly wealth you are forgoing because you view “mistreatment with the people of God”/”disgrace for the sake of Christ” as better?

Only faith in Christ can conquer fear because those who trust Christ see suffering and loss in the light of heaven.

12. Compare v. 27 with Exodus 2:13-15. What appears to be the problem?

The problem is that Hebrews says that Moses left Egypt by faith not fearing the anger of the king and while the passage in Exodus doesn't directly say that Moses feared the king, yet it sure looks like he left Egypt out of fear and not faith.

13. The NEB translates v. 27 this way: “By faith Moses left Egypt not because he feared the anger of the king...” In other words the author is emphasizing that while it appears he left in fear, he did not, he left in faith. What would it mean that he left in faith?

This then means that while he was initially afraid he overcame his fear by faith in Christ. This is helpful because it shows us that Moses was just like us. He was afraid but he overcame his fear by faith. How did he do that? He knew that he was supposed to deliver Israel out of their slavery and so if he remained in Egypt he would be killed by

Pharaoh. He knew that it was not yet time to deliver Israel and so he fled from Egypt to Midian to await God's time for delivering Israel.

14. How does Moses' fleeing foreshadow the ministry of Christ? See Luke 4:28-30, John 7:30 & 8:20, 59.

Jesus regularly was on the verge of being killed but then he would slip away because it was not yet time to deliver his people by his death. In the same way Moses slipped away from a premature death because it was not yet time for him to deliver Israel and he did this on the basis of his faith, his certainty that Christ would come and establish God's eternal kingdom and that his leading Israel out of Egypt was an integral and necessary part of that plan.

15. The end of v. 27 says, "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." What did he endure and how did he do it?

He left Egypt and he successfully completed the ministry to which God called him. This ministry included living for forty years out in the wilderness of Midian as a shepherd all the while knowing that his people were still in slavery and he was still going to be the deliverer. He was able to patiently wait in Midian for forty years before he returned to deliver his people because by faith he saw him who is invisible. He endured the fear of confronting Pharaoh because by faith he saw him who is invisible. He received the law on Mt. Sinai because by faith he saw him who is invisible. He led the rebellious people for forty years through the desert because by faith he saw him who is invisible. In short Moses endured all the trouble of leading the people of Israel because by faith he saw him who is invisible.

16. What does it mean to by faith see him who is invisible? How would that help you to endure trouble?

The Psalmist expresses what was true for Moses: "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will never be shaken." Over the next 80 years of his life Moses received many blows of various kinds but he was never shaken, he endured because, by faith, he saw the invisible God. He saw God at work everywhere and in everything and thus he did not give into his fear. He believed God's

promises were true, that no matter what happened he could never be excluded from them. His future was secured by the invisible God and his future, as well as his present, was going to be lived with him. God was with him and so he would not fear. The invisible God who made this world and rules over every detail in this world and in your life and who is full of love for every sinner who trusts in Christ is with you. He it is that stands behind and supports this visible world. Knowing that the invisible God is with you and that nothing that happens to you on this earth can ever separate you from him can enable you to do the right thing, even though you are afraid. It is possible to endure in a life of love for God and others in spite of fear inducing threats because you see him who is invisible through faith in Jesus.

Only faith in Christ can conquer fear because those who trust Christ see the one who is invisible.