

The Choice of Moses

by Newman Hall

The sermon emphasizes the importance of making a deliberate and decided choice to follow Christ and His people, even if it means giving up worldly pleasures and comforts.

Scripture: Matthew 16:26, Matthew 19:29, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Timothy 6:6, Hebrews 11:24

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Eternal Rewards"

Description

Newman Hall preaches to the students of Yale University, emphasizing the importance of choosing between holiness and sin, Christ and the world, God and the devil, as pivotal in determining one's true nobility, happiness, and future. Drawing from the example of Moses, who relinquished the luxuries, wealth, and honors of Egypt to suffer affliction with the people of God, Hall urges the young listeners to consider the sacrifices and rewards of such a choice. He highlights the enduring value of choosing a life of faith and service to God over fleeting worldly pleasures, emphasizing the eternal rewards and blessings that come from making a deliberate and decided commitment to follow Christ.

Transcript

By Newman Hall. Preached to the students of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, on Sunday, October 20, 1867.

I am thankful for the opportunity thus kindly granted to me of addressing the members of a university so celebrated, and possessing such influence in the forming of the minds and characters of the generation soon to occupy the place of the one passing away. With a heart full of sympathy I appeal to you, young men, this day. No longer young in years myself, I still retain most of the feelings of youth. I understand your impulses, instincts, aspirations, yearnings, and temptations. I know the ambition, the noble ambition, which animates many of you to act your part well in the great drama of life. I know also that I am addressing a congregation which will furnish men to occupy some of the highest stations in the Republic, whether as Statesmen or Clergymen, whether in the Exchange or the Forum, the Senate or the Church. How can your powers be best cultivated and best employed? Is there any act on which depend the true nobility and usefulness of all your future? And as you naturally desire happiness as well as distinction, is there something which is essential to happiness, something which can be secured by you while in these seats of learning, where not only knowledge is being acquired, but where character is being formed, and the complexion of your whole after-life being determined?

There is! Your highest welfare, your real nobility, your true happiness, are dependent on the choice you make between holiness and sin, between Christ and the world, between God and the devil. Youth is the principal choosing time. In the course which the stream takes now, it will, in all probability, continue to flow. How important is it that you should choose aright! To aid you in such choice, permit me, with all plainness, earnestness, and affection, to ask your consideration of the choice of Moses, thus described by the apostle--"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." Hebrews 11:24-26

Another king had arisen, "who knew not Joseph." The children of Israel groaned beneath their cruel burdens. Oppression and cowardice are twin-brothers, and the tyrants feared their slaves. To check the rapid increase of the hated race, orders were issued that all male infants should be slain. But Moses was hidden by his parents. Beneath the robe of the princess beat the heart of a woman, and Pharaoh's slaughter adopted the tiny tenant of the ark of bulrushes. Nourished for a time by his own mother, the boy afterwards grew up in the palace as the grandson of the mighty ruler of Egypt. But amid the splendors and luxuries of the court he did not forget the lessons of his childhood; nor could he witness with indifference the indignities and wrongs which his own race were suffering.

He had been taught by his mother that the slaves of Egypt were the chosen people of God, the destined inheritors of Canaan, and the medium whereby all kindreds of the earth were to be blessed. He had been taught that the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, was the only living and true God, while all the gods of Egypt were idols. It might seem as if he had forgotten those early lessons. Mixed up with the ruling Egyptian race, all his personal interests identified with the oppressor, lapped in luxury, absorbed in royal pursuits and pleasures, it might be supposed that he would be indifferent to the wrongs of his own people, and even disown and take part against them.

But no; they were in his eyes the people of God, and therefore more honorable in their servitude than the Egyptians in all their power and splendor. He cherished the thought of his kinship with them--he was not ashamed to avow it; he could not be indifferent to their sufferings--at length he openly took their part, and by so doing brought down on himself the wrath of their oppressors. The king, who had cherished him as his own son, now sought to slay him; so that he fled for his life, and shared the afflictions of the down-trodden race.

