

Moses: An Example

by J.C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle's sermon on Moses illustrates the profound sacrifices of faith, urging believers to prioritize God over worldly temptations and comforts.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:24

Topics: "Faith", "Sacrifice"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes Moses as a profound example of faith, illustrating how he chose to forsake the comforts and pleasures of Egyptian royalty to align himself with the suffering people of God. Ryle highlights Moses' deliberate rejection of rank, pleasure, and riches, showcasing his willingness to endure affliction for the sake of a greater reward. This choice, driven by faith, serves as a powerful reminder for Christians to prioritize their relationship with God over worldly temptations. Ryle challenges believers to reflect on their own sacrifices and the cost of their faith, urging them to seek a deeper commitment to God. Ultimately, he calls for an increase in faith, as it is foundational to a fruitful Christian life.

Transcript

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a great chapter; it deserves to be printed in golden letters. I can well believe it must have been most cheering and encouraging to a converted Jew. I suppose no member of the early Church found so much difficulty in a profession of Christianity as the Hebrews did. The way was narrow to all, but preeminently so to them. The cross was heavy to all, but surely they had to carry double weight. And this chapter would refresh them like a cordial--it would be as "wine to those that are of heavy hearts."

The three verses I am going to explain are far from being the least interesting in the chapter. Indeed, I think few, if any, have so strong a claim on our attention. It seems to me that the work of faith described in the story of Moses comes home more especially to our own case. The men of God who are named in the former part of the chapter are all examples to us beyond question. But we cannot literally do what most of them did, however much we may drink into their spirit. We are not called upon to offer a literal sacrifice like Abel, or to build a literal ark like Noah, or to leave our country literally and dwell in tents and offer up our

Isaac like Abraham. But the faith of Moses comes nearer to us. It seems to operate in a way more familiar to our own experience. It made him take up a line of conduct such as we must sometimes take up ourselves in the present day, each in our own walk of life, if we would be consistent Christians.

First, Moses gave up rank and greatness. "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." We all know his history. The daughter of Pharaoh had preserved his life when he was an infant; she had adopted him and educated him as her own son. Moses might have been, if he had pleased, a very great man. If he had been content with the position in which he found himself, he might easily have been among the first (if not the very first) in all the land of Egypt.

Let us think, for a moment, how great this temptation was. Here was a man of like passions with ourselves. He might have had as much greatness as earth can well give. Rank, power, place, honor, titles, dignities--all were before him and within his grasp. These are the prizes which there is an incessant race in the world around us to obtain. To be somebody, to be looked up to, to raise themselves in the scale of society, to get a handle to their names--these are the very things for which many sacrifice time, thought, health, and life itself. But Moses would not have them as a gift. He turned his back upon them, refused them, gave them up!

Moses refused pleasure. Pleasure of every kind, no doubt, was at his feet if he had liked to take it up--sensual, intellectual, social pleasure--whatever could strike his fancy. Egypt was a land of artists, a residence of learned men, a resort of every one who had skill or science of any description. There was nothing which could feed the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life," which one in the place of Moses might not easily have commanded and possessed as his own.

Pleasure, be it remembered, is the one thing for which millions live. Pleasure and enjoyment in the holidays is the grand object to which a schoolboy looks forward. Pleasure and satisfaction in making himself independent is the mark on which the young man in business fixes his eye. Pleasure and ease in retiring from business with a fortune is the aim which the merchant sets before him. Pleasure and bodily comfort at his own home is the sum of the poor man's wishes. Pleasure is the shadow which all alike are hunting--high and low, rich and poor, old and young,--each, perhaps, despising his neighbor for seeking it, each in his own way seeking it for himself, each secretly wondering that he does not find it, each firmly persuaded that somewhere it is to be found. This was the cup that Moses had before his lips. He might have drunk as deeply as he liked of earthly pleasure, but he would not have it. He turned his back upon it.

Moses refused riches. "The treasures in Egypt" is an expression that seems to tell of boundless wealth which Moses might have enjoyed had he been content to remain with Pharaoh's daughter. We may well suppose these "treasures" would have been a mighty fortune. The pyramids, obelisks, temples, and statues are still standing there as witnesses.

Let us consider the power of money, the immense influence that "the love of money" obtains over men's minds. Let us look around and observe how men covet it, what amazing pains and trouble they will go through to obtain it. Tell them of an island many thousand miles away where something may be found that may be profitable, and at once a fleet of ships will be sent to get it. Show them a way to make one percent more on their money, and they will reckon you among the wisest of men. To possess money seems to hide defects, to cover faults, to clothe a man with virtues. But here is a man who might have been rich and would not. He would not have Egyptian treasures.

