

Bible Reflection

Being Mistreated Along With the People of God: Hebrews 11:23-40

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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. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. 31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. 32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Yesterday morning Wayne brought us a insightful reflection based on Hebrews 11:13-22 Today we go to the later verses of this chapter to get a perspective on faith and suffering, from the life of Moses, the Judges and the Prophets and those who stood for the faith during the inter-testamental period.

As we look at the life of Moses, it is important to recognize that his suffering is tied in large part to his identification with our people.

Familial Faith...

Amram and Jochebed had a strong Jewish identity (Exodus 2 tells us that his parents were from the tribe of Levi) and a strong faith. We know from those early chapters in the book of Exodus that Jewish life was tough for any Jew living in Egypt, but especially for Jewish parents. Yet they were up to the challenge. They were well aware of Pharaoh's orders to murder all Jewish male babies (Exodus 1:15-22) And in that dangerous environment, Moses's parents still chose to have children and Moses was born.

The Scripture says that by faith they hid him for three months and that they did so for two reasons. First, because he was a beautiful child. Now I have yet to meet a parent that doesn't think their newborn child is beautiful. But we are to understand that this beauty was not merely physical. Some of the rabbinic writers implied that it was a mark of some great promise.

Secondly, the Scripture tells us that they were not afraid of Pharaoh's command. In *Antiquities*, Josephus suggests that they received a revelation from God about Moses' destiny in a dream and therefore didn't fear preserving their son. Whether this was true or not, their actions showed that their faith in the God of Israel, overcame any fear they might have had of the king of Egypt.

After three months, they could not hide him any longer so they came up with a highly creative plan to keep him alive. Jochebed puts her beautiful infant in a papyrus basket coated with pitch and sends it up the river to where Pharaoh's daughter bathed. It was there that she set big sister, Miriam, in place to watch. When Pharaoh's daughter's heart is melted at the sight of this child, Miriam pops up with the brilliant

suggestion of Jochebed becoming the “surrogate” nurse. And so they were able to raise him for his early years. Faith provides a wonderful place for our creativity, or even our ingenuity.

So here we have Moses in his early years, protected by Pharaoh’s daughter yet nurtured by his own Jewish family. His parents were able to inculcate their values in him, teach him about his roots, his yichus and thus their own faith laid the foundation for Moses’ identity as a Jew and for the faith that he would need to fulfill his destiny—to one day deliver his people from captivity.

It’s important to remember that Moses’ identity as a Jewish follower of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was set and preserved by his parent’s faith. Many of you are parents who have worked hard to provide a strong God-centered home life for your children. You know the challenges of inculcating an identity that not only is Jesus-centered but which recognized the importance of being part of the Jewish People. It’s all the more challenging when the Jewish community itself is divided about what it means to have a Jewish identity. Yet it is crucial that parents meet this challenge as ethnic identity tends to dissipate or become diluted.

Whether we are parents, aunts or uncles, teachers or mentors to younger person, we have an immense responsibility. Like Amram and Jochebed, our faith and the risks we are willing to take can be an important foundation and a critical example for our next generation. What are we modeling that will strengthen a next generation to withstand the challenges to their messianic faith instead of giving way to the prevailing culture?

Forsaking Faith

Verses 24-26 jump to an adult Moses at age 40 and describe how he personally identified with his people. It’s interesting to see how Moses’ identification is first described by a negative choice– he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and later we read, he forsook Egypt. In doing so, he chose to give up all the prestige and wealth and temporary gain that such a title and such a land had afforded him.

By saying no to the Egyptian lineage and attending privileges, Moses was saying yes to identification with his own people. Instead of a life of comfort, he chose one of hard labor. Instead of wealth, he chose poverty. Instead of status, power and authority, he chose to be numbered with the oppressed. In this way, he was foreshadowing, though certainly in a very limited way, what Y'shua would one day do through His Incarnation.

It's easy to allow comfort, convenience, even the esteem of others to influence our decisions. But in order to say yes to God, to say yes to being part of His people, we must be prepared to say no to anything that countermands His call on our lives.

What have those of us who are Jewish believers had to refuse and forsake? First, we must refuse to be called "ex-Jews" by those who insist over and over that we be satisfied to call ourselves Christians and abandon our Jewish identity. We must also refuse to separate ourselves from our Christian identity. Bilateral ecclesiology is a rhetorical fiction and demeaning to the biblical doctrine of one new man. From the Jewish world's standpoint, calling ourselves Jews defies logic and expediency, since being Jewish in a largely Gentile world appears to present more liabilities than assets. At the same time, it is also illogical to non-believers that we call ourselves Christians. Yet as Paul explains in I Corinthians 1:23, preaching Christ is "...a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..."

