

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Christ in Hebrews
 SERMON: *God's Hall of Faith: The Gallery of the Exodus and the Conquest*
 SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:23-31
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
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Introduction:

Look at this picture (Figure 1). What do you see? How many of you see an old woman? How many of you see a young woman? They both are there (the young woman's chin is the old woman's nose) and we see things differently depending on our perspective. There is not a right way or a wrong way to see this particular picture.



Figure 1

In order to persevere in the faith, however, perspective does matter. We need a proper perspective. Our text this morning shows us that **persevering faith has an eternal perspective**. This morning I want to look at three ways an eternal perspective influences how we see things.

Eternal perspective allows us to see God as he really is. (23, 27)

In 11:1 we are given a description of faith. And in that description we're told that faith is "*being certain of what we do not see.*" There is a tendency in each of us to give more attention to visible and tangible things because they seem more real to us. But eyes of faith will also pay close attention to realities we can't see, like God and his promises. In our text this morning we see that both Moses and his parents paid close attention to God and his promises.

The promises made to Abraham were real and could be trusted because they were given by God. God promised Abraham he would have many descendants, and that through those descendants all nations would be blessed. God also promised that Abraham's descendants would inhabit the Promised Land in Canaan. But how do you think these promises would have looked to Moses' parents? After all it had been 700 years since those promises had been made and now the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. And not only were they in slavery hundreds of miles from the Promised Land, but Pharaoh had made an edict ordering all of the newborn boys to be slaughtered. The promise wasn't looking very promising. It would have been easy to lose sight of the promise. It is also easy for us to lose sight of eternity. But Moses' parents had a different perspective. They saw God for who he really is – a God who keeps his promises!

11:23a *By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child.*

I don't know what it was specifically that his parents saw in him that made them determine he was "no ordinary child," but they saw something that clued them into the fact that God had a special future for Moses. Since all the other examples in our text this morning describe people who had faith in the Abrahamic promise, I believe they too saw a connection between Moses and the promise to bring the people of God into the Promised Land.

They believed that God was going to use Moses in extraordinary ways because they had their eyes on the invisible God and his promises. Many of us would have had our eyes on Pharaoh, who had the ability to take life, but Moses' parents had their eyes on God. Their example teaches us that...

We should fear God, not man. (23, 27)

11:23b *And they were not afraid of the king's edict.*

This story is told in Exodus 2, but Moses' parents were not the first people to disregard the king's edict. Look in Exodus 1 at what the midwives did when Pharaoh told them to kill all of the newborn boys born to the Israelites.

Exodus 1:17 *The midwives... feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.*

Moses' parents, like the midwives, didn't fear the king's edict they feared God because they saw God for who he really is; they knew God was to be feared far more than Pharaoh. The same was true of Moses.

11:27 *By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*

If you'll remember, Moses left Egypt twice. The first time he fled to Midian after he had killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite slave. The second time was when he led the people out of Egypt. There is dispute among scholars as to which event the author of Hebrews is referring. I'm persuaded by the arguments that say he is referring to the second time, when Moses led the people out of Egypt. As I read Exodus 2 it seems to me that Moses *was* afraid of Pharaoh, that's why he fled to Midian. But when I read Exodus 7-12 Moses shows no fear when he goes before Pharaoh time after time and gives warnings of more plagues.

Moses was focused on fulfilling God's call on his life. Going before Pharaoh would have been a fearful task for most of us. But Moses, like his parents before him, kept his eyes fixed on the invisible God.

The readers of Hebrews were being persecuted and chapter 2 indicates they were afraid of death (cf. 2:15), but this fear was unnecessary. When Christ died he destroyed the power of death (2:14), and freed them from the fear of death. They didn't need to fear man or death. They needed to fear the consequences of not persevering in their faith (4:1). Failure to persevere in the faith would mean forfeiting the promised eternal inheritance. The author warns his readers in chapter 10 that if they don't persevere they need to fear eternal punishment. He concludes that warning section in **10:31** by saying, "*it is a dreadful [fearful] thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

In each example given in our text this morning there is some kind of persecution from the unbelieving world, whether Pharaoh and the Egyptians or the king of Jericho. Unbelievers will always present threats to persevering in the faith. Unbelievers aren't the only obstacle to

persevering faith (sometimes we are), but they can be a real threat. If we see God for who he really is we won't fear persecution, rather we'll fear the consequences of not persevering in the face of persecution. We need to stand up for Christ in the face of the ungodly, the naysayers, and the skeptics in our communities, in the workplace, and in our schools. We are prone to be shy when it comes to our faith. We are prone to blend in, instead of standing out. We need to be bold as we live in this unbelieving world with our words and our actions. Don't shrink back. Don't fear man, fear God!