Add to all this that Moses did it deliberately. He did not refuse these things in a hasty fit of youthful excitement--he was forty years old, in the prime of life. He did not refuse them because he was obliged to. He was not like the dying man who tells us "he craves nothing more in this world;" and why?--because he is dying and cannot keep it. He was not like the pauper who makes a merit of necessity and says, "he does not want riches;" and why?--because he cannot get them. He was not like the old man who boasts that "he has laid aside worldly pleasures;" and why?--because he is worn out and cannot enjoy them. No! Moses refused what he might have enjoyed. Rank, pleasure, and riches did not leave him, but he left them. Others have refused much, but none, I think, so much as Moses. In the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial, he excels them all.

Now, I wish to consider what Moses chose. For one thing, he chose suffering and affliction. He left the ease and comfort of Pharaoh's court and openly took part with the children of Israel. They were an enslaved and persecuted people, an object of distrust, suspicion, and hatred. To the eye of sense, there seemed no chance of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage without a long and doubtful struggle. If ever man seemed to be choosing pain, trials, poverty, need, distress, anxiety--perhaps even death--with his eyes open, Moses was that man.

We draw back by a kind of instinct from suffering and avoid it if we can. We spend our days in fear and anxiety when we think affliction is coming near us and use every means to escape it. And when it does come, we often fret and murmur under the burden of it. And if we can only bear it patiently, we count it a great thing! Moses saw the cup of suffering that was before him if he left Pharaoh's court and chose it, preferred it, and took it up.

But more than this, Moses chose the company of a despised people. He left the society of the great and wise among whom he had been brought up, and joined himself to the children of Israel--slaves, serfs, pariahs, bondservants, laborers in the brick kiln who were oppressed, destitute, afflicted, and tormented. Moses chose reproach and scorn. Men would tell him he was mad, foolish, weak, silly, out of his mind. He would lose his influence. He would forfeit the favor and good opinion of all among whom he had lived.

There are few things more powerful than ridicule and scorn. It can do far more than open enmity and persecution. Many a man who would march up to a cannon's mouth, lead a forlorn hope, or storm a breach, has found it impossible to face the mockery of a few companions--to be laughed at, made a joke of, sneered at!

Finally, let me speak of the principle which moved Moses and made him do as he did. We have the answer in the text: "Faith." He did it all because he believed. God set before his mind's eye his own will and purpose. God revealed to him that a Savior was to be born of the stock of Israel, that mighty promises were bound up in these children of Abraham and yet to be fulfilled, and that the time for fulfilling a portion of these promises was at hand. Moses put credit in this and believed. Faith was a telescope to Moses. It made him see the goodly land afar off--rest, peace, and victory, when dim-sighted reason could only see trial and barrenness, storm and tempest, weariness and pain. Faith told Moses that all the rank and greatness of the earth was a poor, vain, empty thing, fleeting and passing away; that there was no true greatness like that of serving God. Faith told Moses that worldly pleasures were "pleasures of sin," ruinous to the soul and displeasing to God. Faith told Moses that these pleasures, after all, were only for a "season." They would weary him soon; he must leave them all in a few years. Faith told Moses that there was a reward in heaven for the believer that was far richer than the treasures in Egypt: a crown incorruptible.

What has all this to do with me? someone will ask. For one thing, if you would ever be saved, you must make the choice that Moses made. You must choose God before the world. I do not mean that the statesman must leave his office or the rich man forsake his property. But I mean that if a man would be saved, whatever be his rank in life, he must be prepared for tribulation. He must make up his mind to choose much that seems evil and give up and refuse much that seems good.

Are you making any sacrifices? Does your religion cost you anything? Are you, like Moses, preferring God to the world? Is there any cross in your Christianity? Do you know anything of the afflictions of the Gospel? Is your faith and practice ever a subject of scorn and reproach? Many, I fear, would like glory who have no wish for grace. They would fain have the wages but not the work, the harvest but not the labor, the reaping but not the sowing, the reward but not the battle. But it may not be. As Bunyan says, "The bitter must go before the sweet." If there is no cross, there will be no crown.

Dear reader, would you be eminently holy and useful? Would you, like Moses, make it clear as noon day that you have chosen God before the world? Then take this advice: go and cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the disciples did, "Lord, increase our faith." Faith is the root of a real Christian's character. Let your root be right and your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/moses-an-example/>

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