

The Endurance of Faith

By Faith: Pt. 10

Our text today comes from **Hebrews chapter 11**, as they all have been this summer – we’re going to wrap it all up next week - but not before we delve into the story of Moses this morning. Let me read to you **verses 23–29**.

23 By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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.

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

This is snapshot of Moses’ life – he lived an amazing life – and we’re going to focus in on that phrase that says, “*He persevered...*” - he endured – “because he saw him who is invisible.” You could easily make the case that this entire book of Hebrews is actually about the word “endurance”. Because the book of Hebrews is written to a group of Christians who, because they were being persecuted and because of their suffering, were really talking about giving up.

And the writer is sending this letter to encourage them to hang in there. He reminds them of what they’ve already endured in the past. It says in **Hebrews 10:32**, “*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you **endured** in a great conflict full of suffering.*” In fact, the climax of the entire book is in chapter 12, where the author – as every Christian should – points to Jesus as the ultimate example of the lesson to be learned.

Hebrews 12:1-3, “*And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. 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. Consider him who **endured** such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*”

Now the Greek word that is always translated “endure” by the writer of Hebrews is *hypomeno*. *Meno* means to stand or stay. *Hypo* is the little prefix from which we get our English prefix “hyper”. So what the word “endurance” actually transliterates into here is to “hyper-stay” or to “hyper-stand.” To hyper-stand means you put your feet down and *nothing* can knock you down. It’s like you’re in a river, but you can stand in the river. You’re hyper-standing no matter how strong the current is moving.

Now the question that comes up...Is it possible to be a durable person? Is it possible to endure? Is it possible in a throwaway culture, in a society of throwaway relationships, and in a society of throwaway identities to stick with something and to hyper-stand? That’s what the book is about. And the answer here, of course, for the writer to the Hebrews is “yes”. In fact, the whole purpose of what we’ve been reading this summer is to show you how it’s *possible* to hyper-stand, how it’s possible to be someone who endures.

I’d like just to show you fairly briefly today the principles in the life of Moses that show the secret of endurance; the secret of someone who stands firm, who stays put, and who can’t be knocked off their feet for anything. Don’t we want to be durable people? This is the secret. Let me just show you, first of all, *what Moses endured* but then *how he did it*.

First, here’s What Moses endured. There are four major crisis points in his life, and they’re all really mentioned in these few verses. The first major crisis point was where it says he refused to be called the son of the daughter of Pharaoh but decided to identify with the people of God and be mistreated with them. Now where did that happen? Moses, as the story goes, was a Jew who was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter – the whole baby in the basket story. And therefore, he was brought into the royal court, and he had the most incredible training. He had access to all the corridors of power. He had an incredible career ahead of him, *but...*

You know, Joseph, years ago, had been both a Jew *and* a prince in Egypt, but times had changed now. Pharaoh was nervous because the Jews had multiplied, and they’d become so numerous he was afraid of them. So he’d begun to oppress them. He’d turned them into slaves. He began to beat them and exploit their labor. And Moses realized he could *either* be a prince in Israel, a leader, *or* he could be a leader in Egypt, but he couldn’t do both the way Joseph had. And he knew a choice would come, and one day the choice sort of ambushed him.

He was out and he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a helpless Hebrew slave, and in anger Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried his body in the sand. And at that point he had thrown in his lot with the slaves. He decided no longer to take the advantages he had as a member of the royal court.

But as hard as that would have been to do, we're told there was a second choice that happened almost immediately, and it was a harder choice. We're told here in **v.27**, "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger.*" What does that mean? Here's what happened. The very next day Moses discovered two Israelites fighting with each other. He walks up to them, and he says, "Why are you fighting? Stop fighting."

And the one guy turns and says, **Exodus 2:14**, "~~The man said,~~ *Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?*" Then Moses was afraid and thought, *'What I did must have become known.'*" Suddenly, it hit Moses that this wasn't a secret. If the fact he had killed the Egyptian was already out, he knew Pharaoh would hear about it pretty soon, but the worst thing was his own people had rejected him. They *resented* the idea he had self-appointed, and they were *frightened* of him. And suddenly, Moses in one day went from having two peoples to having *no* people.

