

Faithful Over the World Part 2

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 11:23-28

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. 24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. 28 Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Last week we began this message, "Faithful Over the World." We shared that basically the world has three major offensive weapons against us: power, pleasure, and pain. The world uses power to either intimidate us or entice us with power so that we would compromise power with God to have favor with the world. Today I want us to look at the final two weapons of pleasure and pain. Pleasure is our greatest evil and our greatest good. It all depends on to whom we look for the source and fulfillment of pleasure. If we look to the world, it is our greatest evil, but if we look to God, it is our greatest good. How can pleasure be good? Sir, if God is your source of pleasure, then pleasure will be a motivation to keep you in hot pursuit of God. God gives us pleasures to enjoy Him more and to glorify Him. Satan and the world do not really have your joy in mind. No matter how many pleasures Satan offers you, his ultimate intention is to ruin you. Your destruction is his highest priority. Thomas Jefferson gave some wise advice when he said, "Do not bite at the bait of pleasure till you know there is no hook beneath it."

Pain is also a tool of the enemy to weaken us and cause us to compromise. I call pain the "well-known stranger." We know it well and yet we act as if it is a stranger when it arrives. We want to avoid it, ignore it, and escape it. But pain will not be avoided, ignored, or escaped. Pain comes to us all and in so many different forms. It can be physical, but it also can be emotional. Therefore let us learn how to view pain when it is placed upon us by the world.

Our text again is Hebrews chapter eleven verses twenty-three through twenty-eight. Today I want to move to our second point and show from the text how Moses defeated the pleasure of the world. Look at verses twenty-five and twenty-six. It says that Moses chose to suffer the affliction of God's people rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Now I think we need

to understand just exactly what we mean by “worldly pleasure.” It is important when we define pleasure to know that pleasure in itself is not wrong. That has been confused in Christian circles for years. Many people believe that pleasure has nothing but satanic roots and that the world can never offer pleasure that will bring delight.

Pleasure is not an evil thing in itself. If it was, then God would be evil, for the Bible tells us in the sixteenth Psalm and verse eleven, “Thou wilt show me the path of life.” And what is the path of life? It is, “in thy presence is fullness of joy and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.” God is a God of pleasure, of joy, and of delight. I can tell my most enjoyable moments are when I am experiencing God’s presence. God is a God of pleasure. I have quoted for you so often the statement from C.S. Lewis that has been such a great blessing to me over the years. He said,

If we consider the unblemishing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospel it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak for pleasure and happiness. We are half hearted creatures fooling about with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us and like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

Lewis is right. The problem in the world is not that we are so pleasure hungry; the problem is we are not hungry enough. We are satisfied with lesser pleasures than God. We find what the world offers to be satisfying when we could be enjoying something far better. What the world offers is substandard and will never satisfy. But God Himself is pleasure. God is not against pleasure; He wants you to experience pleasure all the more. God created Adam and Eve, and He placed them in the middle of a beautiful paradise for their enjoyment. Genesis chapter two and verse nine says “out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight.” God created trees, and He made them to be pleasant to our sight. But not just pleasant to look at but also good to the taste. Verse nine also says that the trees “good for food.” God created the world to be an experience of joy and pleasure everywhere man turned.

If God is our greatest pleasure and pleasure is not sin, then sinful pleasure must be seeking pleasure outside of God’s prescription for pleasure. The world’s pleasure that Moses was tempted with and rejected is nothing more than seeking pleasure outside of God’s prescription for pleasure. Let me illustrate. God did not tell Adam and Eve that eating fruit was wrong. In fact, He gave Adam the entire garden of fruit trees. Here is where the legalist will run in and commit error. The legalist would say you should never eat fruit, but that is not what God said. The Bible says in Genesis two verse sixteen, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat freely.” Dear friend, just because some people take pleasure to the wrong degree and disobey God’s prescription on how it is to be used doesn’t mean pleasure itself is wrong. Amusement itself is not wrong. Entertainment is not wrong. I have heard good men say that if you want to be holy you must get rid of your television, but television is not the problem. The problem is not pleasure or entertainment but it is our hearts. God created you to enjoy and to experience delight. What God prohibited Adam and Eve was the fruit of a certain tree. The lesson is obvious. Pleasure is not wrong, only the pleasure that God doesn’t allow is wrong.

