

What Faith Chooses

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A number of years ago I read an interesting book entitled, "The Paradox of Choice." It was written by a psychologist by the name of Barry Schwartz. Here the paradox of choice. Generally, we believe that the more choices we have, the better chance we have of finding something that makes us happy. But here is the paradox. The more choices we have, the less happy we become. For example. Your wife tells you to stop by the store and get a can of beans. No big deal. But you stand in the aisle and see thirty different kinds of beans made by several different companies. There you stand trying to figure out the best can of beans to buy. Another example is buying a sweater for a loved you. You go to one store and see seven different kinds of sweaters. They are all good, but you waste time trying to figure out the best sweater to get. Then you visit two or three other stores and still you can't find that perfect sweater. Do you see the paradox? We think choices make us happy, but often they don't. They can overwhelm us and make us less happy.

Well, the Lord does us a favor. Instead of giving a choice of thirty or more things, he narrows it down to just two choices, him or the world. That is it. The Bible is full of examples of people making such a choice. Joshua warned the people about the dangers of all the false gods in the world. Then he made a choice. He said that he and his household will serve the Lord. Oh, what if every family did that. Joseph chose to obey God before Potiphar's wife. And we have examples of bad choices. Lot's wife chose unwisely. In our gospel reading today we hear of many of Jesus' followers turning away. Today let's look at one example, Moses, and see what kind of choice faith makes and why.

I. What choice did Moses make?

We have to understand something about Moses. He had two choices only because God gave him two choices. If he didn't know God, if he didn't believe in God, he would have only one choice, the world. But God made it possible he had the second choice. Right before our text, it says that Moses' parents saw that he was no ordinary child. What does that mean? Did they know that God had great things planned for Moses? I don't know. Literally the word means beautiful or special. When Pharaoh ordered the drowning of all Israelite male babies in a brutal attempt at population control, Moses' parents were not afraid of Pharaoh. They disobeyed him, "by faith" it says. By faith they saw Moses was no ordinary child. By faith they hid him, but when that became impossible, by faith they set him loose in a basket on the river. By faith they committed Moses to the Lord and into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter to raise him without fear of him being killed by Pharaoh. It took faith in God to do that.

Guess what? You are not ordinary people. In fact, this world would be a better place if we viewed every baby as special, if we viewed every adult as special. Remember how God felt about murder? It is wrong because man is created in the image of God. We are not animals. We are special, born with souls. If we can only understand that, then there will be fewer murders. Then there will be more care and charity to those in need.

But Moses was special in another way. He believed in God. Even though Pharaoh's daughter raised him, God made it possible that his natural mother nursed him and was there every day to raise him. What do you think she told him about the Egyptian gods? What do you think she told him about the one true God? Moses grew up a believer. Again, all homes would be better if every Christian parent did the same.

You were born like everyone else, with only one choice, sin. You were born with a sinful nature and inclinations to sin. You were born a child of the world and not a child of God. But in your Baptism and by faith in Jesus, God changed you. Moses didn't choose to believe in God, nor did you. God chose you. He made you special by clothing you in Christ by faith. He washes away your sin in Baptism and every time you hear that Christ's death on the cross pays for your sins. You now share his holiness. Holy literally means to set apart. Just like how you set apart good apples from wormy ones, or the fine china from ordinary dinner ware, God has set you apart, made you holy, set aside from the rest of the world.

Moses understood that. Though it will be hundreds and hundreds of years into the future, he knew of Christ and how this Son of God will save him from his sins. He knew he was holy, set apart, from the rest of the world. And that faith, that holiness, helped Moses to make the choices he made. **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 fleeting pleasures of sin. 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.**

Imagine growing up in Bill Gates' home, or one of the Walton's from Walmart, or in the home of Elon Musk? Can you imagine having everything you can ever dream of at your fingertips? Moses grew up the grandson of Pharaoh, the most powerful monarch

in the world at the time. I doubt he ever ate leftovers. Any food he wanted would be served to him. He never wore hand me downs. He wore the most luxurious clothing available. He was someone special, the grandson of Pharaoh.

Yet, he made a choice. Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose instead to be mistreated along with his fellow Hebrews who were slaves. He gave up luxury for hard work. Poor clothes. Lousy food. Why? Because Moses was no ordinary child. Yes, he was the grandson of Pharaoh, but by faith he was also a child of the King of Kings and Lord of lords. It was more important to Moses that he was a child of God rather than the grandson of Pharaoh. I get it. Christians can be and are both. Abraham was a dear child of God and yet a very wealthy man. Esther was the queen of Persia and also a child of God. But sooner or later, and often those two come into conflict. Esther risked it all, even her very life, to plead to the King of Persia in behalf of her people. Joseph risked his life and imprisonment when confronted with the sin of adultery.

Moses had to make some pretty hard choices. ²⁵ **He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.** Moses felt out of place in the palace of Pharaoh. There were all kinds of sinful pleasures there. He lost his taste for the rich food of Pharaoh's table, which was blessed in the name of the gods of Egypt. He loved instead the simple food the slaves ate after being blessed in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He felt more comfortable wearing terrible clothes among fellow God-fearing people than for all the creature comforts of Egypt.

I know you understand. Kids face choices at school, to believe in creation or evolution, to do what God says or what peer pressure demands. College students have choices. They will run into professors or fellow students who regard Christianity the enemy. Fellow students will ridicule you if you avoid sex before marriage or you don't get hammered every weekend. Adults face choices. Every time Judas placed an offering into the money bag (he was the treasurer, you know), he had a choice to make: put it all in or keep some of it which he did. And it snowballs. Judas fell in love with money so much that he betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. What choices come before you? When have you made the wrong choice? Maybe you have to leave like Moses. Maybe you need to change jobs. If you can't, or don't, then make the choice, God or the world.

At first it sounds like we must give up a lot for the Lord. In worldly terms, we do. But really, you don't give up anything. Compared to Christ and his heaven, we are giving up very little. 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.** Moses made these choices by faith. By faith in what? In the Lord and his promises. Yes, he promises a lot for today, but he also promises a better future. A study was made with children. They were given a choice, get some candy now or wait and get a huge amount of candy later. Many couldn't wait. They chose the candy right away and then got none later. What would you prefer, some pleasures today, or treasures later? The devil, the world, even your own nature want to make the treasures of God seem so boring. "Who wants to stand around singing all day," they suggest. But what is better, the mansions of heaven or of earth? Which will last? Which will make you truly happy?

Moses felt out of place. And if you feel out of place, good. That's the way it should be. Moses didn't feel right in Pharaoh's palace because of his faith. When you find yourself fitting in with the world, or if church or the Bible don't feel right, go back to who you are. Yes, you might be a banker or farmer, husband or wife, parent or child, student or teacher, you might be considered somebody special in the world or a nobody, but remember who you are. You are no ordinary child. God made sure of that. You are a child of God. You were bought for a price, the very Son of God who died for you. Go back to your Baptism. God back to God's promises. There is only one choice that makes you happy. Say to the world, and to yourself, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Amen.