We must refuse to have our public identification with Jewish people or with other believers in Jesus lessened by calling ourselves ex Jews or non-Christians. If we refuse to take on those false appellations, we are labeled deceptive because of the first one, and expected to take responsibility for a host of atrocities done in the name of Christ because of the second.

As Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles, we are called to make the hard choices of identification, choices that will be misunderstood and choices that will provoke the world and make us feel "apart" in the world.. Yet, we don't take, or shouldn't take, our cues from those who dispute our claims.

What about forsaking? While we can embrace certain elements of the present culture, we cannot make our choices based on the prevailing winds of that culture since it does not submit to God's truth. Ultimately, our culture will come to loggerheads with the demands of our faith. We are to be in the world, not of the world. This idea of being set apart, is as true for us today as it was for Moses. What do we refuse and teach a next generation to refuse in order to be set apart for God?

What places don't we go because we are set apart? What actions don't we take because we are set apart. What praise do we decline because of who we identify with? Ask yourself this: "If this person or group knew what I believe about Jesus and the implications of that belief for them, would they be so willing to receive me?"

How do we make our choices?

Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God. He recognized that he couldn't be true to his faith, to his God and be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and in saying no to that title and all that went with it, he said yes to God. He suffered reproach, experienced disgrace for his faith, even rejection from his own people. And he saw it as an honor to endure all that. He was looking ahead to his reward—and not just the temporal reward of the Promised Land, which as you know, he never attained. But he forsook his place of safety and comfort and identified with a people who would suffer affliction, be mistreated and held in contempt for an even greater reward.

What place of safety and comfort will we forsake? In what ways do we choose to identify with the mistreatment of our people today? There are many ways to choose—depending on where we live and what God has called us to do. We can be careful to let others know we are Jewish even after an anti-Semitic slur has been painted on a nearby synagogue, as has happened in France. We can grieve with the mourners of the West Bank family of five who were murdered in their sleep earlier this year. We can refuse to be silent when an outspoken Christian is martyred in Pakistan. We can refuse to be intimidated about proclaiming our faith in Y'shua in Tel Aviv after a young man is beaten in front of Tel Aviv University for handing out broadsides.

Like Moses, we must remember that mistreatment—whether it comes because we are Jews, or because we believe in Y'shua, or both—is only

for a short time, for a season— that God had a plan then and he has one now, and his people, the Jewish people, are part of it.

Enduring Faith

Further in this passage we see how the faith of Moses was wedded to patience, knowing that God’s timing was far superior to his own.

After killing the Egyptian who was mistreating the Hebrew slave, Moses left town—for forty years. He didn’t leave out of fear at what the Pharaoh would do to him. He was more concerned about doing what was right in the eyes of the “invisible” King of Israel than anything the visible King of Egypt who wanted to slay him would do. He was willing to be misunderstood and his best intentions misinterpreted. He was misunderstood by his own peoples, and not for the last time. He saw himself as a defender of the God of Israel, yet his fellow Hebrews didn’t see him that way. “Who made you ruler and judge over us” (Exodus 2:14).

Moses, after fleeing to Midian, had the faith to wait forty years for his assignment to be put in action— more faith than I can imagine. He didn’t rush redemption. His sense of timing was submitted to God’s sovereignty. Think of it. He loved his people. Their situation in Egypt was getting worse and worse. His attempt to jump start deliverance by slaying the Egyptian showed he had better not try leading a revolt on his own. Yet it was because he believed his God would ultimately deliver Israel that he was able to endure. The invisible God we serve wants us to rely on his timing, not our own. In 1 Peter 5:6 we read “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

Withstanding Faith

One thing you won’t hear at most Passover seders is this: At the very point of our redemption out of the land of Egypt, with the Red Sea on one side and the Egyptians on the other, the people said to Moses: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?”

His faith stood and grew strong in contrast to others who despaired. His faith sustained the onslaught of disbelief. He did not wither from the cynicism of skeptics. Instead of becoming distraught and discouraged by their disbelief and complaints against him, Moses looks beyond to the promise of deliverance and says, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." And then the Lord instructs Moses to raise his staff and stretch out his hand, the Red Sea parts...and the rest is history.

This rejection of Moses was just the first of many times in which our people would revert to seeing him as an outsider, even as the enemy and yet Moses never accepted that enemyship. He never used it as a reason to abdicate his responsibility for his people, a responsibility that was based on his faith in God.