Persevering faith has an eternal perspective that sees God as he really is.

Eternal perspective allows us to see treasures as they really are. (24-26)

The world has a different economy than God. In America we treasure individualism, accomplishment and wealth, to name a few. Christians should treasure something different.

We should treasure association with the people of God. (24-25)

11:24-25 *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*

Being known as Pharaoh's daughter would have had significant social rewards like fame, honor, prestige, position, and power, not to mention comfort, safety, and wealth. Being associated with the Israelites on the other hand would have been a major step backwards, after all they were slaves. They were considered the lowest in society. They were treated as property, not humans. They held the lowest position in Egypt. They were powerless. They endured hard work with no payoff. They were oppressed.

Moses could have chosen to maintain his association with Pharaoh's family, but instead he chose to be associated with the people of God. Moses had an extreme identity makeover. Either choice involved consequences. Choosing solidarity with the people of God meant losing his position in Egypt. But if he would have chose his position in Egypt he would have been going against God's call on his life and would have lost the promised inheritance.

One reason the writer of Hebrews includes this example is because some of his readers were disassociating themselves with other believers; they were shying away from a distinctively Christian identity.¹ The reason they were doing this was because it was not safe to be a Christian in Rome at that time. However, it is more dangerous to disassociate with the people of God than it is to associate with them, for, as we saw in chapter 4, if we're not in regular fellowship with other believers we're in real danger of forfeiting the promises of God. Therefore, the author of Hebrews urges his readers to stop their disassociation.

10:25 *Do not neglect meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.*

Do you value meeting together? Is there evidence that you value being associated with the people of God? How you spend your time will indicate what you treasure. Are you a regular

¹ Ellingworth, 1993.

attender at Sunday worship gatherings? Are you a part of a small group or a Sunday School class? Do you have a spiritual mentor that you meet with regularly? I'm not saying that any of these things will earn you favor with God. These activities are designed for the edification of the body of Christ. But they are also evidence that you value participation with other believers. Do you treasure fellowship with the people of God and if not, why?

Surely it is not because we fear death like the readers of this letter did. But there are some who may value sleep more than corporate worship gatherings, on any given morning. There are some that value sports and hobbies more than discipleship. There are probably some who value time out of town more than time at church. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we need to spend every day of the week at church. But we are commanded to meet together regularly for the sake of worship and to encourage one another toward love and good deeds (10:24). Do we value meeting together; is it something that we treasure? Generally speaking we spend time with those we have a lot in common with, especially those who share the same common interests as we do. For example my family has a lot of children, so we generally spend time with other people who have kids. We do this because our kids are important to us and that's just who we are at this stage in life. But if Christ is our main identity and he is the main treasure in our lives then a large amount of our time will be spent with other people who treasure Christ. How we spend our time will indicate what we treasure. What do you treasure?

We should be willing to suffer loss for the treasure of our eternal inheritance. (11:26; 10:33-34)

11:26 *He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*

When the text says, "he regarded" it means he was doing a calculation; he was making an assessment²; he was counting the cost. He was weighing the "disgrace of Christ"³ against the treasures of Egypt. The NIV says, "*He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ.*" I take the phrase "for the sake of Christ" simply to be a description of the kind of disgrace he was assessing; the disgrace he was considering was comparable to the kind of disgrace that Christ suffered.

Moses is compared to Christ here because his life parallels the work of Christ in so many ways. Moses could have been a member of Pharaoh's house, but he chose solidarity with the people of God. Christ could have stayed in heaven with his father, but he chose solidarity with humanity. Chapter 2 tells us that Christ was not ashamed to call us brothers (2:11). He became a man, and was rejected by men. Philippians 2:6-8 describes it well.

Philippians 2:6-8 ... *being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

² Keller, November 13, 1994.

