

Faith and Seeing Reality

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[0 : 00] Now, if you have Bibles there, we're on page 1008, and we're coming to Hebrews 11, verse 23, reading to verse 31.

The author has been going through the book of Genesis, essentially, from the creation, taking great figures like Abraham himself. Now he comes on in the story to Moses and the events surrounding his birth, surrounding his life, and the Exodus.

So, Hebrews 11, verse 23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

[1 : 23] By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Amen, that's the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to our hearts and help us as we look at it together. I always think that one of the interesting features of our age, which in many ways is ruthlessly determined to turn its back on the past, is a great deal of nostalgia for that same past. It's seen in things like, for example, the love of antique furniture, the love of vintage cars, shops and firms like past times.

But one of the ways in which it's particularly shown is by those many volumes we have of old photographs. If you go down to Borders you can find many of these.

[2 : 44] I must confess I enjoy browsing through them myself. I was looking at one recently on old St. Andrews. St. Andrews is a place I know very well and where I spent some happy years as a student, about the time of the flood.

And these photographs show many interesting things. We have, for example, a group of bell ringers in 1896, with smiling faces having won the trophy.

We have a professor of moral philosophy in 1901, looking grim and stern. And we have a happy group on the west sands on the beach.

It's interesting, it shows the difference, of course, of our generations. Nowadays, in summer, people wear beachwear to church. In those days, people used to go to the beach in their Sunday best.

Men with three-piece suits, women with hats and so on. Children with, girls with pretty dresses and boys with ties and so on. But the thing that struck me most, as I reflected on this, is that every single one of these people are now in the eternal world.

[3 : 58] The world which they knew so well, the world which was real and comes to us briefly in these old photographs. That world has gone. That world has vanished.

That world is no more. And the world they are in now is the eternal world. And where they are in that world will have depended on how they responded to the word of God in their world.

By whether they were people who lived by faith. And whether they were people who lived by sight. When the Bible talks about the world and the world to come, it doesn't talk about the natural and the supernatural world, because both these belong to God.

It talks about the visible and the invisible world. The seen and the unseen world. And it's the unseen world which is the world which matters in the long run.

Because that world is actually more real, more solid, and certainly more lasting than the present world. John says in his letter, the world passes away.

[5 : 13] But the one who does the will of God remains forever. And the one who does the will of God is the same as what our author calls people who lived by faith.

There's a wonderful phrase here in verse 27 of Moses. He endured a seeing him who is invisible. Now, Moses and the other people of faith were most effective in this world, in this visible, tangible, passing world, because their center of gravity was in the world to come.

Now, when you talk like this immediately, people will say, you can be too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. Have you ever in your life met anyone like that?

I most certainly have not. My problem is not that I'm too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. My problem is I'm so often, for so much of the time, caught up in this world, that I lose sight of the world to come, the invisible world, which, as I say, is not less, but more real than this one.

And here the contrast is stark between the world that Moses saw, the world he lived in, and the world to come, the world to which he was looking.

[6 : 37] And I want to say two things about this. If we're going to have faith like Moses, if we're going to see him who is invisible, first of all, we need courage.

Faith involves courage. Twice. Verse 23. Sorry, verse 27.

By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, and then earlier, it was indeed verse 23, his parents were not afraid of the king's edict.

Moses' parents were not afraid of the king. Moses himself was not afraid of the king. Now what does it mean not to be afraid? It certainly doesn't mean feeling courageous.

What it means is going on and doing the right thing, standing for God, living by faith, even when we're feeling afraid, believing in God's word, and acting on it.

[7 : 40] Now so often in the West today, we are so timid. We are so afraid of the anger of the king. Now in the West, it's not so much the anger of the king in sense of persecution, it's much more the sneering of the king, the sneering of the liberal establishment.

And this is across the board. Every single newspaper, from the Guardian to the Daily Telegraph, if that's the end of the spectrum, are uniformly hostile to Christianity.

Uniformly sneering in their attitude. Well, they don't mind the kind of tincture of Christianity. They're quite fond of civic religion and so on, and all the rest of it. But anything that's gospel Christianity is sneered at.

And we need to be courageous. We need to stand up and be counted. We need to defend the truth. We need to stop keeping our heads down behind the parapet.

We need courage, in other words, if we're going to live by faith. And how do we do that? We only do that if we see him who is invisible. If the living Lord and the world to come, which we cannot see, dominate our hearts and minds, then we can have courage.

[8 : 53] And as I say, we can be effective in this world. But faith also means taking risks. We've seen this already in the life of Abraham. And here it comes again. By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents.

Imagine hiding a baby boy for three months. Every time he squealed. Every time he cried. Every time he was fractious. There must have been the danger of discovery.

Moses was a real baby. Jesus was a real baby. Don't be fooled by this nonsense. Little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. Babies, real babies cry.

Real babies make a noise. Real babies clamor for attention. So imagine the risks that they were taking. Three months keeping a baby hidden. We're told that the people crossed the Red Sea.

Verse 29. As if on dry land. There's faith for you. Faith taking risks. Jericho. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down.

[9 : 57] Earlier on, Moses had sent out some spies. Most of whom had come back saying, we can't possibly attack the city of Jericho. It's too strong for us. In other words, they were doing things that seemed crazy.

