

**By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.**

**(Hebrews 11:27-28)**

If not the greatest, Michelangelo's David is considered to be one of the greatest sculptures in the world

- Created between 1501 and 1504, the story has it that when Michelangelo was commissioned for the work
- He looked at hundreds of blocks of marble before he decided on the 'right' one
- To the ordinary person, all the blocks of marble would probably have looked more or less the same
- But, as writer Barbara Hofmeister observes, for Michelangelo it needed to be a certain piece of marble
- Nothing else would do because he already knew exactly what he wanted his David to look like
- In his mind's eye, he could already see the end result – and when asked
- how he was going to create such a fine figure as King David out of this huge piece of marble, he answered
- 'That's easy. All I have to do is chip away everything that is not David.'

I was hopeless at art at school and found it very difficult to create anything worthy of the name artistic

- I came 32/33 in my last term of art (when I was nearly 13 and had decided Latin was the better option)
- And if not that term I know the art master had simply commented on my work, 'somewhat uninspired'
- Happily, I do have some other gifts – I've often said about youth work
- 'it is easy to be good at it for the first three weeks'
- Written compositions whether they be sermons or Bible studies or articles for church newsletters
- Are not that difficult to write – well, not for the first three times at least
- Some people might suggest that what you have to do thereafter is to persevere
- But I am not sure that it is the case – and it seems to me we have to bear this in mind with Moses

The writer to the Hebrews has already introduced Moses, one of the greatest of the Old Testament figures

- The story of Moses begins with his deliverance from Pharaoh's edict ordering the death of Hebrew boys
- Adding his parents 'saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict' (11:23)
- Despite the privileges of being brought up by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses refused to be known as her son
- 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. The writer to the Hebrews continues:

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

The passage has perplexed Bible commentators because of this dilemma – Moses left Egypt twice

- the first time he fled to Midian because he had killed the Egyptian oppressor and was afraid (Ex. 2:14)
- the second time he left with the Israelites in what we know as the Exodus
- this passage says, 'By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger' and continues, 'he persevered'
- now back to our conversations about two artists at either end of artistic ability – Michelangelo and me!
- It would not have mattered how long I persevered in my art classes, the reality was I could not do it
- And a great part of my inability was exactly what the teacher wrote, I was uninspired, I could not see it

When I began work on this passage, my eye immediately lighted on the word 'persevered', 'he persevered'

- I like that, it suits my temperament and it suits my upbringing – where you were never allowed to give up
- Persevering, keeping going, not giving up are all virtues in my book – but persevering is not the key but

## I PERCEPTION

It took Michelangelo two years to form his statue of David but all the way along he was working to his vision

- I have no doubt that in work of that size he needed to persevere – but just keeping going was not the key
- He need to keep the vision of the completed masterpiece before him – to fail to do so what have meant
- That for all his endeavour, perseverance would not have been enough, nothing would have been achieved

Probably the most likely solution to the problem that the Old Testament says that Moses was afraid

- But the writer to the Hebrews says that ‘he left Egypt not fearing the King’s anger’
- Is similar his parents’ dilemma – they were afraid of the King’s edict so they had to hide Moses
- If fear had remained their dominant emotion then they would not even have had the courage to hide him
- When Moses first realised that his killing the Egyptian oppressor was known – he was afraid
- But he did not continue to be afraid because of his change of perception
- He persevered because he saw him who is invisible – but how does one see the invisible?

Christians believe that the invisible God has appeared in Jesus – in whom the glory of God was veiled

- There are times in the Old Testament where people seem to have seen God
- Sometimes this might be a metaphor (e.g. we say ‘seen the light’ meaning ‘come to understand or know’)
- Jacob believed that the mysterious man with whom he wrestled at Peniel was God (Gen.32:30)
- Remarking, ‘I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared’. ‘Peniel’ means face of God
- We call this remarkable appearance of God a ‘theophany’ – a visible manifestation of God
- Whether we should conclude that ‘Moses saw him who is invisible’ means by the eye of faith
- Or whether we are perhaps to think that Moses saw God veiled, perhaps in the burning bush (Ex. 3)
- Is difficult to say – but the key to Moses’ persevering is perception (of the God of his fathers)