WHAT WAS IT HE RELINQUISHED? The luxuries of a palace containing all that could please the eye, and charm the ear, and regale the taste--where his every desire was anticipated, and where every service he asked from his menial courtiers was regarded as a favor conferred.

He renounced wealth as well as luxury. The text speaks of "the treasures of Egypt" as being given up. Pharaoh had great riches. By the policy of Joseph, all the cattle and all the land had been sold to the king for food, who thus became proprietor as well as lord of Egypt. With reasonable expectation Moses might look upon a large share of this treasure as destined to become his own. Yet he willingly forfeited it. Tradition says that he was commander of the forces, a prince of the empire, and the designated heir of Pharaoh's crown. Yet this position and these honors, present and prospective, he gave up!

The martyr Stephen said that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." The Israelites could not, owing to their condition, cultivate learning. Slavery

degrades the mind still more than the body. Therefore Moses, with refined and learned tastes, had to relinquish the congenial society of scholars and philosophers, in which he delighted, in order to identify himself with an ignorant and uncultured race. This must have been a great trial to a man whose genius and learning qualified him to appreciate the advantages afforded by the libraries, museums, and refined society of what was then the most civilized country of the world.

He had, moreover, to sever the ties of gratitude and affection which bound him to the palace. Pharaoh's daughter loved him as her own son. Moses would not have been so great as we know him to have been had he not ardently responded to this affection. Doubtless he felt towards the princess as to a mother. Her grief at the disappointment of her long-cherished affection, at the frustration of her plans for his welfare, at his seeming ingratitude--this must have torn the heart of Moses. He grieved to be the cause of such sorrow in one he had so much reason to love; and he grieved for himself, that such ties must be broken, and that, in all probability, he would see her no more.

There were also positive evils which he incurred. Among these was the probable anger of the princess. Love sometimes turns to wrath, when it is trifled with and abused, or when it supposes that it has been thus treated. Such wrath may prove more terrible than any other. And woman's anger, when thoroughly roused, has sometimes been wilder and more implacable than man's. Pharaoh's, if less fierce, would be more sure and lasting. Men hate whom they injure. He therefore hated his slaves. And as Moses chose to identify himself with them, Moses would share that enmity. Besides, the monarch would feel that his own authority, his very throne, was assailed, when one in such high position, an inhabitant of the palace, the heir of his wealth and power, had slain an Egyptian, and taken the side of a race whom he regarded as his natural foes. "Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses."

But reputation is often regarded as more valuable than life. This, too, was threatened. Would not Moses be stigmatized as a monster of ingratitude, repaying unexampled kindness with unexampled treachery? Would not, as always, the basest motives be attributed by those who were incapable of comprehending his lofty and divine impulses?

Moreover, he would be ridiculed and despised by his former philosophical friends, as a visionary, for sharing in traditional hopes, the fulfillment of which seemed impossible, and as a fool for surrendering such advantages and expectations as his, for the indulgence of a whim. Some people dread the charge of vulgarity far more than sin, and would sacrifice truth and a good conscience to avoid it. The charge would assuredly be made by "society" in that day. For a gentleman, a scholar, a prince, to take sides with mere common laborers--no, worse, to identify himself with slaves--this to the fashionables of the day would appear an atrocious offence against all propriety. Such a soul as that of Moses would be indifferent to such criticism.

But in other respects his sacrifices were very great. Did he look for some compensation in the praise, homage, and influence he would gain from those whose cause he espoused? The reverse might be expected. The natural leaders of the Israelites might be jealous of his former superiority, and resent his claims to consideration. He might be distrusted and his motives suspected. His adhesion would not carry with it any material help. He knew his worldly friends too well to expect that they would adhere to him any longer than he could promote their interests. He must join the Israelites, not as the leader of a strong party, but as a single individual; not as one rich and powerful, but as one suddenly become as poor and weak as themselves.

Moreover, the wrath excited against him would be visited on the whole people, so that they would be likely to regret his association with them, and to hate him as the cause of increased burdens and a more rigorous servitude. It seemed as if he lost everything, and gained nothing, by his choice.

