

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, April 8, 1973

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (44:33)

Would you turn with me, just for a few verses in the book of Hebrews, the faith chapter [Hebrews 11], the one that speaks of “by faith” so many times. Verse 24: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense.” Just those few verses. In seeking to evaluate the character of Moses, for that’s the subject, the person, the character that he was, in being the leader of two million souls, leading them out of bondage, out of slavery, into a wilderness, which might have been a journey of a few months, but turned out to be a journey of 40 years.

Now just before we get away from this passage, may I say that I believe this is the beginning of the character of Moses. It said he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Well, he was her adopted son, she had adopted him, but through the goodness of God, and the wonderful way that he works with his servants, Moses as a babe was taken care of, was nursed, by his mother, in a double sense, not only as a mother but as the paid servant of Pharaoh’s daughter. And I believe it was the training he received from his mother, although Scripture does not tell us this, but rather tells us that Moses was trained, and was brought up in all the learning of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians were the reigning, the ruling nation of that day.

So that Moses must have been a remarkable man, brought up as a Jew in the court of Pharaoh, and I suppose it is possible to extend our thought and say that if Moses had not done what we’ve just been reading about, choosing his place with the people of God, that he might have been a successor to Pharaoh. But this was the wonderful part of Moses character. When the time came, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

And I think it’s a remarkable thing that so early in the Scriptures we have the subject of a decision. the need of a deciding, the need of making a clear-cut decision, what is my life going to be. Every time the gospel is preached, as the call of God goes out to men and women, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior, to repent of their sins, to come to him for forgiveness, and a clear cut decision is made. We now that many time it is not made. In my own case, I can remember hearing the gospel so often that I could have preached it as a boy; I could have preached it, I believe, acceptably, but I hadn’t received the Lord as my own savior, for myself, til I was the age of 12.

Well, this business of being known as Pharaoh’s daughter was really a lie to Moses, and he cast his lot with slaves. Although he was in the palace, and could have had the ... [tape fadeout] ... and all the learning and the riches, and the glory of Pharaoh, and the court of Egypt, he made the remarkable choice the blessed choice, how fortunate he was in making that choice, wasn’t it. It says that he “esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” What a remarkable statement. So far as we know, Moses could not have known of Christ, but he waiting for the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, and I believe this is what was meant by “the reproach of Christ.” “Greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense.” In other words, he was looking for God’s approval, rather than man’s approval. He would have had it here, but it would have been just a

temporary thing. He was being fitted out to be a wonderful vessel for the purposes of God.

If anyone had asked me what I should term the address tonight, the meditation on the character of Moses, I would have set this unusual heading to it: "Forty years too soon," because I believe that the verses we have read apply to the first 40 years of Moses' life. And we're indebted to the personage Stephen, who was the first martyr, the first Christian martyr, reading in the seventh of Acts, that Moses' life divides into three stages, three periods. The first 40 years, and then he becomes an outcast, or a fugitive. Then for 40 years, he's in the back of the desert, tending sheep. Just think of the descent of that. Here from the palace, with the prospect of becoming Pharaoh, or another king, he not only loses his contact with his brethren, but it says "he had it in his heart to visit his brethren," but he loses contact with them, because in undertaking their cause and killing an Egyptian, to defend his own fellow Israelites, he then becomes known to the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, and has to run away for his life.

And so, within a few days, after his 40th year, he is in the back part of the desert, and he becomes a shepherd. The shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians, as we read in the story of Joseph, so that humanly speaking, Moses has made a terrific choice, a downward choice, a degrading choice. But it was the best after all, time was to prove that he was under the hand of God, and he was going to be God's man. He was going to do wonderful works for God. And the character that Tim [that's probably me ... TW] was telling us about last week, the two characteristics of Moses that developed between the 80th year and the 120th year of his life, it's told us in that chapter, Numbers 11 I think it is, the first characterization, the first praise, the first commendation given of him is that he was very meek, the meekest man in all the earth [Numbers 12:3].