Here's why the choice was so amazing. We know enough about those autocratic kingdoms of the ancient times to know that if a son of the daughter of Pharaoh kills a commoner in a tantrum and then turns to his grandfather, turns to the Pharaoh, and says, "I'm sorry. I don't know what got into me," that's not a problem. "Okay, you killed a commoner. All right. Oh, well. Not the end of the world." Moses knew that he could go back, but now he realized, if he stayed *true* to his identification with his people, he would be an outcast.

He knew that he would have to always be an outcast and he'd be an eternal fugitive from the wrath of the Pharaoh, who was the most powerful man on earth. So he was at a moral crossroads – he could abandon his people, or he could abandon his palace. It came down to a choice of principles. He could do the wrong thing and be safe, or he could do the right thing and face absolute career suicide.

To be faithful to his principles was not now to become this great leader, but to have to become a fugitive, run off into the desert, if not killed by beasts or thieves, which is most likely, and be a fugitive endlessly...and that's what he did. He decided to do the right thing. He decided to obey even though it meant the end of his life. Career suicide, oblivion, and he did it. Of course, as he stood out there, as far as he was concerned, it did appear that his life was over. That's certainly what it looked like in the Egyptian tabloids...

Any person looking at what had happened to Moses would say, “This is crazy. Here’s a man with tremendous leadership skills, and his people need him, and look what happened to him, stuck out as a shepherd in the desert for years and years, now a member of a marginal group of people, his life at an end, and everything in tatters.” There he was. He passed his forties. He passed his fifties. He passed his sixties. He passed his seventies. He got to 80 years old. There he was, a complete has-been, everything over, but then one day God showed up in the burning bush and said, “Moses, I have a job for you.”

God says, “You know, even though you’re a member of a marginal little group of people, even though you’re a nobody, I want you to do two things for me. First of all, I want you to walk up to Pharaoh, the most powerful person on the face of the earth, and I want you to say, ‘I’m about to take your entire free labor force from you.’ Then I want you to lead out that group of people, broken by years of slavery, no economic resources, no personal resources, and I want you to lead them out, even though they’re going to *continually* fight with you, and even though you know the greatest army on the face of the earth will come after you,” and Moses did it.

But then the final crisis was when he stood on the banks of the Red Sea. And in front of him was the sea, and behind was the army of Pharaoh. And in obedience to God’s Word, he took his people, he faced the sea, and he said, “Forward.” He went *literally* into the sea, and he endured. He hyper-stood. He put his feet in the Red Sea, and he passed through it. Nobody knocked him off his feet. Now how did he become a man like that?

It’s just like with Abraham. You notice, at every spot the test got worse, and at every spot he was able to handle it. He never would have done it 40 years *before* that, but at every point he continued to grow in perseverance. He *endured*. Now how did he do it? There are three verbs in this passage that tell us how he did it.

That’s our second point, How Moses endured. You must not think, friends, that Christianity is the same thing as stoicism. You must not think that Christian endurance, the endurance that is offered to you here, is a kind of grit-your-teeth, negative thing. That’s not what’s presented at all. We’re told here *exactly* what Moses did to become this kind of person, and if you *do* the same, you will *be* the same. What is it? Three things.

First of all, Moses **regarded**. Do you see that word? **V.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.” He regarded. He looked at the treasures of Egypt, and he looked at the reward he would have with God. He *assessed* the two, and he assessed the disgrace he would have in being faithful to God as *far* more valuable than all the treasures of Egypt. Assess.