Consider, too, at what period of life that choice was made. He was comparatively a young man. "When he was come to years," says Paul; "When he was forty years old," says Stephen. He was, therefore, in the prime of what was then considered early manhood. He had lived long enough in a palace for his habits to be formed in accordance with its luxuries. He had become so accustomed to a regal mode of life, that a sudden change to a humble station would be difficult and painful. Yet he had not lived so long in luxury as to have become gluttoned by it. He was not like many who make a virtue of giving up the world, when no longer able to enjoy it. On the contrary, even when eighty years had transpired--when, at the age of one hundred and twenty, the veteran chieftain mustered his hosts on the plains of Moab--we read, "yet was not his eye dim, nor his natural force abated." It was, therefore, in the very prime of life, when his natural instincts of mind and body were fresh with newly-attained maturity--when the full cup of worldly prosperity would taste the sweetest--it was now that he deliberately cast that cup to the ground. And he did so, in exchange for safety and comfort, and to encounter poverty, danger, and disgrace. He not only renounced the sweet cup of pleasure, but he took the bitter cup of adversity. He not only chose the people of God, but he chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God."

Dear young friends, in becoming Christians you also may have much to give up. It is possible you may grieve those whom you dearly love--you may alienate friends to whom you owe a debt of gratitude, and whose continued favor would secure your advancement in life--you may be called to relinquish wealth, station, and congenial society--you may be exposed to ridicule, enmity, and wrong. But should you be spared such trials as these, you will certainly be required to renounce sinful pleasures at an age when they are most attractive, and to curb all your natural instincts when they are most impatient of restraint. We do not say there is nothing to give up--that the vain world is not attractive--that there is no pleasure at all in sin. On the contrary, you must "crucify the flesh," and "strive" to enter in at the strait gate. The sacrifice you make may not be so great as that of Moses, but it must be of the same kind.

Consider, then, WHAT PROMPTED HIM IN HIS CHOICE. Why did he thus come out from the highest society and pleasures to enter the lowest? Why did he exchange ease for toil, plenty for poverty, honor for disgrace, safety for peril, the diadem of a prince for the yoke of a slave? Why did he refuse to gratify his intellectual tastes, his social habits, his personal attachments, the grateful love of his noble nature towards the woman who had been to him as a mother? It was "by faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

The conduct of Moses was not to be accounted for by ordinary motives. He did not leave the palace, as already observed, through boredom and satiety--he was still able "to enjoy the pleasures of sin." Nor because his presence was no longer desired, for he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He rejected urgent generosity, he resisted importunate affection. He was not animated merely by patriotism. Doubtless his heart throbbed with sympathy for his own race. But it was a still higher motive which determined his conduct. He chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God." He acted as he did from motives of religion. In other words; he was influenced "by faith."

Faith was to him "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." He believed what he had been taught in his childhood about the ancestors of his people--Abraham the friend of God, Isaac also, and Jacob; and how these patriarchs had worshiped the unseen Creator, and had never bowed to

idols; and how He whom they served had guided and guarded them throughout their pilgrimage. Although they seemed abandoned to a hopeless servitude, he believed the promise that Israel would become a great nation, that Canaan would be their inheritance, and that in some manner, through them, a blessing would come upon all mankind.

He believed that they were "the people of God." This was the center on which his faith reposed. They might be poor, despised, enslaved, afflicted; but they had in God a portion infinitely superior to riches, and honor, and even freedom itself; and so he resolved to be united with them as "the people of God," rather than to hold rank, however exalted, among a prosperous but wicked nation.

Moreover, "he was looking ahead to his reward." It was very improbable that he would receive any recompense himself in the present world. The Israelites were to be exalted at some future time, but this could be no reward to the generations who passed away meanwhile. Some other hope must have sustained him. He believed it would eventually be well with the nation, but he also believed in "the reward" to himself, though he might share in their affliction throughout his life. Thus his choice was the result of "faith." What he hoped for was still beyond his reach, but he was assured of the reality of it. Faith rendered it not a vague wish, but a "substance." That God was the Guardian of Israel was a fact "not seen" with the bodily eye; but faith was to him "an evidence" which influenced him so that he acted in opposition to that which appealed to his senses.