What would these pleasures be? The pleasures that are obtained outside of God's prescribed method or command. Let me give you another illustration. Sex is not a sin. It is a pleasure that God has given mankind to enjoy. The physical relationship between a husband and a wife is not only a beautiful thing, my dear friend, it is a sacred thing. It is holy, holy unto the Lord. Why one of the greatest illustrations of Christ loving the church is the physical union of a husband and a wife. Sex is not dirty, sex is not wrong, and sex is not evil. But when we seek to indulge this God-given pleasure outside of God's prescription of marriage, it is a sin. It then becomes evil. Let me give you another illustration. Resting is not a sin, except if you are asleep right now. Resting is not a sin. In fact, medically speaking, rest is a necessity in order to maintain our health. Resting from our labors and responsibilities is a wonderful pleasure that is therapeutic. However, resting when we should be working is called laziness. Laziness is a sin.

The three magic bullets that the temptation will fire against you in the area of pleasure are sex, laziness and money. As in the above illustrations of sex and rest, money is not an evil thing. But if our ideas about money or our use of money are not within the perimeters of God's commands, we are guilty of indulging in worldly pleasure. As I said rest and relaxation is not an evil thing. It is not going to be wrong for you this afternoon if you want to go lie down and take a nap. Vance Havner, the Southern Baptist evangelist, used to quote Jesus telling the disciples "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat" (Mark 6:31). Havner would then advise ministers, "Brethren, if you don't 'come apart' you will come apart." Our bodies need rest and a change of pace. Our emotional well-being needs such. But, dear friend, I believe that the world has aimed at our culture the gun of pleasure loaded with the bullet of rest and relaxation. Our minds are consumed with ease and comfort, rest and relaxation. Listen to how we talk about our lives. We will work a number of years, save in a 401K or retirement program so that we can spend the golden years of our lives doing what we want to do. But wait a minute, who says I can do what I want to do? Ah, this is sin's deception. We are to do what God wants us to do. The Lord could want you to retire so you can go into fulltime ministry. One of the biggest temptations that I know of is God's people taking it easy. Not many Christians are promiscuous, involved in adultery or fornication. Not many Christians are stealing or getting drunk nor are on drugs. But a lot of Christians battle the pleasurable temptation of rest and relaxation that they have literally become crippled in the kingdom of God. Their service is little because their minds are concentrated on ease.

Let me talk about entertainment for a few moments. Again entertainment itself is not wrong. But I believe that the devil has lulled the church asleep with entertainment. We seem to be so consumed with the latest gimmick that Hollywood can produce or the game makers can manufacture. We think we always need to be entertained. Laughter and fun have become the preoccupation of the church world. Since the invention of television, the format of church services have changed dramatically. Worship has become less worship of God and more worship of entertainment. Church services are more Hollywood productions than holy saints in the passionate and reverent pursuit of God. Ministers are trained to conduct a service and preach a sermon remembering that their audiences are an audio and video generation. They are being instructed in Bible colleges and seminaries that they must compete with entertainment if they are to attract a

congregation. Therefore they must find more entertaining ways to gather a crowd. I do not wish to be misunderstood and interpreted as believing that a church service and sermon must be boring if it is to be holy. That is not what I am saying. But our attraction to the things of God must not be built upon the flesh or appeal to the flesh for “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” If holy reverence and the experiencing of God’s presence is not the most exhilarating and joyous experience to the saint, then he or she is not a saint but still a sinner, a natural man that “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

What about money? How is it ammunition used by the world against the Christian? I believe money has been given to us as a stewardship, given to us from our Master. Money and possessions are entrusted to us to manage. If you have been here for a number of years you will not be able to remember a single message I have ever preached on tithing. I am not against tithing. I just don’t think it is New Testament. I think tithing is for the immature and the weak. The New Testament says—all of your possessions belong to God, not ten percent. We are under the New Covenant and under the terms of this new covenant the Christian is purchased by God, bought out if you please, lock, stock and barrel. All the good things about you, all the bad things, and all the ugly parts, everything about you belongs to Him. “All to Him I owe.” I possess nothing; I manage everything as a steward of God. I don’t own a thing. This suit is not mine. It belongs to God. My family is not mine. They belong to God. My car belongs to God. Nothing is ours as believers. All that we are and have has been purchased with an incorruptible price.

