

Join with Moses: Mistreated but Never Defeated

Hebrews 11:24-26 • July 14, 2019 • Pentecost 5



Howard Carter was commissioned in 1907 to search for artifacts from ancient Egypt. After many years of not seeing many tangible results, his sponsor told Carter in 1922 that he didn't want to keep paying for any more seasons of the expedition. It all began to seem like a worthless endeavor. But in November of that final year Carter's team discovered one of the greatest finds of the century. Most Egyptologist and archeologist of the time had thought all the tombs of the ancient kings had been found already or destroyed by grave robbers. But near the conclusion of his final expedition Howard Carter found the entrance to a tomb. It wasn't the tomb of any outstanding Pharaoh. In fact, it was a Pharaoh most knew very little about. He came to the throne at the age of nine and died within ten years. Yet it was one of the greatest finds ever. Today it's the most widely recognized name of any ruler of ancient Egypt, King Tut. That's because when Howard Carter found the tomb it was largely all still intact, with the inner room still undisturbed. The wealth buried with this boy-king was tremendous. Over a thousand pounds of gold was discovered along with many other treasures. It took ten years to excavate and carefully catalog it all. It is still is on display in museums around the world and in Egypt. The treasure is insured for over 26 million dollars with at least 1.7 million in value for the gold alone.

King Tut is just one small surviving example from the many rulers of Egypt at a time when it was the richest and most powerful nations in the ancient world. He likely ruled near the end of the very same Dynasty which oversaw the events recorded in the Bible in the book of Exodus. His burial treasure is just one small glimpse of the types of treasures afforded to one man, Moses. Moses more than fortunate to live among the Pharaoh's family. He had access to all the pleasure and wealth of the Pharaoh's family. Yet today we see that Moses chose to leave behind all Egypt's treasures in exchange for a difficult life. Moses spurned the greatest treasures of this world in exchange for mistreatment and disgrace. And today the writer to the Hebrews urges us to do much the same. Why? We find out today as we read from Hebrews 11. He urges you to join with Moses as mistreated, but never defeated.

Moses is recorded as escaping worst of fates to attaining one of the best of positions anyone could ever dream of in the ancient world. He was born to Hebrew parents at a time when the Pharaoh's of Egypt were treating the Hebrew's miserably. The rulers of Egypt had enslaved the Hebrews. When the Hebrews were becoming too numerous, Egypt decided to barbarically treat them like mere beasts and to cull the herd. The Pharaoh ordered every Hebrew male child to be killed at birth. By God's grace Moses avoided this fate. And then instead of growing up as a slave he was taken in by a Pharaoh's daughter to live in the palace in Egypt. Scripture records that he was brought up by the Pharaoh's daughter as her own son and was educated in all the wisdom of Egypt. People talk about privilege today and about those who have opportunity for wealth, education, and advancement. There have been few in history who were brought up from such a low position as Moses and attained such a high position. He had a life of privilege like none other!

Moses' story is incredible. But what the writer to the Hebrew's highlights about Moses' life is the most striking part. No one has ever found the burial place of Moses, but if you did you wouldn't find any treasure. "Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of the Pharaoh's daughter." Most could hardly fathom being brought up in a rich and powerful family and choosing to break all ties from them. But Moses did even more than break away from the family of the Pharaoh. It says he chose to be mistreated with the people of God. Moses saw the Israelites and their condition. He saw how they were treated like cattle for the slaughter. He saw how they were beaten by their masters. And yet he chose that life over the life of the son of a Pharaoh's daughter. I can't think of anyone who had ever risen to such heights as Moses and willingly tossed it all aside for a harder life. He gave up privilege and pleasure like none before!

The Scriptures make clear why he made such a choice. He didn't want to identify and lay claim to the riches of Egypt because he identified with *the people of God*. When it says that Moses saw a Hebrew man being beaten, it says he saw "A fellow brother, a fellow son of Israel." Moses didn't just identify with his ethical roots. He identified with the spiritual roots of the Hebrews. The title "son of Israel" pointed to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). They are rightly titled "people of God" by the writer to the Hebrews. They held to promises from God. Moses saw their miserable existence as slaves. Yet still believed that God's promises for them could not fail. Despite the temptations to join the temporary pleasures of sin in Egypt, he wanted what was promised to Israel. That's a choice made by faith.

God's people have often come to this same crossroad. They have had to make the choice to either join with others in being mistreated or join in temporary pleasures of sin. The choice doesn't always look obvious when you see the options presented to God's people. It has always taken faith to hold to God's promises. Long before Moses Abraham had to leave behind family and his homeland to follow the Lord. We read earlier today how men like Joseph had to choose between the temporary pleasures of sin and holding to the Lord his God. When he chose to still honor God it caused him to be thrown into prison. So many faithful prophets and people of God faced threats and mistreatment for choosing to follow the Lord. The first readers of this ancient letter to the Hebrews were second-generation Christians. Many of them were losing their homes and possessions because they were Christian. Some were persecuted with even higher prices to pay. They only had to choose to hold onto a religion which rejected Jesus and they would have escaped the persecution and

loss. They could have enjoyed the pleasures of life on the apparent winning side for a time if they only chose not to be called a follower of Jesus. Yet they chose to be mistreated along with the rest of God's people.

