

+ Hebrews 11:24-28 + What Are You Looking Forward to? +
+ 14th Sunday after Pentecost + 6 September 2009 +

Everyone looks forward to something. A baby looks forward to a diaper change and a meal. A child looks forward to a special trip to the zoo or to that new toy or game on their birthday. A teen looks forward to getting the car keys and to graduation. A young couple looks forward to their wedding day and to the birth of their children. A worker looks forward to a vacation or to his retirement. A grandma looks forward to seeing her grandkids. Some simply look forward to dinner or tomorrow or a sunny day.

Everyone looks forward to something, but that something is always passing by. Diapers need to be changed. Trips end. Toys break or wear out. Games get boring. Special days become memories. Vacations end. Retirements get tough. Family goes back home and eventually, life ends. We look forward to lots of things, but in this life, so quickly those things come and go. Soon we're looking forward to something else that comes and goes..

Now in Hebrews 11, we hear about a man named Moses. At first glance, you'd think he was a fool, because he was so blessed and had so much ahead of him. Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the most powerful ruler in the known world at the time, had decreed that every male baby born of Hebrew slaves be thrown into the Nile River. Pharaoh feared an uprising of the nearly two million Hebrew slaves, who had settled in the Nile River Delta centuries before. Moses' parents, however, managed to hide the child for nearly three months until it was impossible to hide him any longer. So his mother prepared a waterproof basket. With tears streaming down her cheeks and final kisses gently touching his, Moses' mother placed her baby boy in the basket and let the current of the great river take him to who knew where. The current took the baby basket down the river to the place where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing. She discovered the basket and was shocked to find a cute little baby boy inside.

She took the little "orphan" in as her own son and even hired a Hebrew slave to nurse the child, never realizing the slave she hired was Moses' real mother. Pharaoh's daughter raised Moses in the royal palace of her powerful father. Moses grew in wisdom and strength and stature. He had a great future ahead of him as **"the son of Pharaoh's daughter"**— a life of unimaginable wealth, power, success, and royal luxury. Who knows? As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses could've even attained a prominent position as a ruler of some kind in the Egyptian empire. He could've had anything he wanted. He could've had anyone he wanted, but **"...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..."**

Yes, Moses had Hebrew roots, but nobody knew that. So why did he give up everything to join the two million Hebrew slaves in the pits of Egypt making bricks with mud and straw and constructing great cities and monuments under the oppression of their Egyptian taskmasters? Why did he bring down their mistreatment and oppression on himself?

If this was someone else from any other book, we would think he was a fool. Give up palaces for mud pits? Success for disgrace? Power for bondage? In fact, that might even be our first thought. What a fool to forsake all those pleasures and possibilities! Look what he had! How could he give them all up? He had so much to look forward to and then it was gone. What a fool by the world's standards. What a fool by mine too, but that's the sinful nature talking. To see someone give up so much for so little just doesn't make sense to my reason when the possibilities are so great.

...But then this account of Moses knocks you and me off our pious, privileged pedestals with condemnation. If I look down on Moses, then what am I really looking forward to? What do you eagerly expect to enjoy? Passing pleasure? Guilty pleasure? Stuff and experiences that pass away? What are you looking forward to? Things or a lifestyle that will disappear with age? With illness? With job loss or a cut in pay? With death? This account of Moses condemns me, because I have to ask myself the hard, honest questions: What am I really looking forward to? Am I really looking forward to the passing pleasures of sin? Of satisfaction I can see and experience right here and right now even though they'll pass away? Of messages that assure me that I will have the best life right now, but only leave me empty? Am I really looking forward to something that will leave me with nothing at death or will end in eternity in hell as I forfeit my soul to possess the world? Would I be willing to give it all up like Moses?

Why did Moses really give it all up? The writer of Hebrews provides an answer we couldn't possibly see with our eyes and worldly expectations. **"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin."**

Moses gave it all up because he was looking forward to something greater. **"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."** He gave it all up because **"the disgrace of Christ"** was more important and of greater worth than all the vast treasures of Egypt—treasures that passed away with the Egyptian rulers who tried to keep them in their cold, dead, mummified hands. Moses was

looking forward to something greater than all that—**“the reward”** of God’s grace in Christ Jesus, **“the reward”** of eternal life in heaven earned solely by the promised Savior who was to come. Moses gave it all up because the coming Christ was more important.

Eye-opening, isn’t it? There’s more! **“By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; for he endured because he saw him who is unseen.”** Forty years before Moses had fled in fear from mighty Pharaoh after murdering an Egyptian, but the Lord made Moses fearless to deliver the Israelites and bring them out of Egypt. By faith Moses looked forward to the Savior who had not yet appeared, but who was going to come. **“He saw him who is unseen”**, and that caused Moses to endure and persevere, even when Pharaoh threatened to destroy the Israelites. Through Moses, God displayed his mighty power to Pharaoh, as we heard in Exodus 7, but in anger Pharaoh refused to listen until God sent **“the destroyer of the firstborn”**. At the same time, the Lord delivered his people not through glorious means, but through the messy blood of lambs painted on Hebrew doorposts. By blood, the Lord rescued his people from slavery and death.

So then Moses really wasn’t a fool! By faith, he knew what lay ahead though it was unseen. By faith, Moses looked past the passing pleasures and treasures of Egypt to the time when a greater Savior would come in love to rescue God’s people by enduring even greater disgrace with an even greater sacrifice—himself. By faith, Moses knew that by the blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord would deliver his people from the slavery of sin and death, so all who believe in him would enjoy the eternal reward of life in heaven. By faith, Moses could look forward to all that which wouldn’t pass away.

Before you can look forward to that which doesn’t pass away, you need to look back first. The unseen Christ did fulfill the prophecies and did take on human flesh for you. In fact, Christ was disgraced for you. He had an eternity of the glories and comforts and power and wealth of heaven, but yet he considered disgrace for you greater than all that for him. He allowed himself to be conceived and born as a human child. His first cradle was a feeding trough. He endured the tough reality of a childhood and adolescence in poverty. When he became an adult, he gained popularity, but as we heard in John 6, many deserted him for his **“hard teaching”**.

Those who should’ve supported him turned their backs on him in rejection. Then like a lamb to the slaughter, Jesus allowed his blood to be shed on a cross and then his dead body placed in a tomb he didn’t earn or deserve, all for you. Jesus always looked forward not to the time when he would receive his own praises and glory, but to the time when he would rescue you and me from the oppression of sin and death. He gave up everything, so you and I could have more than all the everything in this life and in this world. This Jesus, however, proved he was more than another social savior. He proved he is the only source of life when he rose from the dead on the third day. In so doing Jesus earned the eternal reward of heaven for you and me. For that reason, when you look back, then you can look forward to the fulfillment of your salvation—the eternal reward from the unseen Christ.

With eyes of faith, then, you can avoid being distracted by the cares and worries and stuff of this life. Like the blinders wagon drivers used to put on horses so they wouldn’t be distracted, but would pull the wagon straight ahead, our eyes of faith are focused forward by Christ crucified. By faith in Christ, you can then realize that all around you is passing away and changing, but Jesus and his Word and his reward will never ever pass away. It gives you a new perspective as you realize every good and perfect gift is from above. The Lord chooses to give and take away, but blessed be his name, because he gives what can never be taken away—the eternal reward of heaven earned and given by Christ to you.

A few verses after our text, the writer of Hebrews has some encouragement for us as we look forward to what really matters. He urges us to fix our eyes, our hearts, and our anticipation on the One who endured disgrace and opposition and the cross, so we could have what really matters. **“Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** By faith, then look forward to the end! Amen.