The advantages of the palace were present, obvious, tangible. So were the afflictions for which these advantages must be exchanged. Yet he was governed by motives drawn from what was unseen and future. The truth believed exercised on him the same effect as if he had seen what he believed. It was to him a living and potent reality. As he saw bodily the advantages he was losing, so he saw spiritually those he was gaining, and faith made him victorious.

Seek this faith. Pray for it; but at the same time cultivate it. Ponder the word of God. Keep the great truths of true religion before your mental eye. View them again and again in their various aspects. Let them surround your spirit even as the outward world surrounds your body. Let them impress your imagination and produce the effect of what is visible, and so let faith in the unseen and eternal regulate and control the influence of things "seen and temporal." This is the "victory that overcomes the world, even your faith."

Under this influence let your choice of Christ and his people resemble that of Moses. His choice was deliberate. He must have fully known what he was relinquishing, and his deep sympathy with the wrongs of his own people taught him what he also must be prepared to endure. So must you count the cost and decide deliberately. There is something to give up. How much? How long will it last? What is it worth? Are you willing to make the sacrifice? "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Having chosen deliberately, let us, like Moses, act decidedly. He felt no regret. He did not afterwards lament the good things he had abandoned. He did not go about talking of the great sacrifices he had made. He did not regard himself as a loser. He was an infinite gainer. So he felt and so he acted. "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." The very poverty which was shared with the people of God and for his sake was to him absolute wealth, greater far than all the gold of Pharaoh. To him privation was luxury, ignominy was honor, toil was repose, peril was safety, and death was life.

So let your conduct, young friends, be decided. Make your selection and abide by it. Give not the Egyptians reason to suppose that you regret having changed sides. Let them see that you consider yourselves richer and happier than they. Whatever trials may come on you through your religion, account all these to be wealth. Glory in them. Reproach changes its nature when it is the "reproach of Christ." Loss for Him is gain. This is the "Midas touch" that turns all it touches into gold. This is a light that gilds the darkest cloud. "If you are reproached for the sake of Christ, happy are you." Do not be as some professing Christians, who speak as though they had lost a great deal by accepting eternal salvation.

The choice of Moses was personally beneficial, as well as religious, deliberate, and decided. What is right is always in the end the best, in the sense of advantage as well as duty. Gain should not be our chief motive, yet the truth that "godliness is gain" is designed to encourage us in godliness. None shall ever be losers by serving God. And it cannot be wrong to desire what He has promised, and to reach after a prize which He holds out. Moses "was looking ahead to his reward." That reward, though delayed, would be everlasting. The pleasures of sin were but "for a season." The palaces of Egypt were magnificent, but they could be tenanted only for a season. The riches of Pharaoh were incalculable, but they could be possessed only for a season. The luxuries of royalty were alluring, but they could be enjoyed only for a season.

So also the "afflictions of the people of God" were only "for a season." Those chains could bind them only for a season. Those labors could be exacted only for a season. Those stripes could be inflicted only for a season. The "reproach of Christ" would soon be forgotten, leaving its mark not as the defacing scar of a wound, but as an impress of honor which angels might envy, indelible and beautiful throughout eternity. Even though the people of God may, during the whole of their earthly pilgrimage, be in heaviness through manifold temptations, one day amid the glories of their heavenly inheritance will outweigh all the sorrows of the journey!

What, then, shall we say of the everlasting duration of the reward? A drop compared to the ocean--a grain of sand weighed against the universe--an instant of time contrasted with the whole of the longest life--these illustrations fall infinitely short of expressing how brief is the longest life of sorrow here, compared with the endless state of blessedness hereafter! What is Egypt now? Where are her Pharaohs and her Ptolemies? Where are the princes of Egypt and the sons of ancient kings? Egypt is desolate. Pharaoh is but a sound. The images have ceased out of Egypt. Its hundred-gated palace is desolate without inhabitant. Temples and palaces which taxed successive generations to rear them are overthrown or buried in the sand. The mighty pyramids are but memorials of death. Yet even if Egypt had retained until this day all her ancient greatness, of what advantage would it be to Moses, three thousand years in his grave?

