

**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 fleeting pleasures of sin. 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)**

Among the many interesting things left for me in the superintendent minister's study at Inverness

- Was a book of signatures of people who had 'signed the pledge' – dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century
- The Band of Hope was a Methodist movement that educated young people about the dangers of alcohol
- members signed a solemn pledge, 'I Promise to Abstain From All Intoxicating Drinks As A Beverage'
- others signed pledges with slightly different words that included the phrase 'except as medicine'
- the names of the signatories in the book in Inverness were recognisably Scottish and included ages
- Willie Mackenzie (aged 6), Florence MacDougal (aged 7) and so the book continued
- Hardly an adult among them – that's not to say, of course, that there were no adults
- At that time, most Congregational ministers had signed the pledge, the majority of Baptists were teetotal
- And in the various parts of the Methodist family, drinking alcohol was universally frowned upon
- But it was the age of the signatories that made a lasting impression on me
- A child could join the Band of Hope at six years of age and the quicker they were signed up the better
- I am sure that some of them stuck to that pledge into adulthood – but perhaps not so many, we don't know

It was this that came to mind when I read, 'By faith Moses, when he had grown up,'

- Stephen tells us that Moses was about 40 years old at the time (Acts 7:23)
- Which suggests that the writer to the Hebrews is saying that the decision that Moses was reached
- Was not the decision of a child or a difficult adolescent but the decision of a mature man

The loss of what is now at least two generations of young people from the Christian Church is a great sadness

- Particularly sad is the loss of those who made professions of Christian faith in their younger years
- Perhaps, like me, you are someone who made a first profession of Christian faith in your younger years
- But, perhaps, also like me, you feel you made several significant subsequent professions of faith
- In fact there is a sense when with Philip Doddridge (1702-51), the author who wrote the lines
- ‘O happy day that fixed my choice, on Thee, my Saviour and my God,’ we must continue
- ‘High heaven, that heard the solemn vow, That vow renewed shall daily hear,’

We must not make light of Christian decisions of adolescents, teenagers, even very small children

- They are steps, often very significant steps in the right direction – but they will certainly be tested
- Recently, I have been remembering the conversion of one my fellow-students to whom I witnessed
- She believed in Jesus as her Lord and Saviour about a month after her nineteenth birthday
- Looking back, even that seems pretty young now, but the key point with Moses is that he is not a child
- He is now in the position to exercise faith on his own behalf – and he does so decisively

The writer to the Hebrews appears to be dealing with a community that includes the apathetic and discouraged

- In the previous chapter (10:32-36), the writer recognises that they had endured conflict, suffering
- Insult and persecution – at other times they stood side by side with those who were treated like that
- They suffered with those who were in prison, joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property
- Because their focus had been on better and more lasting possessions – so the writer urges them
- not to throw away their confidence, but to persevere and to receive what they were promised
- as a response he gives them a gallery of portraits of those who have stood faithful
- and now in similar words to his previous exhortation paints a portrait of Moses – and shows him

## I REFUSING AN EASY LIFE

The choices that faced Moses were clear alternatives – and it was a choice that could only be made by faith

- among the Egyptians, Moses had status, wealth and access to more or less anything that he wanted
- life as an Egyptian prince gave him a right to privilege and distinction
- meanwhile the Hebrew people were living a life of servitude and forced-labour
- Knowing full-well what he was doing, Moses ‘refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter’
- Bible commentator F.F. Bruce says this ‘must have seemed an act of folly by all worldly standards’
- For in just a few verses in Exodus Moses goes from royal prince to fugitive in a foreign land (Ex. 2:11-15)

I wonder if one of the challenges in Britain today is we give the impression that being a Christian is too easy

- We have reduced Christian discipleship to going to church and a few private devotions
- And even things like going to church are negotiable if something we judge to be more important crops up
- But perhaps we run into difficulties because we have a fundamental misunderstanding of discipleship
- It was not going to the synagogue or sharing in few private devotions that caused difficulty for Jesus
- At the heart of his trial and the alleged offence for which he was convicted and crucified
- Was that he was uniquely the Son of God, the Messiah – the Christ or anointed one
- His offence was his identity and his kingship: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews (Jn. 19:19)
- Consequently, we refuse an easy life when we affirm our belief in Jesus – not simply that he existed
- But that he was and is uniquely the Son of God, the Messiah – the Christ or anointed one
- It is unshakeable faith in Jesus as only Lord and Saviour that will cause Christians to run into difficulties
- And hard on the heels of that is living by the values that he not only taught but also exemplified
- People don’t mind if you go to church and say prayers but they mind being challenged by a different life
- The life of kingdom values exemplified in the Beatitudes