³ ESV

Christ was rich in glory before his incarnation, but made himself nothing by becoming a human. He suffered death for the sake of humanity; that is disgrace. And why did he do it?

Hebrews 12:2 *...for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus endured disgrace because he was looking ahead to his reward; Moses chose to be associated with the people of God for similar reasons. Moses made an assessment between the value of the promised reward and the treasure of Egypt and he concluded that the disgrace he would have to endure was worth it because the promised reward was of more value than the treasures of Egypt. This is a very remarkable verse! Let me explain.

Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. And adopted sons, in the ancient world, had full inheritance rights.⁴ We've already considered some of the social implications of Moses decision to be associated with the people of God. I'd like to look now at some of the financial implications of that decision.

Many of you are familiar with King Tut, who was a Pharaoh in Egypt in the 14th century B.C. King Tut's tomb was discovered in 1922, mostly intact. This tomb has 4 rooms in it and is probably 550 square feet. This is a very small tomb, because Tut was a very insignificant Pharaoh. We don't know the exact value of the treasure found in his tomb, but the travelling museum exhibit is insured for about \$650 million. Contrast that with the Sons of Ramses II tomb, which has over 70 rooms and is about ten times the size of King Tut's tomb. Ramses II ruled in the 13th century B.C. There was no treasure found in this tomb, however, because grave robbers had already looted it. But my guess is the value of the treasure found in a tomb the size of this one would be in the billions in today's economy.

We don't know for certain who the Pharaoh was when Moses was in Egypt or how much money would have been inherited if Moses would have stayed in Egypt. But we know the treasure of Egypt would have been worth a lot of money to Moses, more money than any of us will probably ever have at our disposal, but Moses considered the reward that had been promised to the people of God of much greater value than great worldly wealth and honor.

This idea wasn't new to the readers of Hebrews. Hebrews 10:33-34 makes it clear that they knew what it was like to be publically insulted, to be imprisoned, and to have their earthly possessions stripped from them. They endured this disgrace/loss because they knew they had better and lasting possessions. The example of Moses was being set before them because they were no longer displaying the same endurance. They, like Moses needed to keep their eyes on their great reward. They needed to make a calculated assessment.

We too need to make a calculated assessment. I said two weeks ago that faith that justifies also testifies. What I meant by that is if we truly have faith in Christ people will be able to tell by the way that we live.

⁴ Lane, 1991.

The Egyptians believed they could take their treasures with them. That's why they buried it with them in their tombs. We obviously know can't take your wealth with you. So the bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins," is absurd. We know that, in our mind, but do our lives reflect that belief? If our checkbooks were laid bare would they indicate we believe we can't take worldly wealth with us? Would they indicate that our treasure is in heaven? If our thoughts and our hearts were laid bare would they indicate that we regard disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of this life because we are looking ahead to our reward?

I read a story about Randy Alcorn this week that stopped me in my tracks. He donated his entire book collection to the church library.⁵ That may seem insignificant to some of you, but I have to confess I don't know if I could do that. What is it for you? Is there something in your life that you don't know if you could let go of – an object, money, a relationship, a position? When we are unwilling to let go of worldly treasure we prove that we don't fully believe the riches found in Christ are of more value than the treasures of this life. I want to be like the man described in **Matthew 13:44** which says, "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*"

An eternal perspective will see the true value in things. It will see the things of this world as of little value in comparison to the riches of heaven.

One of the things many people value or treasure in America is their retirement years. How people spend their retirement years, and how people prepare for their retirement years can be a pretty strong indicator of what our treasure is. I'd like to share with you a story from John Piper's book *Don't Waste Your Life* that illustrates my point.

In April 2000, Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon, West Africa. Ruby was over eighty. Single all her life, she poured it out for one great thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached, the poor, and the sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon. The brakes failed, the car went over a cliff, and they were both killed instantly. I asked my congregation: Was that a tragedy? Two lives, driven by one great passion, namely, to be spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ—even two decades after most of their American counterparts had retired to throw away their lives on trifles. No, that is not a tragedy. That is a glory. These lives were not wasted. And these lives were not lost. "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35).

I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider a story from the February 1998 edition of Reader's Digest, which tells about a couple who "took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells." At first, when

⁵ Alcorn, pg 24.