Now meek and weak are very easy words to say, and one would almost associate the one with the other, but in the Lord's account, a meek man is not a weak one. As I think I said in my prayer, that the meek shall inherit the earth. And the meek man is not the milquetoast kind of man that we think of, humanly speaking, but he's the man who is in contact with God. And realizing something of the greatness of God, and how condescending he is to his creatures, to even the lowest, that is the person that the Lord deals with, that he has contact with, that he has fellowship with. We're told that in two places in the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah 57:15 and 66:2. Those two passages give us an idea of how differently God deals with man, than we think. "A poor and a contrite spirit" is the expression used in those two passages, and it says that God dwells with them. He makes his home with them, or they are at home with Him.

And that was the kind of a man Moses was: developed gradually, but surely, in those last 40 years of his life, for he lived to be 120. And in the 80th year, when he had the experience of the burning bush, when God spoke from out of that bush, and called him to the service he was to do for the next 40 years, this was the beginning, I believe, of Moses' meekness.

In that same chapter, in Numbers, there's something else that's told of Moses, and that's something that each one of us could aspire to, should aspire to, I believe, and that commendation was that "Moses was faithful in all God's house." [Numbers 12:7]. And that commendation is repeated in the third chapter of the book of Hebrews, but it's compared with the work of Christ. Moses was a servant in God's house, he was faithful in all his house, but Christ was a son over his house. Whose house are we, speaking now as Christians [Hebrews 3:2-6].

Moses had a work to do, and I won't go into the subject of the call of Moses to go to Pharaoh, and demand, or rather ask first, later it was a demand, and ask first that these slaves, by that time two million of them, it's estimated, that they be allowed to journey three days into the wilderness, and offer sacrifices to their God, Jehovah. And remember the insolent answer of Pharaoh, "who is the Lord, that I should obey him? I will not allow them to go."

And then the plagues come along, and you'll remember the tenth plague is the one in which Pharaoh says, "I'll see your face no more." Dismisses him. And that's where the next passage in the book of Hebrews, the eleventh chapter comes in, "by faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" [Hebrews 11:27]. Forty years before he had feared the wrath of the king, was running for his life. You see what a change forty years can make in the character of a person. All that Moses had learned in the court of Pharaoh he unlearned, in the back part of the desert, and now he was fitted to go back to Pharaoh, and demand the release of Israel.

Well, remember the last plague that Pharaoh had to suffer. He repented each time, after each plague visited him, almost each time, but then he recalled the repentance, showing it was not a real one. And then God sent another one. And these plagues were all to call Pharaoh's attention to the fact that the gods that he worshipped were no gods at all. But the God in heaven, the God that Moses spoke of, was the true God, and to the end, had to answer to him. Pharaoh resisted to the end, and even after the firstborn of every family in the land was slain in that passover night, Pharaoh was not repentant at all, rather his anger burned. And when he saw that the nation of Israel, two million slaves were getting away from him and he had a chance to recall them, either to dispose of them, either to slay them, or to recall them, to get them back into Egypt as his slaves, he took that opportunity and marched his army against them.

And though Moses had instituted at the Lord's request for Moses did everything at God's request, at God's orders. That's the remarkable thing, I think, of the character of Moses; he followed orders. And we have a hymn that expresses two thoughts, trust and obey. It's not enough for me to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, but from then on I become a pupil in the school of God. And my success will be in proportion to the measure in which I obey the Lord's commandments. And he says "the Lord's commandments are not grievous" [1 John 5:3].

He also makes the stipulation that "if you love me, you will keep my commandments." [John 14:15]. And these commandments are not the commandments that Moses was given by God to give to the nation of Israel. Those commandments were sanitary commandments, they were judgments and statutes, and besides the ten commandments that everyone knows about, the ten commandments on the tablets of stone that Moses first broke, and then they were re-written, but they are the 600 additional commandments that were given to the nation of Israel as a condition that if they would obey them, if they would keep to them, their success and their blessing would be assured. And their righteousness depended upon their keeping these commandments.

Well we know of course they were not, they couldn't be, because as we shall see in a little while, I hope in the remainder of the hour, that the heart of the nation, although Moses led the nation out of Egypt into the wilderness, and from there into the land through Joshua, their hearts were really back in Egypt. They forgot all about the slavery; they forgot all about the whippings, and the deprivation, the

social status, the terrible stigma attached to them as slaves. They just remembered the nice things of Egypt, the food, and other things like that, natural things, and were willing to forfeit all the promises of God, that they were going into a land flowing with milk and honey. And that was the place that had been promised to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and all the rest. They were willing to forfeit that and go back to Egypt and become slaves again.