Now, of course, if something is crazy, it's just crazy. But if something is true and seems crazy, then we need to take the risk.

We need to have faith. That's what our author has already said in verse 6. Without faith, it is impossible to please him. For whoever draws near to God must believe that he exists, that he rewards those who seek him.

So that's the first thing then. Faith that sees reality, faith that sees the living Lord and the unseen world, involves courage. The second thing is this.

Faith involves vision. Seeing him who is invisible. See, courage could simply be insensitivity. There are people who are courageous because they haven't seen the problem very clearly, or are not particularly sensitive.

[11 : 04] But this is not insensitivity. This isn't whistling in the wind. This is taking a long, hard look at the facts. Seeing him who is invisible.

See, vision is not seeing what's not there. Vision is seeing everything that's there. We all see, we all engage with, we all live in the visible and tangible world.

And I say there's no danger of us not doing that. But we're in real danger is of not seeing him who is invisible. Moses is the outstanding example.

But notice verse 31. By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who are disobedient. There is no hierarchy here. There's no honors list here.

Remember, the faith of Rahab is every bit as valid as the faith of Moses. Because the faith of Rahab, like the faith of Moses, put her in touch with the invisible God.

[12 : 05] Vision is seeing what's there. It's rather like looking at a person only on the outside. There are many people we know who are acquaintances, whom we don't really know.

And then sometimes something happens. Maybe have some emotional distress or maybe some excitement. And you suddenly see what's behind. You suddenly see the real person.

That's vision. So faith involves vision. And vision means a true assessment of where real power, real authority lies. Pharaoh had power, no doubt about it.

The Red Sea and Jericho had power. All of them were deadly. And that remains true. We are surrounded by events that we can't control.

Time passes. The state has power. We have problems. All of these have power. But we must look beyond these to see who has ultimate power. The living God, who is the creator.

[13 : 03] That's why this chapter begins with the creator. How do we know that this is a God whom we can trust? We know we can trust him because he is the creator. He is the one who made heaven and earth.

He is the one who controls everything that is. He is the one who not only controls the present and the past, but he controls the future. So faith and vision means seeing where real power lies.

It means having a true sense of priorities. Look at verse 24. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ far greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. On the one hand, there were the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt. That glittering civilization, then at the peak of its power, one of the most splendid and magnificent civilizations the world has ever known. All that lay at Moses' feet.

[14 : 12] All that was his. Not even for the asking, because he already had it. On the other hand, what's he called? What's called the reproach of Christ.

This is a wonderful phrase. Moses did not clearly see, as we do now, after the cross and the resurrection, with the whole scriptures in front of us, what would happen when God became flesh, became human, took our nature and died for us at Calvary and rose again for us.

And yet, he saw enough to make him realize that that matters far more than Egypt could ever give. On the one hand, glittering prizes, on the other hand, obscurity.

On the one hand, power. On the other hand, contempt. On the one hand, wealth. And on the other hand, poverty. Moses could have argued, he could have both, couldn't he?

He could have said, oh, I can stay in Egypt and be God's representative. Not all was a wrong thing to do. After all, Joseph had done that. And nevertheless, for Moses, the choice was stark.

[15 : 21] Egypt or Christ. And that's the choice, ultimately, that comes to each one of us. Are we going to live the life of faith? Are we going to take the risk?

Are we going to have the courage? Are we going to step out, boldly? And the other thing that's Mark's vision is a true sense of what is lasting.

The church is often affected by the short-termism of the age. We live in a very short-term age, don't we? Live in an age where there's a kind of inbuilt disposability.

We get rid of things very quickly and don't value them very highly. Moses, like Abraham, when he made this choice, was not a young man. He was a mature man.

Everything at his feet and yet, he made that choice. Let me finish then two things about that. First thing is this, it's never too late to begin this journey.

[16:19] If you have lived your life, a fairly long life up to now, and never stepped out on the journey of faith, it's not too late to begin.

because it's not the length of time, it's the quality of time after all. On the other hand, if you're a young person and are wondering whether you are going to take this step of faith, remember once again that this is something that will carry you through your whole life.

Moses, we are told, was looking forward to the reward. In other words, the life of faith is not something you take up as an enthusiasm of youth and then grow out of it.

It's not something you take up as a hobby in middle age, nor is it a prop for your declining years.

The gospel, the faith, is something that is not only for your whole life on earth, but for the world to come.

So whatever stage we may be, it may be indeed that you have lived the life of faith for many years. It may be you're tempted to drop out. It may be you feel the task is just too hard.

[17:34] The way is just too rough. The problems are just too great. This passage is a great word for us, seeing him who is invisible. Look away from the circumstances.

Look away from the problems and look to the invisible Lord. Look to the real world, the world which is to come and step out boldly in faith.

As we'll see next week, that is the road that will lead us home because Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, not only ran the race before us, but he has reached the goal.

There's a guarantee that you will as well. May God bless us all. Let's pray. God our Father, we recognize the life of faith as it risks.

We recognize it requires courage. But our abiding message from this chapter is not that it depends on our faith, on our courage, on our willingness to take risks.

[18:41] It depends on your great faithfulness. And so help us, Lord, as we leave this building, as we go back to our business, back to our homes, or wherever we are going, may we indeed walk with you that journey that will lead us through the trials and temptations of this world, that journey that will eventually lead us home.

We ask this in your name. Amen.