

Sermon: “The Faith of Moses,” Hebrews 11:23-27, by David Kingston at BCF, August 19, 2012

Introduction

We begin a new sermon series today on the Life of Moses. The real series begins next week, when Chris Faith will preach on the beginning of Moses’ life. So this message is not really part of the series; you can think of it as a sort of Prequel to the series. And so before we begin our series on Moses, some questions may come into your mind. The first of these may be something along these lines “This is Old Testament stuff; why should we as Christians study the Old Testament? Isn’t our faith based on Jesus and His death on the cross? What possible significance is there for us in looking at these “Ancient words” from over 3000 years ago?

Well, that is a fair question, and it is one that many people (including many Christians) have answered by saying, in effect, “there is no point in studying the Old Testament”. Polls show that 80% of Americans claim to believe the Ten Commandments, but very few can name as many as four of them. Half of all adult Americans cannot identify the Bible’s first book as Genesis. And 14% identify Joan of Arc as Noah’s wife.

1. Why Study the Old Testament?

So how do we answer the question? Let us take a very brief look at just two of the reasons: I am sure that those of you in House Groups that discuss the sermons will be able to think of several more.

a. Because it is the essential background to Jesus’ life and ministry. My wife and I enjoy watching British mystery programs on PBS; Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot, or modern programs like Inspector Lewis. The only problem with this is that sometimes we forget to tune in at the beginning of an episode, and so then the plot line is very hard to follow; we have missed the subtle clues sprinkled through the opening scenes, and so the eventual identification of the murderer leaves us puzzled. Reading the New Testament, with the story of Jesus in the gospels and its explanation in the epistles, is a bit like trying to understand the second half of a mystery without having all the clues from the opening scenes. We cannot understand the full meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross without understanding the meaning of the Jewish feast of the Passover, for example; and we could not understand how Jesus was shown to be the Jewish Messiah through the many detailed prophecies about Him in the OT.

There is much more that could be added here, but let me just add one more reason.

b. Because God gave us the people and the events of the Old Testament to serve as examples to us. I don’t know about you, but I often find it easier to learn from an example than from a general theory. In chemistry you can explain to students that igniting a mixture of Hydrogen and Oxygen makes them react violently to form water, but nothing beats exploding a hydrogen-filled balloon to drive the point home. In the same way God could have simply told us about the consequences of sin or the importance of faithfulness, but He also chose to give us examples of sinful men and women and faithful men and women. So Paul, writing to the Corinthians, tells them:

1 Cor 10:1-6, 11

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. *Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.*

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us

So the Old Testament stories were given to us as examples – both positive and negative – to learn from and to copy or avoid, as the case may be.

2. Why Study Moses?

a. Because Moses is one of the key figures in God's plan of salvation. We can trace God's plan throughout the Old Testament, beginning with Adam and his sin, on through Noah to Abraham, called by God to be the father of a new nation. But this new nation would have ended its existence as a group of slaves in Egypt if God had not called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. It was under Moses that God instituted the Passover; it was under Moses that the Children of Israel first became a nation, and it was under Moses that God gave the 10 Commandments and the Law. Moses' influence on the establishment of the nation of Israel was so crucial and so necessary that one historian said that if we had not known of Moses through the Bible we should have had to invent a leader like him to explain the origin of the nation of Israel. Another way of saying this is to say that without Moses we would not be here today, because without him there would have been no nation of Israel, and therefore no promised Messiah and no Jesus and no salvation and no Christian church. So Moses' life is crucial to understanding God's plan of salvation in all its richness and grace.

b. Because Moses is a wonderful example of the man God uses. Moses was not a perfect man; he was a murderer, he resisted God's call on his life, he wanted to give up on more than one occasion, and he disobeyed God, and yet in spite of all these things God used him in a mighty way. And the reason God used him was because above all else Moses was a man of faith; a man with a deep and abiding trust in God, and therefore a man God could and did use in a mighty way.

And so, as an introduction to the life of Moses, let us consider God's word as recorded in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11. This particular chapter is without a doubt the one I have heard the most sermons on, because when my brother Peter and I were teenagers (**slide**) my father was the district superintendent of the Elim churches in the London area. This meant that he would travel around to different churches on Sunday evenings and preach there, and Peter and I would usually go with him. My father had a favorite sermon that he preached whenever he went to a new church, and it was on Hebrews 11; my brother and I probably heard it preached at least a dozen times. Let us read a portion of Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 24-26

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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.