The writer to the Hebrews urges all God's people today to act on faith despite our circumstances. But our circumstances can also make it difficult. We too must often choose mistreatment instead of temporary pleasures. Jesus warned his disciples that if they wanted to follow after him, they would also face many hardships. To follow the Christ means to be mistreated and suffer. If a Christian's priority is to find life and live their best life right now, they will have to choose between making time for worship or making time for entertainment. What comes first in your own life? Is it the temporary pleasures of indulging in entertainment on your phone or TV -much of which is godless in form- or is it setting that all aside to be a disciple who meditates on God's Word day and night? Brothers, have you chosen to be the man who takes his family on a long vacation to some luxurious destination or to put God first on the priority list? Just ask yourself if you've spent more on supporting the work of God's kingdom or on your last vacation. What choices are you making between love of God and love of this world? It's not easy to make that choice when everyone else puts entertainment and pursuit of enjoyment of wealth first. It's not easy to do that when you enjoy wealth in this world. You and I may not have position of privilege in the house of Egypt with Moses, but we have just as many fleeting promises of the temporary pleasures of this world. And they often conflict with a life of faith. These things, whether we purchase them, pile them up in our homes, or pursue them with insatiable hunger can end up pulling us away from the love of God to love of sin.

Many will say those who serve God are missing out on all life's pleasures. Why give up the god of money when it is able to satisfy you today? Why turn aside from sexual sins when their gratification is instant? Why give God priority when his promises seem so distant? But Moses knew the pleasures of this sinful world are all fleeting. If you're living your best life now, you are headed for hell. That's a simple but profound truth. Chasing after sinful pleasures gives a satisfaction that is always temporary. Even the rulers of Egypt did not have lasting wealth or treasure.

Meanwhile by faith Moses knew faith sees beyond the start and all the way to the finish line. Faith understands God's promise is more powerful than all the world can offer. Even if you are living the hardest life now you are still able to trust God's promises of blessing. Faith knows that today's suffering will end with tomorrow's rejoicing for those who trust in the Lord. Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than all the treasures of Egypt. He held to, however distant it may have seemed, the hope of Christ. Moses knew that one day God would fulfill all his promises through the coming chosen one, the Christ. Jesus said that Moses wrote about him. Moses spoke of the one to come after him who God would raise up as the greatest deliverer and the fulfiller of all God's promises.

And when the Christ was born, he set aside far greater riches than Moses or anyone. In order to be with the people of God he left the Father's side and set aside all his glory. And as the very Son of God he could have laid claim to every service and treasure this world could offer. He could have not only received but demanded the pleasures of this world as his own. But he chose to let go of all that and to be mistreated. He chose to have himself bound and tied and beaten. He chose to put aside every fleeting pleasure this world could offer for the sake of suffering with his people. And he did more than suffer with us. He took the suffering for us which we all deserved for partaking in sin's pleasures. He died for us on the cross. He gave up his life so that we might not be headed for hell, but for our best life with him forever.

Jesus did this with a full confidence that God's plan would be fulfilled. He chose this suffering knowing that it would end in glory for him and for us. He rose assuring us of that victory over sin and its curse. Because he suffered and overcame, we know that we who follow and trust in him can never be defeated. Our victory is as sure as his resurrection to life. Moses saw that through faith and chose Christ over all else. He knew he couldn't fail with faith in him. I can't think of any greater change of fortune or position of privilege that could be enjoyed than to be adopted into the family of God through faith!

That is why Jesus can tell his disciples, "Don't be afraid if you lose your life, for my sake you have found it." That is why Christians throughout history have taken up their crosses and chose to follow Jesus even if it meant being mistreated. They knew with Jesus they would never fail. They knew his kingdom is a lasting one and the richest he gives are eternal. The apostle Peter reminds us that to follow Christ through suffering and trials is to follow him to his glory. *Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ... if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. (1 Peter 4:12-16)*

There are many in history who have been born in the lowest position of slavery to sin and death, but have attained, by God's working, the highest position: sons and daughters of the King. They may not look like it. In fact they may at times appear to be those mistreated in this world, those who endure ridicule, suffering, and persecution. The unbelieving world may say the people of God need to get a life. But Jesus says they have found life for his sake and for the sake of the gospel. By faith they know they have. They have joined with Moses in choosing to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin and the treasures of this world. They have joined Moses in valuing disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than all the gold of all the Pharaohs. The writer to the Hebrews urges you and me to follow with them in faith as we follow Jesus. We look forward to what he has promised those who trust in him.