Well here's something they had never thought of: God, in order to enable them to last out in the wilderness, he provided two things. And it was a constant reminder of His presence. It was his presence. When they were just about to leave Egypt they were supplied with fire by night and a cloud by day. And their success depended upon keeping under that. Because if they had gotten out from under the cloud in the daytime, they would have perished miserably with the heat. If they had left the camp without the fire, they would have frozen to death because there was a tremendous difference in temperature between the daytime and the evening. And besides, they weren't dressed for any cold weather. So they probably would have perished, but according to the plan of God they never got that far.

Their hearts were back in Egypt, they wanted to go, they were willing to appoint a captain to take them back there but they never got there. Now suppose there had been a man at their head, as Moses was, a representative of the people to God (God was represented to them by Moses), supposing there had been a forceful man, a man who was a commanding personage, a man who demanded obedience and would have struck them down if they hadn't obeyed. What a catastrophe that would have been. It needed a meek man, it needed a man who would stand for the treatment that he received.

And the treatment he received was nothing less than scandalous. They charged him with murder, they charged him with bringing them out into the wilderness to kill them with hunger, or to make them die of thirst. Their treatment of him was terrible. But I believe he understood that this was not so much directed against him as against God. For all unbelief, all the dissatisfaction, the discontent, the hatred that they manifested was really, although expressed to Moses, was really against God. And God had to deal with them.

There's some interesting things that I'd like to just interpolate here. If you want to study the character of Moses you would really have to read and study some 75 chapters in the five books of Moses, which is quite a chore. I've done quite a bit of reading in the last few weeks, and some of the passages in the rest of the Scriptures that deal with Moses are very leading, very interesting. For instance in the Psalms, David, perhaps the greatest character in the Old Testament if you go by the number of times his name is mentioned in the Scriptures. That's an interesting thought, and I hope you won't think that I counted these one by one. This is an average count, but fairly accurate I believe.

Abraham we would say was one of the great characters of the Old Testament. Then we would have to say Moses was. Then finally, the king who was a perfect picture of Christ, though he was a failure himself, that's David. If I tell you that Abraham is mentioned 300 times, that would seem like a great deal, wouldn't it. For Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel. But Moses is mentioned some 700 times, "the Lord spake unto Moses saying" and then Moses writes it down in exactly the same words that the Lord gave him to write, or to speak, for what was written was first of all spoken.

But David, the king, a man after God's own heart, he is mentioned some 1200 times in the Scriptures. And if you want a very short and abbreviated history of the world from the beginning of time to the end of time, it would be something like this. From Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and then

the interregnum, this present dispensation of grace, these 1900 years which may go on some time further, might be as much as 2000 years, when the Lord is dealing with Jew and Gentile, with all men, giving them the most favorable opportunity to become saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.

And then, what is still unfulfilled as prophecy, the seven years of Daniel's seventy weeks, the one week, the 69th to the 70th, the fulfillment of the 70th week. That period of seven years, and then the day of the Lord, the thousand years, where the King will reign in righteousness. God's king, his own son will be on the throne. And he will be king of kings and lord of lords in that time. And then to be followed by the short time when men are finally judged, when Satan is released from the pit, and then is the day of eternity, the day of God's again, and we're back again in eternity. Eternity past, then this short space of time, thousands of years, to be followed by the eternal day.

Then the names that Moses is called are interesting; he is called the prophet. It's interesting that the Lord said of him, "he wrote of me." Remember in the fifth of John, the Lord put the question to them, if you don't believe what Moses wrote, because he wrote of me, how shall you believe my words? [John 5:46]. Moses calls attention to the Prophet, the capital P Prophet. the one who was to be the last word, God's word for all time. And Moses acted as priest. How many times he interceded for the people. He even went to such lengths as saying to God that if God wanted to destroy the nation he would rather that he destroyed him, because if God destroyed the nation of Israel, those rebels that had so disgraced him, then he would be losing face before the nations, and they would say that he was not able to bring them in.

So Moses acted as priest. And in Revelation he is called the final name, that is he's the servant of God, "Moses the servant of God." This was what Moses was to the fullest degree, next to the Lord himself. And he was appointed by God to teach the people his commandment; he was also a teacher. A varied character, but it was characterized mostly by meekness and faithfulness.