Ok let me just tell you quickly how this works. This is not stoicism. This is not a stiff upper lip. He assessed. This is a calculation word. This is the same word Paul uses in **Philippians 3:8**, where he says, “*What is more, I **consider** everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I **consider** them garbage, that I may gain Christ.*”

Here’s the image. The image is, you and I, we’re novices when it comes to diamonds. We’re novices when it comes to real estate, maybe. We’re novices when it comes to various things. But then there are experts who knows how to assess. You ever see that program *Antiques Roadshow*? People bring in their items and experts appraise them. In 2012 the show came to Corpus Christi and a man brought in a painting he’d inherited from his mother. She had bought in on a trip to Mexico years ago. Turns out it was by the famous early 20th century Mexican painter, Rivera, and it was worth about \$1 million dollars. The guy had

been keeping it in a box in his office. How many of you would have taken it to Goodwill?

This is what this word “regard” or “consider” means. Instead of going on appearances, you get the expert who assesses and says, “This is *far* more worthy than that.” Moses knew how to do it, and here’s how he did it. It even shows you. He says he decided the treasures he would have in God are far greater than the “passing pleasures of sin”. The pleasures of sin last for a short time.

Let me give you the first secret, and here it is. Moses knew that you’re only as durable as the thing you love most. Moses said, “If I love something *most* that can never pass away, *I* will never pass away. If I can love something *most* that will last forever, *I* will last forever, but if I love *anything* that’s vulnerable, I’m vulnerable. I’m as *durable* as that which I love most.”

Thomas Oden is a theologian I quite like. “Was” I suppose, he passed away just a few years ago. But he wrote about how the human heart works. He says, first, every person is goal-oriented. You can’t live if you don’t have something to look forward to. Secondly, all goals compete, so you can’t live unless you choose one goal as the center of value by which all other goals are judged - one standard by which all other goals are evaluated. Thirdly, he says if you choose a finite center of value, you’re always anxious.

Here's how he says it, "Anxiety becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose my center of value is my health or my political party or sexual attractiveness or financial productivity. If my center of value is any of these things, when these things are under threat, and they always are if I think about it, I am shaken to the depths. Therefore, I try not to think in order to keep my peace."

This is what's going on with most people in society. Don't think...distract. Ignorance is bliss. But not for Moses. Moses "regarded" – Moses thought. He says, "I will be as *durable* as the thing I love most in life. If I decide the most important thing is I have to have somebody to love me, so I will do whatever it takes to get somebody to love me. I'd like to obey the Ten Commandments, but if I have to disobey the Ten Commandments to get somebody to love me, *that's* the center of my value."

You're as durable as that person is you have banked everything on. And that person is *not* durable. That person is a sinner. That person is fragile. Same thing with, as he said, your political party or your sexual attractiveness or your productivity, Moses figured it out. He assessed. He *thought* about it.

This endurance, this strength, that Christianity gives you is not just something that comes on automatically. You have to *think*. You assess. You reason. You consider the data. You say, "Yeah, these things are happening, but they're nothing compared to this. *This* is what I live for," and you're as durable as that thing you love most.

Secondly, Moses chose to **suffer**. He chose to be mistreated. Now, don't twist it, he didn't *look* for suffering, but he decided to obey even though the obedience *entailed* suffering. Did you hear that? Moses didn't *look* for suffering. He chose to obey even though it entailed suffering and he didn't know why. When it looks like to obey God and do the right thing is going to bring suffering, the great temptation is to take a red pencil to God's script for us.

In other words, here is Moses, and he could have said, "Do you know what? I went out on a limb for these people. I risked *everything* for these people. What a bunch of ungrateful jerks! Why should I be faithful to God now because to be faithful to God now means utter oblivion? That's a waste of my talents."

Now you think about it from a human point of view. Here is the one Hebrew in the whole world who has the connections, who has the knowledge, who has the training, who has the ability, and who has the intellect. They need him. They rejected him, and now his life appears to be a complete waste. So he says, “Maybe if I obey God, it’s a waste.”