This morning I want to focus on two questions about faith from Hebrews 11.

3. What is faith and how does it make a difference in our lives?

Let us begin by dispensing with the schoolboy definition "Faith is believing something you know is not true". This definition is only true when it is describing the faith of an atheist, who has to believe that the universe came into being all by itself, in some wondrous femtosecond of creation at the Big Bang 14.6 billion years ago, and then proceeded to organize itself into stars and planets and eventually to create life in all its marvelous complexity, all completely by chance. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek wrote a book with the marvelous title "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist" in which they point out the logical inconsistencies of atheism.

So what is faith? One definition of faith could be "Intellectual conviction of a truth combined with actions flowing from that conviction." And in one sense we show faith every day of our lives. Thus if you have a car you put the key in the ignition and turn it in the faith that the engine will start. You do not necessarily have to

know the workings of an internal combustion engine to exercise that faith; you just need to trust that the car manufacturer knows how to make engines that work. Or perhaps you are going to take a flight from Roanoke airport. You can stand looking at the plane you are due to fly on and say "I believe that this airplane can fly and that it will take me to Charlotte" but unless you actually put that belief into action and get on the plane you will never get to Charlotte. Standing looking at the plane is intellectual assent; getting on the plane is faith, but faith based upon the track record that these planes have historically made it to Charlotte.

In the same way Christian faith is founded on the solid rock of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and on God's promises, and it demands not just intellectual assent but also commitment based on that assent.

Rom 10:9

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So Christian faith requires intellectual agreement "believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" together with commitment "confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"" (in other words, accept Jesus Christ as you Lord, with all that this means)

Verse 1 of Hebrews 11 then gives us additional insight into the nature of faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." To understand this definition we need to understand the context. The author of the letter to the Hebrews was writing to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith, and some of whom were turning away from their faith. And so in chapter 10 he wrote to encourage them in their walk with the Lord and to encourage them in their faith.

Heb 10:32-34, 38-39

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

But my righteous one will live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

And then in chapter 11 he goes on to explain what faith is and how it works out in our lives.

a. Faith looks ahead. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for" True faith in Jesus Christ gives us the ability to look beyond our present circumstances to the blessings and rewards promised to those who trust in Christ.

Faith looks to the time when every knee will bow to Jesus

Phil 2:9-10

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Faith looks to the return of Jesus Christ

1 Thess 4:15-18

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

And until Christ returns, faith sees with tears beyond the grave, because

1 Cor 15:54-55

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

b. Faith has confidence in the present. "Now faith is being...certain of what we do not see." Our faith in God enables us to trust Him in the here and now, being certain that He is present and that His word is true. And that gives us the power to go through life "Practicing the Presence of God" to use a phrase of Brother Lawrence, the godly 17th century lay brother who served as a monastery cook in Paris. The man or woman without faith often has no moral center, no core values "If it feels good, do it" is his or her motto. As one example of this, an article in the current issue of Time magazine on the use of cell phones reported that over 50% of people age 18-34 have sent suggestive pictures with text messages, and over 33% have used text messages to set up adulterous relationships. In contrast, the man or woman of faith holds on to God's truth when all around them people are going through life without any clear direction.

c. Faith wins God's approval.

Heb. 11:2 "This is what the ancients were commended for." Faith is basic to pleasing God, as the writer says in Heb 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Can you imagine a family where there is a loving father, but his children have been turned away from him in some way, and they no longer trust him? How sad that would be! And how sad God must be when we his children fail to trust Him!

d. Faith recognizes God's Creative Power.

Heb 11:3

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." This is not the time to go into the evidence for God's existence from the created world, but ultimately there are only two choices to be made concerning the origin of the universe:

A. Somehow or other matter just came into being at the Big Bang, and all the physical constants were miraculously just right for stars and planets to form and for life to appear by blind chance.

B. Somehow or other God exists, and He created the heavens and the earth and the stars and the universe and everything in it, in perfect harmony, by His creative power.