But the portion he chose still remains; and who shall deny the wisdom of exchanging a corruptible crown for an incorruptible one, the halls of Pharaoh for the many mansions of heaven, the empty and fleeting "pleasures of sin" for the "fullness of joy" which is at God's right hand, and the "pleasures forevermore?"

Dear young friends, "go and do likewise." Egypt still allures you. Sin has its attractions. Youthful imagination depicts palaces of pleasure in which you may revel and be at home. There is also a "people of God" still--not, indeed, oppressed and scorned--yet the true people of God, as distinct from many who bear the name only, are often found among the poor and the despised. In becoming "an Israelite indeed," you may be required not only to give up the "pleasures of sin," but to encounter loss, opposition, reproach. The Pharaoh of the world offers bribes, which glitter with special brightness in the eyes of youth. At the

same time, Christ invites you to take His yoke and to bear His cross.

What is your decision? There is much to give up if you resolve to turn your back on the "pleasures of sin." There may be much to encounter if you cast in your lot with the Israel of God. It is not always possible to make the best of both worlds. In the deepest sense, indeed, we possess the best now as well as hereafter, when we have a good conscience, and the presence of Christ. But as men ordinarily judge, you must reckon that you may make the worst of this world. You may "suffer the loss of all things." Men may "revile you and persecute you." Like the apostle, you may become as the "offscouring of all things." Yet though all this is possible, though all this should become actual, you will never regret a choice like that of Moses.

You will be really better off, even now, in the despised tents of the people of God, than in the palaces of Pharaoh. To know that their God is our God--to feel safe beneath His protection, happy in His service--to have the consciousness of wishing to be right, and, in spite of many failures, of being right--to know what peace means, and rest, and home, after the weary, unsatisfying search for happiness elsewhere--and, though 'heaven' be yet distant, to have the present hope of it, a strong, abiding, substantial expectation of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away"--this renders a choice like that of Moses as reasonable as it is right, as profitable to ourselves as it is obligatory towards God. If some pleasures are given up, those which remain are intensified by the consciousness of receiving them from God, and of enjoying them in the light of His countenance. The hope of everlasting happiness can never cast a shadow over any of the lawful and pure enjoyments which He bestows.

What is the value of that which you relinquish? Grant all that may be urged in its favor. Let money, and luxury, and fame, and power, and the pleasures of sin in their fairest forms and largest measure, be combined in one great mountain of attractive fascination, and the question arises--How long will all this last?

You know the story of the Eastern king, one of whose courtiers, surveying the magnificence around, flatteringly asked, "What is lacking here?" The monarch replied, with a sigh, "Continuance." Yes; a worm is hidden in the loveliest blossom, a serpent creeps amid the fairest flowers, the wealthiest summer beckons winter frosts, and days the longest and the brightest close in night. Of what avail is it to say, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry," when the message is given, "This night your soul shall be required of you"?

What will be your remorse at death if you shall have chosen, as your chief portion, that which thus perishes? How terrible to find everything you had struggled to gain slipping from your grasp--money, luxuries, position, power, learning, fame--all retreating and leaving you alone. Was it for this you refused the enduring riches, the endless delights, of piety? Was it for a master who allured you with such transient and deceitful pleasures that you turned away from Him who entreated you to enter His ennobling service and share in the recompense of an eternal reward? Alas! what multitudes in the unseen world now regret--when it is too late--so mad a choice! What to them is every remembrance of the pleasures of sin but fuel added to the fire of their remorse?

But who has ever regretted the surrender of sinful pleasures for the service of God? Who was ever known to lament on his death bed that he had suffered and labored too much for Christ? Who now in glory regrets the cost at which glory was secured, or wishes his choosing time back again, that he might reverse his decision? If you would not in eternity regret a foolish choice, make the only wise choice now. Decide at

once. Let this be the turning-point of life. Seek forgiveness through Christ for having lingered at all in the palaces of worldly delight--for having hesitated a moment when He called you to join His people. Look up for the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, and, in the exercise of Faith, choose rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

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