God grants us the ability to earn a living so that, my dear friend, you cannot say, “I give my ten percent to God and I can keep the other ninety percent.” It all belongs to Him. A mature Christian understands this and should pray over their finances asking God what they should do with them. The Lord may say give twenty percent or thirty percent or He may say ninety percent as he did Mr. Hershey, the multi-millionaire who invented Hershey’s chocolate, and live off the remaining ten percent. It all belongs to God. But today we have been tempted by money. We hoard and spend with disregard to God and how He would have us to manage His wealth that He has entrusted to us. We work longer hours, neglecting our families, so that we may accumulate more possessions. We have sent our wives and mothers into the work force thinking that two incomes were necessary. They are necessary in most cases only to keep the standard of living we have come to expect, and we have done all of this at the expense of our children and in disobedience to God.

Satan has gained a powerful stronghold in the church world by the seduction of pleasure. Never has a culture had so much as the American culture in the last fifty years. In my lifetime technology and wealth have exploded. Why none of us have to work hard, that is most of us. We have so much at our fingertips. You don’t have to worry about cooking and baking half a day anymore, you can just stick the food in the microwave and in three minutes it is done. The world has offered the church pleasure and ease and the church has grabbed it. Churches have been sold a bill of goods and as a result they have no power with God. The temptress called pleasure has captivated us with her lustful charm that we cannot even enjoy a worship service unless we are entertained.

So churches today are bringing in camels, horses, dogs, and pigs along with everything else to try to entertain their people and keep them awake during a worship service.

I will never forget a discussion I had with a group of preachers who said you can't preach long and keep a congregation's attention. I asked them why they thought this. And they said it was because a long sermon won't entertain them. They argued that because of the entertainment industry people's attention span is shorter and they could not sit that long and endure the sermon unless it was entertaining. But if you get the sermon down to about twenty minutes they will be fine. That is what a lot of those men are doing right now. They are preaching about twenty minutes. And when adversity strikes one of their members there is no stability because there is no foundation. Their house will have been destroyed having been built upon shifting sand.

Moses chose the affliction of God's people rather than the pleasure of sin. Sin must have some attraction or it would never allure, tempt or entice us. There is some pleasure in sin if only for a season. It cannot be disputed that worldly pleasures are fun, but it is only temporary. Sin's pleasure will not last. Oh, my dear friend, you could live until you are one hundred and enjoy everything the world has but it will come to an end. You will die. There is something better than the pleasure of this world. I believe Moses understood what very few New Testament Christians understand, he understood that the pleasure of God here and now outweighs the pleasure of sin. Some of us have done some of the things that the world calls exciting and entertaining. But when you woke up the next morning you weren't so entertained. You were not so satisfied; the devil's cup will always leave a gnawing emptiness in your belly. The devil's food will always leave you lean of soul and malnourished, but God fills to overflowing and He fills you with good. He nourishes the soul and He satisfies the deepest longings; He brings peace to a troubled mind. He gives joy to a joyless spirit.

Let me suggest another temptation facing the churches of our nation, which Moses also faced, the temptation for power. As I said in our previous message, we have not seen the anger of an oppressing government in this country. We do not live under a régime or a king that tells us we cannot worship and adore our God. Although I am convinced that day is coming to America, it has not happened yet. We haven't seen power's anger and intimidation. But having not seen it does not mean we are free from the enslavement of power. In addition to the intimidation of power is the allurements of power. This is the temptation we in this nation have experienced. The church has been enticed by the lust for power that we have compromised so we can have the acceptance of the world. The church world, especially many in the conservative evangelical world, have mistakenly thought that if the church could wield political power that it would be better for society. The church could influence culture for good. And so much of the Christian world has been seduced by this desire for power.