Now if we go to the book of Exodus for a few words, we shall see how the character of Moses develops. In Exodus 14, the chapter which tells of the wonderful deliverance of the nation of Israel, a little nation of two million people, of slaves, that had been in Egypt for some 215 years from the time that Jacob went down with his family of 70. And reading from the 10th verse, Exodus 14:10, "When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel, (and this was really the nation of Israel) the nation of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid. And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord." But what a cry of unbelief. Just notice what the eleventh verse tell us: "They said to Moses, because there were no graves in Egypt, has thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt such with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt. is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians, for it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

What an expression of unbelief. And here, just at the very threshold of their deliverance, they go into this terrible slump of unbelief, of doubt, lack of faith. And then Moses tells them, "Fear not. Stand still, do nothing, just wait and see the salvation of the Lord. Egyptians you have seen today you shall see them again no more forever." And then God worked that wonderful miracle. First of all he put a cloud between the Egyptians and the Israelites, and they were safe for the night. And then in the morning, when the Egyptians were ready to swallow them up the Lord opened a way through the sea, he divided the waters.

Men, of course think this impossible; this is just fun, and mockery for an atheist or an unbeliever. How could this be? How could anyone change the waters? And God did. And the nation of Israel is here today. And they celebrate this every year; they date their beginnings from this moment. And God opened the waters, let them out, and they walked through dry land into the wilderness. And then when the Egyptians came after them the waters returned and the Egyptians were drowned.

I just wanted to call your attention to the unbelief that preceded this great deliverance. How gracious God was to answer their unbelief, their ingratitude, their lack of faith, everything was wrong about this, it was better to go back and serve the Egyptians, go back into our slavery than we should go into this wilderness. They thought they were going into something worse. Just shows how blind unbelief is, and how gracious God is to deal with us so leniently.

Well, we know that when they were safe on the other shore and their enemies were no more, then they sang a song, and it was Moses that led the song. It was really the song of Moses. And just notice in the 15th chapter the second verse what high language they use, what an exalted position they take, and if they had only stuck to this: “The Lord is my strength and song. He is become my salvation. He is my God and I will prepare Him a habitation, my father’s God and I will exalt him,

What a remarkable expression. This is true song, isn’t it. This is the expression of souls that have been delivered, but I think it was more the song of Moses than the song of many of the nation of Israel. For all of them, that were over 20 years old, in the next 40 years, would fall in that wilderness and be buried there. They would find their life ended. So those who were only 20, never got to more than 60, and those who were perhaps aged, they died too somewhere along the line.

And then in the very end of this chapter the same chapter that tells us of this song, this song of deliverance, one of the high points in the history of the people of God is almost immediately followed, within three days I think it says, they have another lapse. Verse 24, and 25: they come three days journey into the wilderness and find no water. “And when they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter, therefore the name of it was called Marah and the people murmured against Moses, saying, what shall we drink.” He cried to the Lord and the Lord showed him a tree, which when thrown into that water made the water sweet.

See God was acting in marvelous mercy here. The fact that it says that the people murmured, and murmured is a very mild word, I think. In the dictionary it tells us that murmuring is a low-voiced complaint. It doesn’t really amount to much. But as we go on, in the history of these 40 years, we shall see that these murmurings always developed into something really bad. They develop into an accusation, an accusation of murder, deliberate murder, for time after time, I don’t think we’ll have time to go through these ten occasions that they used this language, they charged Moses, and really through Moses they charged God, as having deliberately brought them into the wilderness to slay them, to do away with them.

One of the interesting expressions in the Old Testament, I think it is repeated some seventy times, and almost all those seventy times in the same language, it is this: “the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” And a few other occasions it’s “the Lord led thee by the hand out of the land of Egypt.” The Lord showed his mercy to you in bringing you out, bringing you in.

So then the Lord picks that up, the bitter waters: instead of finding any water at all, they found bitter water. And the Lord was testing them, you see. And every one of us in our Christian experience is

going to find a testing, is our faith real, are we murmuring, and does that murmuring lead to something else? Because I believe that's one of the sad things, that if you entertain an evil thought, no matter how light it may be, it will lead on to something worse, unless that is repented of, and we get right with God.

