

SUNDAY SCHOOL: The Greater Reward

Text: Hebrews 11:24-27

Summary: Suffering for Christ is better than taking the path of least resistance.

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:10-12

Sermon Summary: God will reward those who suffer for His kingdom.

We've arrived at the last week in "The Golden Chain", our series on the Beatitudes, and what a way to finish! Persecution. Just what every believer is looking forward to, right? Not exactly. But the obedient follower of Christ should expect to suffer for their faith to some extent. This has always been the case for those who choose to do God's will. While probably not the passage on suffering which first jumps to your mind, these verses from Hebrews present a clear portrait of the risks and rewards inherent in walking the path of obedience to God.

A conscious choice (vv. 24-26): Exodus 2:1-15 and Acts 7:20-29 (part of Stephen's speech) are the backing narratives to this section of Hebrews' "Hall of Faith", which includes verses 23, 28 and 29. Moses had been raised as a member of the Egyptian royal family, but he also knew of his Hebrew heritage. Stephen pinpoints Moses' coming of age as 40 years old, when he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. Verse 24 explains that Moses chose to deny his royal Egyptian status ("refused", "denied"; Matt. 10:33; Peter in Matt. 26:70), opting instead to identify with his Israelite brethren.

To the outside observer, there was nothing wise or expedient in this choice. Moses chose (*aihreomai*; also "elect" or "vote") to "suffer affliction" (*sugkakoucheō*; "with evil treatment") with his people instead of living the life of ease in the royal court of Egypt. It's not that life in the palace would have been so rife with sensuality and hedonism. It may or may not have been, from Moses' perspective. Certainly they were pagans and idol worshippers. But the sin for Moses would have been to know that God was calling him to a different destination and to have chosen instead to hold onto his royal status.

But Moses "esteemed" (same word translated as "count" and "counted" in Phil. 3:7-8) the suffering he would endure as worth more than anything Egypt offered. Much has been written about the phrase "the reproach of Christ" in verse 26. As for Moses' knowledge of Jesus, he did prophesy of a future Prophet in Deut. 18:15. If Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day (John 8:56), Moses certainly could as well. But this phrase also presents Moses as a "type" of Jesus and shows that all who participate in carrying out God's plan of redemption will share in Christ's suffering. The writer of Hebrews uses the word "reproach" again in 13:13 to encourage his readers (and us) to leave the comfort of our camp and suffer for the cause of Christ. He notes in the next verse (13:14) that we have no "continuing city", since we're citizens of heaven and seek the eternal city yet to come. Moses, in the same way, looked for the reward God would give him for his faithfulness in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt (v. 26b).

What do you find yourself wanting to hang onto in this life?

How ready are you to sacrifice for the cause of Christ? What are you willing to sacrifice? What would you consider to be “off the table” if you had to sacrifice something or someone?

What actions by others would you consider persecution or affliction?

What are you doing now in your life that might result in persecution or affliction?

Faith over fear (v. 27): There’s a lot of debate over this verse, as to whether Moses’ leaving Egypt is speaking of his fleeing to Midian when he was forty or his leading the exodus of the Israelites forty years later. Those opting for the first exit say this keeps this verse in chronological order with the following verses. Proponents of the exodus state that Moses fled for Midian out of fear (Ex. 2:14-15), which would contradict this verse. A mediating view proposed by Matthew Henry and others sees Moses’ fear in Exodus as a fear of discretion, in that Moses knew he had a mission and he must escape to Midian to eventually complete it. This was a different fear than the fear of wrath shown in this verse.

Whatever the case may be, Moses in fact left Egypt and its allure behind spiritually and emotionally. His faith overrode any fear he may have experienced (1 John 4:18). “Forsook” here is used in another form in 10:25, and means to abandon or leave behind. Moses’ endurance was based on having eyes of faith that could see God and His plan as clearly (and more so) than any material thing. This endurance is a recurring theme in the book of Hebrews, as the original readers were becoming increasingly uneasy about what looked to them like impending persecution (Hebrews 12:3-4).

Believers who take the eight Beatitudes seriously and diligently incorporate them into their daily lives may indeed face persecution and affliction for their obedience. Holding Christ’s righteousness as a priority to not be diminished will put us at odds with this postmodern culture. Speaking out against sin will cause us to be branded politically incorrect. Standing up for the downtrodden and mistreated will be seen as acceptable until we begin to share the gospel of Christ with them and try to help them change their lives. Stepping into the fray of conflict and unrest will create one and possibly two enemies in the process. But we must join with Moses in seeing our affliction and reproach for the cause of Christ as worth more than all the treasures this world has to offer (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Egypt in Scripture often denotes sin and evil. What fears keep you from walking away from things in your life you know are sinful?

Why do we often settle for the lesser reward of just going along instead of looking for the greater reward which comes from obedience to Christ? How much does the fear of persecution or reproach figure into this?

Challenge: Encourage the class to identify areas of their lives (relationships, habits, conduct) where they follow the path of least resistance instead of being bold for Christ. Lead them to see that while changing direction may cause them grief and even persecution in the short run, God will honor and reward their obedience.