Moses must have argued with himself before he made the decision to leave Egypt's palace and suffer the afflictions of his people. He surely must have wrestled with the notion that perhaps he could do his people more good by remaining close to the throne of Pharaoh. He could wield influence on the king. No doubt, he could have easily rationalized this having known the details

of his birth and deliverance. He could have said that this is the reason that God had put him in Pharaoh's household and court, and he would have had a biblical precedent for thinking this—the story of Joseph. God had put Joseph in the court of Pharaoh to save his people from starvation. But Moses loved something more than power, and it is this something that can help us as it did Moses to defeat pleasure's and power's temptation.

How do you defeat the temptation of pleasure and power? Look at verse twenty-six.

Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

First, I believe Moses recognized by faith the pleasures that the world offers as being outside of God's prescription of pleasure, and he saw them as they were—sin. Moses recognized that everything Egypt had to offer him was outside of God's plan for his life. Therefore it was wrong. Faith has the ability to discern evil even in good things. There are some things totally wholesome and good but sometimes they are evil for us. Moses understood that even material wealth, which is not evil in itself, for him would have been wrong because it would have been outside of God's plan for his life. God had something else for him. This kind of discernment comes only by faith.

Second, as we stated earlier, faith knows that sin's pleasures are only temporary. Even if Moses had experienced all that the world had to offer him he would have a day of judgment. And third, faith believes Christ's reproach is better than the world's treasures. This is something we need to stop and think about. Faith is able to see that the reproach of Jesus Christ is better than anything pleasurable that the world has to offer. Now from a very practical human standpoint that does not make sense. It is not fun or pleasurable to be criticized. The reproach of Christ means the world's scorn and ridicule. The world doesn't like our Master. It crucified Him; if He were here today they would execute Him again. The world's system is anti-Christ. Everyone is so concerned about when is the Anti-Christ coming? The spirit of Anti-Christ is already here and that is what operates this world, and as a result the world does not like the Lord, it hates Him. Therefore the world will hate all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prestige is one of the pleasures that the world offers. Every one of us wants to be accepted by someone, that is as natural as the desire for food or water is. We all have placed within us a desire to have somebody appreciate us and to accept us. We want the approval of others. That desire for approval can become a temptation. We begin to compromise our stance with God so that the world and people that we are associated with will approve of us. But Moses by faith was able to see the reproach of Jesus Christ was better than the best thing the world had to offer to him. How? Because Moses understood a principle of identification that many Christians don't understand. In other words, if you endure the same reproach that our Lord Jesus endured then it means you're identified with Him. The world views you as it viewed Him. This was the priceless treasure to Moses, and it ought to be to every one of us. Jesus said in John chapter fifteen verse eighteen, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen

you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” You have been so identified with Jesus in their minds that their hatred of Christ transfers to you. They see you like they see Him. That is a priceless treasure, to be so recognized as a person of God that you receive the reproach of Christ. That outweighs everything this world has to offer. Think about this. People literally know you as a man or a woman of God and that in you dwells the Most High, that when you speak to God, God listens. One of the things that impresses me about Moses was that God spoke to him face to face as a friend. To have that kind of a relationship comes by being willing to be identified with Christ.

Faith believes in the reward. Moses looked at the reward, “that he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” Faith believes in the reward, therefore Moses could give up the pleasures of this world because he knew they were only temporary anyway. He could accept the reward of God which is going to be eternal. What is the reward of God? God Himself is the reward. I wish you would forget about heaven for just a little while and concentrate on its Maker. I wish we would quit thinking about gates of pearl and streets of gold and think about the one who made it all. He is the reward. That is the passion of our hearts; at least that is what it should be. The reason why I can turn away from the pleasure of this world is because I have found a greater joy, a greater pleasure. In the 1700’s a man by the name of Phillip Dodridge said,

*Live while you live, the Epicure would say,
And seize the pleasures of the present day;
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,
And give to God each moment as it flies;
Lord, in my view let both united be;
I live in pleasure when I live to thee.*

When you really want to know joy, live for God with all of your heart. Seek Him with all of your heart and He shall be found and then you will find joy unspeakable.