In the sixteenth chapter, notice it's very shortly after that, I think 45 days in the first verse of the 16th chapter, the fifteenth day of the second month, which would be 40 days after they left Egypt, they again have a period of murmuring. And this time, it's something different. Second verse: "the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the nation said would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots, and when we did eat bread to the full."

I don't believe this at all; I think they were exaggerating their past experience. The suffering and the stigma of being slaves, of being beaten, of having to work hard from daybreak to dayfall, had forgotten this. They thought just of the nice things, and how like ourselves, how we can do that to perfection. "when you brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Well, I see the time is going. And right after, there's another one in the 17th chapter. And I don't think it tells us how long this one took. And in this case Moses cries to the Lord about it and he says in 17:4 "What shall I do to this people, for they be almost ready to stone me." Stoning was the worst punishment that they could have given him. To hang him on a tree was one thing, to kill him was another, but to stone him, that was the worst kind of death.

Well we know that very shortly after this the Law was given, the ten commandments and a great many of the others. And then Moses is invited to meet the Lord, to go up into the mount, and meet the Lord and get the rest of the commandments, and especially the plan for the tabernacle. Because this was in keeping with their song, "I will prepare him an habitation" [Exodus 15:2]. That was the blessing that was to be theirs. They were to have the Lord with them in this wilderness, but how soon they forgot Him. Although they were protected by him perfectly by the pillar of fire giving them heat at night, and the cloud protected them from the rays of the sun, the heat, they had also divine food given them, the manna that fell from heaven every morning, except one, and that was the sabbath. On the fifth day they had to pick up enough food for the sixth day, the seventh day, rather, for their seventh day was our Saturday.

And then Moses is in the mount for 40 days and 40 nights, and murmurings and discontent and questionings and whatnot take over again. And they get Aaron to build a calf or make a calf, a golden calf, which was what they had in Egypt, that was one of the gods of Egypt. And they not only say that this is the god that brought us out of Egypt, but then they take burnt offerings and peace offerings and offer that with it. You see mixing the worship of God with the worship of Satan. God couldn't take that, so he sends down Moses and we have the breaking of the tablets of stone. Then Moses is invited again, and we have the instructions about the tabernacle, which very much ends the book of Exodus.

As our time is going, I'll just be able to give a few more incidents from the later wanderings of the nation of Israel. What they should have been able to traverse in eleven days took them two years, because the Lord arranged that they were only to move when the cloud moved. So they stayed in various places for different lengths of time. And at the end of two years, they again have an outbreak of this murmuring, and accusation, false accusation against Moses and God. The incident happens of course with Miriam and Aaron, when they think that Moses has taken too much upon himself. He has taken the

advice of his father-in-law, or brother-in-law, and has appointed seventy men, and they think that they are left out. So I believe that the rebellion, or the questioning of Miriam and Aaron had in some ways, justification. But it was not justified in the sense that they complained and charged him immediately; they should have gone to God. Aaron was the priest, Aaron was appointed by God to be the priest for the nation of Israel. He was the representative of God to them, and to them of God.

And so at the end of two years, God has twelve men, one from each tribe, go out into the land of Canaan, to search it out, so that the people will know what they're coming in to. Notice now, this is two years, two years after they're in the wilderness, God has preserved them. So they have deserted Him, they wished they were back in Egypt, or they wished that they were dead, but God has preserved them. Then these twelve spies, though I dislike the word spies, because the land of Canaan was God's land, He had promised it to Abraham, and the men there, the Canaanites, were a wicked lot, and they had to be exterminated, because they would have defiled the world with their evil ways and habits. And the character of the inhabitants is shown by the report that the so-called spies brought back.

Ten of the men, representing ten tribes, said that it was a wonderful land, it was a land flowing with milk and honey, and they brought back a bunch of grapes that took two men to carry. They said the corn of the land was beautiful, everything was prosperous, but, and Satan certainly is able to always put a wrench in the machinery, isn't he, but we were as grasshoppers in their sight. These men were more like giants than men. But they were flying in the face of God, for God had said that he would bring them into this land, and they would get there, and he vouched his word for it.

Two of the men were Joshua and Caleb. representing the two tribes of Judah and Ephraim, and ...

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