Think about it. As missionaries, how many of you can attest to encounters where you were rejected by your own people, you were treated like the enemy, when what you had to offer was the message of life. And though, humanly speaking it was impossible to imagine those people ever accepting Jesus as Lord and Messiah, yet there was a metaphorical parting of the Red Sea, and they came to faith.

Moses had a faith that we too can draw on. Going back to the start of this chapter, as Bodil expounded on Tuesday, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Paul also says we are to "fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Cor.4:16-18)

If we really believe in a reward to come, if we really believe in the reality of that which we can only see with eyes of faith, we can endure a lot, even rejection from the people we love the most. While it is true that we are what the Bible calls a faithful remnant, those of us, especially those of us who are missionaries, are regarded by many in the larger Jewish community with less flattering titles. Some call us misguided and ignorant at best, and more often than not, traitors. We cannot let this keep us from identifying first with Jesus and also with our Jewish people, for whom he died. We must reject the enemyship of our own, in the face of personal rejection and even in the face of anti-missionary

violence. Our faith must be brighter than the darkest note of despair sounded by our naysayers.

Sustaining Faith

There is a forty year break in the record of faith, picking up in verses 30 and 31 with Jericho and then on to the judges and prophets through verse 34. We're reminded of these notables in the Faith Hall of Fame. They saw their faith result in victory in battle. But it is not until the end of verse 35 through 38 that the theme of suffering for one's faith resumes.

“... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—and the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

Here the author seems to refer to a wide range of faith-filled people, from the 2nd century BC Maccabees, to Old Testament prophets and perhaps even to John the Baptist, who would have been a more contemporary prophet. What they have in common was that like our Messiah, they did not “play it safe” and like him, they “were rejected and despised of men.” The Scripture tells us that the world was not only worthy of them, yet the world did not see their worth.

The chapter concludes with the words that God has “planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” Which brings us full circle to David's Bible reflection on Monday on Jesus, the perfecter and finisher of our faith. Any risks we take are backed by the fact that the Lord has promised to cover anything we might suffer or lose for his sake. We don't have to work ourselves up to “feel” a certain way. His promises are sure on the days that we are feeling it and on the days that we are not.

While the hope of those who came before us is recorded in this passage, they never received this side of glory, the greatest promise—the coming of our Messiah. How blessed are we to know that the Messiah has come,

and to have a personal relationship with him through his Holy Spirit and through the constant access to the Throne that he has made possible.

So I ask. Are we willing to risk rejection, to be mistreated for Messiah's sake? Paul was imprisoned many times, beaten, often in danger of death. Five times our people whipped him with the 39 lashes. Three times with rods, once he was stoned. People he worked with turned against him. Congregations he planted turned away from him. Are we able to show love and even leadership to those who misunderstand us and treat us as the enemy? Jeremiah was ignored, opposed, rejected, persecuted, imprisoned, thrown into a cistern with no water in it, only mud where he was left to die; later forcibly taken to Egypt. Are we ready to endure, even in fields that lack apparent fruitfulness if that is where God is placing us? Isaiah's proclamation and teaching and prayers and pleading only caused the majority of our people in that day to harden their hearts even harder, close their ears even further, shut their eyes even tighter to the truth. Tradition says that ultimately Isaiah was rejected by Israel's leaders and sawn in two. Are we willing to be without honor in our communities? Are we willing to suffer for our faith? We've been given even more than those who came before us. Shouldn't that inspire and motivate us to a stronger faith and a more costly sacrifice?

Nineteenth century Jewish Believer, Adolph Saphir in his commentary on the Book of Hebrews says this about faith and suffering:

Faith works and suffers; faith is busy and energetic. It is our only strength and victory. In suffering we glorify God as well as in action; and in suffering it is only faith which grasps the promises, and rests on the bosom of God in quiet and loving humility. Suffering is an honour God puts on His saints. To them it is *given* to suffer for Christ's sake. A life without affliction and self-denial, a life without the cross, is not likely to precede the life with the crown. When the Church becomes lukewarm, there is little hardship endured, and little cross-bearing. Let tried believers not doubt that they are precious in God's sight. They whom the world despises are generally the God-chosen nobility, of whom the world is not worthy. ¹

¹ Adolph Saphir, The Epistle to the Hebrews; an Exposition, Chapter 35, 1873

Have you been insulted, cursed, given dirty looks, rude finger gestures, threatened with harm, spit upon, treated as traitors to your people, when in reality you are more loyal to the God of Israel than they are? Take heart and remember Saphir's words, "you are precious in God's sight. They whom the world despises are generally the God's chosen nobility, of whom the world is not worthy."