## II PASSOVER

The story of the Passover and of the Exodus is a vital part of the Old Testament

- The Hebrew people had been in Egypt since the time of Joseph – a period of 400 years elapsed
- In the latter part of this period the Hebrew people were forced to work on Pharaoh's building projects
- They had to make bricks without straw (meaning the bricks were heavier and the work was harder)
- eventually a king came to power in Egypt who did not know about Joseph (Exodus 1:8) who,
- fearful of the growing Hebrew population, ordered the extermination of all boys born to Hebrew women

When Moses asked Pharaoh for spiritual freedom for the Hebrew people, Pharaoh refused

- In judgment, God sent ten plagues of increasing severity upon Egypt – the last the death of the first-born
- But the Hebrews were protected from the 'smiting of the first-born' through the 'Passover'
- a ritual of the daubing the blood of a sacrificial lamb on the doorposts and lintel of their houses
- this was something essentially performed in faith – there was no precedent for sprinkling this blood

The writer to the Hebrews separates this event into three parts

- the Passover – which could mean simply the celebration of the 'Passover meal or Feast'
- the application of blood – a rather gruesome marking out of Israelite houses with sacrificial blood
- and the fact that the first-born of Israel remained untouched
- the Passover, the meal which Jesus celebrated as the Last Supper is still evoked by our Lord's Supper
- being covered by the blood of the lamb is a theme extended in the New Testament (Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7)
- Perhaps we sit rather lightly to the death of the first-born
- But it is, of course, a mark of God's judgment as well as being his means of:

### III PRESERVATION

The first-born of Israel were preserved from the destroyer by being covered by the blood

- God promised that when he saw the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe
- he would himself pass over the threshold of the home, and prevent the destroyer from entering the house
- In faith Moses and the Israelites complied with the divine directive and were guarded by God
- their first-born children and livestock were spared from the plague of death that ravaged the Egyptians
- there was nothing in the previous experience either of Moses or the Israelites to justify this action
- the writer to the Hebrews reminds us – it was accomplished ‘by faith’, faith was his mainspring (Morris)
- when instituting the Passover, Moses had nothing to go on but the conviction that God had directed him

Moses fixed his eyes on the ultimate and not on the immediate, on the eternal reward not the temporal gain

- it is important to notice that the only action required by the Hebrew people was an act of faith
- in simple faith they kept the Passover. They relied on God who had spoken through his servant.
- And they were saved through the sign of the blood of the lamb
- Here, as elsewhere in Hebrews, blood is ‘a life-affirming medium’ (Lane)

In this account of Moses and the Passover, can we help but see a pattern of salvation, even for us today

- I want to suggest that so much part of the problem of the church and Christian life today is perception
- We have people all around us and their great mission seems to be to persevere
- This, of course, in itself can be a noble motive – we don’t want to give up just because it is tough
- Discipleship can be hard and keeping going is true and laudable – but it is not enough
- We have people who are motivated by tradition (it takes one to know one I suppose, I understand it well)
- We have people who are motivated by noble aspirations – but Moses is not commended for persevering

Moses was able to persevere because of his PERCEPTION – he saw him who is invisible

- And by faith the believer also can see him
- We have to get back to the idea that being a Christian is a matter of PERCEPTION
- That is we have seen, at least by the eye of faith, God revealed to us
- And he is supremely revealed to us in Jesus and the love and grace of God in Jesus
- Is shown most clearly in his death on the cross – now wonder that Isaac Watts wrote:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul exclaimed:

- ‘For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us!’ (1 Cor. 5:7)
- It is a reminder that the sacrificial lamb is our hope of salvation too – he is our PASSOVER

The theme of judgment is one hardly spoken of in the church today

- But a true perception of God must include an understanding not only of his grace and mercy
- But also of his justice and holiness – the blood of the lamb is our hope of PRESERVATION
- We cannot go on just persevering – motivational as such a sermon might have been
- It is a matter of PERCEPTION – seeing the grace of God, supremely at the cross of Jesus Christ
- It is remembering his saving provision in the PASSOVER – faith in the blood of the lamb
- It is PRESERVATION – by his grace, that even through judgement we can be saved by his precious blood