But he decided to obey God anyway, and did God ruin his life? We’re all sitting here talking about him thousands of years later, right? What Moses didn’t realize until afterwards...and we never realize till we obey *through* the suffering. He didn’t realize he *wasn’t* ready to be a leader. That he needed two levels to be prepared to be a leader.

The first level was he had to have this great training in Pharaoh’s court, but the second thing is he had to go out and *live* with simple people if he was ever going to lead them. He had to understand them, and not only that, he needed to be humbled. Killing that Egyptian shows an arrogance. Listen, a prince in Egypt, maybe, in that time could have a fit and kill somebody in a tantrum, but a prince in Israel can’t.

They were afraid of him, and rightly so. He needed to be humbled. He needed to learn self-control. He thought he was ready to lead, and he wasn’t. He had no idea he was not going into oblivion at all.

Don’t you see? If he had decided to lead, if the Israelites had decided to have him lead, it would’ve been a disaster.

In other words, here’s the second secret. When it looks like obedience to God leads to disaster, obey anyway, because obedience is actually taking you away from disaster...at least a disaster you can’t see. Do you know how you become an enduring person? Do you know how you get strength? Because over the years if you obey in spite of suffering, if you obey even if it *brings* suffering, you’ll see that, and the more you see it, the more enduring you become, the more durable you become. Do you see? It takes years to develop that, but eventually you see it.

Now lastly – we’ve been told Moses *regarded* and Moses *suffered* – finally we’re told that Moses saw him who is invisible. Well now how did he do that? I think for him all that meant was like **Psalm 16:8** where it says, “*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*” Moses was reminding himself of who God was. He was seeing the unseen. He was continually seeing God, and that means he disciplined himself to remember who God is. And do you know how he does that? He does it this way.

He says, “What makes me think I’m wiser than God? It looks like this is disaster. It looks like that the Red Sea will never open up. It looks like this will never...But God is wise. His ways are not my ways. He knows better than I do. Do I think I know better?” He reminded himself of who God was, and because he was continually being confronted with the *wisdom* of God, he persevered. But you see, *we* can see somebody that Moses couldn’t see.

The reason that Moses was able to do what he did and become the great man he was, the reason he was able to *assess*, and the reason he was able to *choose suffering* and eventually get to the place where he was able to look at the Red Sea itself and say, “Charge,” and if you want to get to that situation, if you want to get into that kind of character and condition, you have to *regard*, and you have to *choose*, but you have to *see* the wisdom of God.

Moses did that, but *we* see more wisdom than he did. It’s not quite so invisible for us. Do you know why? Because we see someone *in* Moses. We know of somebody who left a much greater palace than Pharaoh’s, and we know somebody who came to his own and his own received him not. And we know somebody who was rejected by his people, but they rejected him in a far deeper, profound, and radical way than Moses was rejected. They *killed* him.

And, we see wisdom in Moses because we see, incredibly, God’s wisdom was such that the very *rejection* of Moses led to the *salvation* of those people. And we see the very defeat of this greater-than-Moses led to the greatest triumph in history. And therefore, because we see the one who did that and who was faithful in spite of our rejection of him, we see the wisdom of God in a way Moses *didn’t*.

We see the *incredible* wisdom of God *on the cross*, and we see in Jesus Christ somebody who was willing to be rejected and to be obedient to God. It meant *oblivion* for him, and yet redemption came out of it. And so when *we* face the problems we have in front of us, we say, “Do I think I’m wiser than God? Look, Lord Jesus, I rejected you, yet you were faithful to me. I’m not going to reject you again. Look, Lord Jesus, you were faithful. Though it looked like it meant oblivion on Good Friday, it meant redemption on Easter Sunday. I’m going to be faithful even though it looks like disaster, because I know it’ll be redemption.”

We see something Moses didn't see. We should be able to take on – not just the Red Sea - the Atlantic Ocean! Do you understand this? If you do, you'll be so enduring. The great hymn writer William Cowper put it this way:

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs

And works His sovereign will.

His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;

The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy and shall break

In blessings on your head.

Let's pray...