I read it I thought it might be a joke. A spoof on the American Dream. But it wasn't. Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: “Look, Lord. See my shells.” That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. Over against that, I put my protest: Don't buy it. Don't waste your life. (pp. 45-46)

Eternal perspective allows us to see treasures as they really are. The first two women understood the value of their eternal treasure. The couple in Florida was blind!

Eternal perspective allows us to see the need for action. (28-31)

In each of the examples in verses 28-31 we see God as *the* agent in salvation. It is God who spares the firstborn child when he passes over the homes whose doorposts are covered in blood. It is God who parts the Red Sea and sees the Israelites safe to the other side. It is God who brings down the walls of Jericho and secures victory in the battle. And it is God who spares Rahab and her family when the walls fell. In each of these examples we see faith that believes God will save, but in each example we also see the people of God doing something that proves they believe. We should follow their examples.

We must apply Christ's blood in faith (Passover). (28)

11:28 *By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.*

Moses believed it when God told him he would pass over the houses of all the Israelites who applied the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. This speaks volumes! Most of us have heard the story of the Passover a hundred times, but we have to keep in mind that this was an unprecedented event. This would have seemed so strange to Moses and to the Israelite people. It is a mystery how blood can cover the wrath of God. But belief in this mystery brings salvation. Moses and the Israelites believed God, and their belief was proved by their action; they applied blood to their doorposts.

We too have to apply the blood of Christ, in a way. We apply the blood of Christ to our lives by believing that Christ's blood has secured our eternal redemption (9:12). Without this belief we will not be spared from the wrath of God.

We should step out in faith (Crossing the Red Sea). (29)

11:29 *By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.*

Psalm 78 retells the story of the Exodus. When it describes the Red Sea crossing in verse 13 it says God *made the water stand firm like a wall*. Can you imagine walking through a dry sea bed when there as a huge wall of water on your right and on your left which could come crashing

down at any minute, all the while you are being pursued by a vast Egyptian army? The Israelites believed God would deliver them. They proved their belief by stepping into the sea bed.

We should act on God's Word in faith (Jericho). (30)

11:30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.*

This too seems like a bizarre command (as the Passover did): March around the city *once* a day for six days and then on the seven day march around it *seven* times, then blow a trumpet and the walls will come down. Can you imagine what the people at Jericho thought? Can you imagine the humiliation? But the Israelites didn't view it that way; they believed God would save them and they took God at his word. They proved their belief by their obedience to his command. It is important that we emulate their example. We are to be not only hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word.

We should take great risks in faith (Rahab). (31)

11:31 *By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.*

Rahab believed God would give Jericho into the hands of the Israelites. And so she collaborated with the Israelite spies. This collaboration could have cost her her life if the king of Jericho found out. She proved her belief that God would deliver Jericho into the hands of the Israelites by risking her life.

Joshua 2:9 *[Rahab] said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.*

Joshua goes on to tell us the reason she knew the LORD had given them the land. She was aware of the Red Sea incident as well and Israel's past military successes on the east side of the Jordan at Bashan and Hesbon. Rahab had a forward looking faith, just like Moses and his parents, and just like the Israelites. She knew that Jericho would be destroyed. She knew that Israel would take the land. Without even knowing the promise made to Abraham she believed that Israel would possess this Promised Land. And she acted on her belief. The reward was of greater value to her than the risk of death.

In each of these situations it is God who does the saving. But in each of these examples the people of God place their faith in God's saving power. Rahab is a reminder for us that we can't save ourselves, only God can save us through faith. If Rahab is included in the same hall of faith as Abraham and Moses then there is hope for each of us.

Rahab wasn't saved because of who she was. After all she wasn't even an Israelite, she was a Gentile. And Rahab wasn't saved because she lived a perfect life. She was a prostitute. But she fell on the mercy of God and was saved by faith. We don't have to have perfect faith or live a perfect life to experience the saving power of God in our lives. Faith like Rahab's will suffice. Rahab is a reminder to each of us that our only hope of salvation is by grace alone, through faith

alone, in Christ alone. We need to daily fall on the mercy of God and believe in his saving power found in Christ alone.

But even a faith like Rahab's will prove itself by action. In each example today people demonstrate their faith by action. They act in spite of obstacles and threats because they really believe that perseverance in faith will result in the promised reward. They have an eternal perspective. We too need an eternal perspective.

13:20-21 *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

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