Neither option answers the ultimate questions of "How did matter come into being?" or "How did God come into being?" but I submit to you that the atheistic first explanation leaves hundreds of unanswered questions, while the theistic second explanation only leaves one unanswered question. As Geisler and Turek would say "I don't have enough faith to be an atheist"

4. How is Moses an example of faith? As we saw earlier, the Old Testament has been given to us in part so we can learn from the examples of faith and non-faith that it provides:

1 Cor 10:6, 11

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.....

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

And so it is legitimate – even required – that we look at Moses life to learn from it.

Most of you know the story of Moses life; how his parents concealed his birth to save his life; how he was adopted by one of the Pharaoh's daughters; how he grew up in Pharaoh's household, with all the education and rank and privileges that come with a favored position such as this; and how he chose instead to throw in his lot with the Israelite slaves rather than live a life of luxury in Pharaoh's palace. Why did he do this? What motivated him to give up his position and the comfortable life he led to take up with a bunch of complaining and ungrateful slaves? Hebrews 11 tells us:

Hebrews 11:24-29

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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.

The key phrase here is “By faith Moses . . .regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” In other words, we are right back at Hebrews 11:1, where the writer tells us that “faith is being sure of what we hope for.” Moses, in spite of growing up in Pharaoh's court, with its worship of the Sun God and its impressive temple rituals, came to a deep and abiding faith in God. This was because in the providence of God his mother served as his nurse during his early years, and she instructed him in the truth of God.

So Moses, because of his faith in God, was able to make a choice. Do I stay here in Egypt and enjoy the luxury of Pharaoh's court? Or do I leave Pharaoh's court and incur his anger by siding with these Israelite slaves? And he made his decision – his choice – on the basis of his faith in God and specifically on the reward that God promises to those who love Him and keep His commandments. As John Piper says of this story:

“The bridges were burned in his heart and they were burned by faith. That's what faith does all through this chapter. Faith is a hunger for God that triumphs over our hunger for the pleasures of this world. And so faith unleashes radically God-centered, risk-taking, people-loving behavior.”

Jim Elliot was a young missionary to Ecuador in the 1950s with a burning desire to share the gospel with a tribal group known as the Aucas. He and four other missionaries were killed by the Aucas in 1956, but their deaths resulted sparked an interest in Christian missions among the youth of their time and are still considered an encouragement to Christian missionaries working throughout the world. One of Jim's statements could have been echoed by Moses: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

5. Conclusion: How to increase your faith

We look at Moses or at Jim Elliot and we ask “How can I have a faith like that?” Let me suggest four steps from God's word to increase our faith.

i. Soak your mind in God's word, the Bible. Rom 10:17

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. As we read of God's greatness and power, as we read of Jesus death for us on the cross, as we read of the examples of the saints of old, then our faith in God will grow as we meditate on these things.

ii. Ask God to increase your faith.

Luke 17:3-5 "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Jesus had been telling his disciples some hard things, and they recognized their lack of faith, so they asked Jesus to increase their faith. And if we ask the same question, he will hear and answer.

So watch yourselves.

iii. Give praise to God. Abraham believed God for the impossibility of fathering a son in his old age

Rom 4:19-22

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Abraham's faith enabled him to give glory to God, but it also works the other way; as we give glory to God we are reminded yet again of God's greatness and power.

iv. Keep in fellowship with God's people.

Heb 10:23-25

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

b. For those of you who do not yet have a living faith in God's saving grace in Jesus. You may be here this morning out of curiosity; maybe you liked our red doors or the ease of parking, or perhaps you came with a friend, but you came without any real faith in God. Oh yes, in a general way you believe that He exists, but you have not come to grips with the truth of Jesus Christ's death on the cross for you. If this describes you, I have great news for you! You too, like Moses and like millions of other men and women of faith, can know the peace of God in your heart, and can look forward with Moses to the reward that God promises to those who love Him and keep His commandments. I would love to talk with you after this message to explain in more detail how you too can have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. For all of us

Let's be like Moses this morning. Let's look to the reward of God's promises, and let's look to the God who is unseen. And like Moses, let us so trust in God that, in the words of John Piper "the bridges are burned to a hundred sins and a hundred fears."

May the Lord bless you as you seek to live the life of faith!

Amen.