Well, we must move quickly to my final point and that is Moses defeated the temptation of pain. Look at verse twenty-five again “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” He was willing to physically suffer even the suffering of the world and the entire affliction it brought against God’s people. Pain has a unique relationship to us. Although pain is a part of life, it is not instinctive to our nature. It is not instinctive to like pain. It is not instinctive to want to feel pain; there is something made in us that causes us to want to flee pain. The law of self-preservation causes us to avoid pain. It is wise to avoid pain. It is godly to avoid pain. It is not godly if a copperhead is on this platform to reach down and pick it up. That is not spirituality, it is foolishness. God put within me wisdom to avoid pain and preserve both life and limb. Therefore, because we have this strong sense of self-preservation, pain can have a very strong control over us. Someone said “Illness is the doctor to whom we pay most heed: to kindness, to knowledge we make promises only; pain we obey.”

What happens when you wake up on Sunday morning and you are in pain? It is not so unbearable that you cannot go to church. What do you decide? You will probably stay home. Often pain can cripple us in our devotion to God. There is such an inner connection with your body and your soul that often when our bodies are wracked with pain we can't even think about praying. What do you do then? That is when you need to grab someone else who can pray and let them pray for you and with you.

How did Moses overcome the fear of pain? The answer is again the same—his faith defeated it. His faith defeated it first by believing that God's afflictions are better than sin's pleasures. Suffering the affliction of God's people meant for Moses to suffer as the remainder of the Hebrews who were in bondage. In Philippians chapter three and verse ten Paul prayed for identification with Christ even in His afflictions. Paul at the end of his life is praying what was really the ultimate passion of his life, not building more churches, not telling more people about Jesus, not writing more theological letters, the passion of his life was Jesus. He says, Oh "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10). Paul realized what you and I know but don't want to acknowledge and that is we never look more like Jesus than when we are suffering for Jesus. Paul by faith was able to comprehend that suffering for Christ was so much better than all the joy the world had to offer. Paul said this was his calling and that this was the reason why he had been apprehended or chosen by God. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12). And this is true concerning Moses, and it is true for you and me.

Faith realizes and understands that God is building character through pain. There was a family in the San Francisco area that grew up with that kind of understanding of faith. The son's name was David Kraft. His father was a pastor, and a very godly man in the southern bay of San Francisco. David grew up with a father who constantly reminded David of God's faithfulness in the past, so that David could always face his future. David grew up in that kind of home and as he came to love Jesus Christ, he was converted. He felt the call of God into pastoral ministry. He went to a conservative Baptist seminary in Denver. At the time of the events of our story David was thirty-two and a very big athletic type, standing six feet and two inches, weighing two hundred pounds. He worked with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and was on fire for God. But at the age of thirty-two he was diagnosed with cancer. It devoured his body and over a period of time he dropped from two hundred pounds to eighty pounds. When he was about ready to pass from this life into eternity he asked his father to come to his hospital room, and lying there in that bed he said, "Dad, do you remember when I was a little boy how you used to just hold me in your arms close to your chest?" His dad nodded, he remembered. David said, "Do you think, Dad, you could do that one more time, one last time?" Again the father nodded and he bent down and picked up that six feet two inch, eighty pound son of his and held him close to his chest. His son's face was leaned up against his. Tears were streaming down both the faces of David and his father. And David simply said this to his father, "Dad, thank you for building the kind of character into my life that enables me to face even a moment like this."

Spurgeon said, "I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain." Pain is nothing to fear. The only thing about pain to fear is fearing pain. The faith of God's elect is a faith which "overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4), and not one which allows its possessor to be overcome! Revelation chapter twelve and verse eleven says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." There it is, faith does something to your heart. I don't know how else to explain it, but there comes a point where faith so captivates you that you don't hold on to this body very tightly. Living in this present world doesn't mean a whole lot to you except to glorify Jesus. "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Oh, dear brother, don't be like a Demas. Demas had been a faithful, loyal helper to Paul. But when Paul was in prison waiting for his execution Paul says "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world." That doesn't mean he went off into adultery, fornication or drunkenness. It simply means he wasn't willing to turn loose of his life for Jesus. He loved living in this world more than he loved living in the world to come and he compromised. Pleasure is deadly, isn't it? It could be our greatest good or our greatest evil. Find the pleasure that is in Christ. Do not hold onto your life tightly, and you will enjoy life like you have never before. Oh thank God that temptation can be overcome and the world's pleasure, pain, and power can be overcome by faith. Amen.