

September 28, 2008

“The Race / The Deliverance”

Today we bring our sermon series on the great pillars of faith to a close. We began our journey with a study of Hebrews chapter 11 and looking at those great pillars of faith from the Old Testament. Abel was the first person who we looked at. We saw that he faithfully gave his first fruits as an offering to the Lord and we saw that his modern contemporary Jim Elliott also gave his first fruits. In fact, he gave his life for the sake of bringing the gospel to the Waodani Tribe in Ecuador. The next week brought us to Noah. Noah the senior citizen; in faith he built an ark. We also saw his modern contemporary, Polycarp, another senior citizen. In faith it was Polycarp who stood before the Romans and said “I am a Christian!” Our journey then took us to Abraham who in faith, left his fatherland to go to the Promised Land and in faith was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac when God asked him to. We also saw Ghorban Dordi Touranie going back to his fatherland to share his faith with his family and his friends in Iran. We saw him later dying for that same faith. Last week it was Isaac, Jacob and Joseph who passed on their faith through word and deed to their offspring, just as everyone here has come because someone has passed their faith on to you.

Today is the last of the big pillars in Hebrews 11. And when we say the big pillars, understand that in Hebrews 11, some of them take up a little bit more space with a little bit of a greater description. We'll return to Hebrews 11 in a couple of months and take a look at some of lesser-known pillars of faith. But today we turn our focus on Moses. Moses' faith is described in three ways. First, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaohs daughter.” Now what are the repercussions for such a decision? “He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.” Like all of us, Moses had to make choices in life and contrary to what we are seeing in much of America today, Moses knew his decisions would affect his life and that he and he alone would be accountable for it. So what was his choice? What did he have to choose between? Well, option one was, live as Pharaohs grandson in the palaces of Egypt. If you have seen the artifacts from the young Pharaoh King Tut, you know Egypt was a wealthy nation. With that wealth came a luxurious lifestyle. People would wait on the Pharaohs and those of the Pharaoh's family.

They would see to it that Pharaoh and Pharaoh's family was happy. Basically, it was a "you want it, you've got it" sort of lifestyle. Oh, and by the way, that would mean your choice of women too. Or as the writer to the Hebrews says, "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." Why short? Because compared to eternity our lives are very short. In other words, the writer to the Hebrews is saying, "live it up now, but be held accountable for it in the judgment of hell for all eternity." That's option one.

Option two, was for Moses to put his faith and hope in the promises of God and live with his people. Along with that would come being mistreated and ridiculed for his supposed stupidity for a short time, but to be blessed for all eternity in heaven. Which leads to a second point of Moses faith. "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 his choice for the sake of the Messiah who the writer identifies as Jesus Christ. Moses knew God's promises. He knew what had been passed on from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. He knew the Israelites would leave someday and that they would be delivered taking Joseph's bones with them and return to the promised land. From there the Messiah would eventually come.

Finally, "By faith, he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood." This was to be a "lasting ordinance" or a memorial stone to remind the people that through the blood of the lamb spread around the door, the angel of death would pass over them and they would finally inherit the Promised Land. Yet, as we know, it was more than a memorial stone, it was also a future stone. An ordinance or practice that pointed ahead to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who shed His blood on the cross so that judgment may pass over us and we may inherit the kingdom of God. Moses really must have impressed all of this on the people, because we see that roughly sixteen hundred years later, Jesus is sharing the Passover with the disciples on the night of his betrayal. Even now, roughly thirty-six hundred years after Moses instituted the Passover, we see the Orthodox Jews still celebrate it. Such is the power of faithful practice of God's practices of Faith.

It was just such a faithful practice that Andrea Santoro wished to fulfill on the morning of February 5th, 2006. Andrea was a priest at the Santa Maria Church in Turkey. He was a member of the Italian Religious Order, the Sons of Devine Providence. Santa Maria Church was built in the late 1800's as a place for foreign visitors to worship in an Islamic country. Father Santoro saw his calling as much more than that of a Priest to Vacationers. He saw the whole country as a ripe mission field. He wanted the church to extend beyond the safety of its four walls and touch the community of lost souls that surrounded it. He had been threatened and mistreated numerous times by his Muslim neighbors. But like Christ, he endured it in love, never striking back and never calling the police to hold them accountable. So it was that on February 5th, 2006, he opened the doors to the church just as he faithfully did every week and welcomed all those who came to celebrate Mass that day. When the congregation left, he faithfully returned to the steps of the Chancel and just as he did every morning, he knelt down, bowed his head and began his daily prayer time with God. The back doors to the church were flung open and a sixteen-year-old Muslim entered and yelled "Allahu Akbar" which means allah is great. The young militant shot Andrea twice, hitting him in the heart and liver. Andrea fell forward dead. He never turned, and he never stopped praying. He literally was delivered and went from a simple conversation with God on earth into eternal fellowship with his Heavenly Father. Faithful practice of faithful practices; Moses is commended for it, Father Andrea Santoro is remembered for it. It is the favorite theme at funeral services to talk about what's in the dash. You know that dash on your tombstone, that dash that's between your date of birth and date of death. It should be the hope and goal of every Christian, that that dash be replaced with two simple words, "Faithful Servant."

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.