## II CHOOSING A HARD LIFE

Moses knew if he were true to his identity and counted among the people of God that he would be mistreated

- The slavery of the Hebrew people in Egypt was not like our normal idea of slavery from the Caribbean
- Slavery in Egypt was the subjugation and oppression of a people in forced labour (Ex. 1:11)

The expression ‘the fleeting pleasures of sin’ has been much misunderstood

- The expression ‘pleasures of sin’ does not mean that Moses lived a dissolute life
- He need not necessarily have been over-indulgent
- Rather, once Moses saw where God’s call lay, it would have been sin for him to turn away from it
- Life could well have been easy and pleasurable but only at the expenses of disobeying God, which is sin
- And, when compared with eternity, these pleasures are ‘fleeting’, momentary, not long-lasting
- Moses accepted that there are more valuable things in life than material treasures
- While Christians look back to Christ, by faith Moses could look forward to the coming deliverance
- And as that deliverance is ultimately revealed to be in Christ, disgrace is still ‘for the sake of Christ’

For the writer to the Hebrews, it was choosing the hard life with God’s people that was Moses’ timely example

- To the community of faith, that is to the church, where certain members were leaving (Heb. 10:25)
- Moses exchanged the easy life for the hard life – Jesus exchanged the glory of heaven for the cross
- When Moses suffered, he suffered with Christ; when the believer suffers, the believer suffers with Christ
- When Moses defended the Hebrew slave who was being beaten, he clearly identified with his people
- But the net result is that he had to flee to Midian where he became a shepherd
- In the providence of God, this unwelcome experience equipped him for further service
- When life is easy for us, our witness is so much less powerful than when life is hard

### III LOOKING FOR ETERNAL LIFE

The writer to the Hebrews offers this reason for the choices that Moses made – they were choices ‘by faith’ but

- It was Moses’ perspective that informed his choices, ‘he was looking ahead to his reward’
- There is no indication as to what that reward might be, but it must be heavenly rather than earthly treasure
- For Moses saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo before he died but did not enter it (Deut. 34:1)
- But Canaan, the Promised Land is an earthly counterpart of heaven, Moses was looking for eternal life
- Therefore, his actions were governed by a perspective not on present enjoyment but future hope

Australian Anglican and Bible commentator, the late Leon Morris, comments on this passage:

Moses looked forward to the “reward.” He bore in mind the just consequences of his actions and was not deceived by the glitter of the Egyptian court. History, of course, has vindicated him. We do not so much as know the name of the Pharaoh of his time; and even if we did, he would be of interest to us chiefly because of his link with Moses. But the choice Moses made resulted in his influence still being felt. It is not “realistic” to opt for the security of worldly safety. Moses did not do this, and he was right. It is faith that finally emerges triumphant, not worldliness.

Our choices are dependent on our perspective, not only in this life but also in eternity

- For a person who does not believe in anything after death, or even in the hope of life eternal
- There is no eternal perspective – everything is for the ‘here and now’
- And while the believer sometimes makes poor choices that work against faith
- The unbeliever cannot really make good choices that work for faith

Moses could have remained in Egypt, with people who did not believe in the true and living God

- But he refused an easy life and chose a hard life because he was looking for eternal life
- If we are correct in our understanding of the letter to the Hebrews
- As being written to Jewish Christians, some, perhaps even many, who were thinking of turning back
- We have to understand that they were not turning back to unbelief in the sense that we would know it
- They would be men and women for whom life would have been easier in the synagogue
- Because that was the place of safe, formal religion, without the person and ministry of Jesus Christ

And there, so it seems to me, is the very heart of the challenge

- There is a small, we might even say, ever-diminishing company of people
- Who I contend have safe, formal religion, dare I say, ‘without the person and ministry of Jesus Christ’
- It is his identity and the life of kingdom values exemplified in the Beatitudes that is at stake

It is not going to make any of today’s Christians more popular if we challenge not only the ways of the world

- But some of the views held within the church – especially if we say that we will be called upon
- To refuse an easy life and chose a hard life because we are looking for eternal life
- Faith will ultimately drive us to certain decisions and actions about the identity and kingship of Jesus

Many years ago I met a minister who had served in Kenya for 22 years

- As a boy, he had grown up in the church where I had become minister some 40 years later
- After he had told stories of life in Africa and escapes from crocodiles and other incidents
- He said to me, privately. ‘The challenges that you face here are not so different from Africa
- But it can seem harder for you, because they are not so exciting’ – the key is to live ‘by faith’