

CHOOSING TO LIVE BY FAITH: LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY
HEBREWS 11:27-29

In Malaysia there is a relatively small group of people (59,000) called the Semai. They might be fairly typical of what you might think about a Southeast Asian culture: they are sustained economically primarily through farming and hunting, they live in small, isolated camps on mountain slopes at high altitudes, and they grow mountain rice, millet, and maize. One of their core cultural values is that they want to eat to the point that they feel full. One writer described them this way:



[The Semai] may represent the most non-violent and conflict-averse society on earth. Anthropologists posit that after enduring a century of predation by Malay raiders and slavers, they developed a sense of “learned helplessness”; because it didn’t seem possible to fight back, they adopted a pattern of fleeing from threats and surrendering to domination.



The Semai continue to instill this approach to life in their children, teaching them that the world is full of threatening forces beyond their control. Learning to get along, even if it means tolerating out-of-line behavior, is prized, and any argumentation, anger, or assertiveness is suppressed. Because they can lead to aggression, competitive games are banned. Encouraged to be fearful, children are repeatedly taught one overriding maxim: “It is safer to be cautious than brave.” [AoM]

Maybe that last phrase resonates with you: “It is safer to be cautious than brave.” Maybe that even sounds wise or “right.” It is safer to be cautious. Who wants to take risks? Is that right? *Is that right for the believer?* In a life of uncertainty, hardship, and risks, should caution be the attribute that directs us?

That was part of the temptation of the persecuted believers to whom the letter of Hebrews is addressed. As a persecuted people, they were considering giving up their faith in Christ and returning to Judaism. If they did, they reasoned, their persecution would stop; it seemed a wise decision and approach.

The author uses a variety of means to encourage them to persist with Christ, trusting that Christ would provide and care for them. One means he uses is to give them a series of short biographies of people from the OT who maintained their faith despite a variety of hardships. One of those men was Moses (11:23-29).

In the first verses about him (and his parents) that we looked at last week, we saw that there were both external and internal pressures that tempted him to conform to ungodly principles and entice him away from believing in God. In the rest of the examples from his life we will see this morning that there are a variety of uncertainties in life that need to be navigated. From Moses we learn —

TO LIVE BY FAITH, PURPOSEFULLY CHOOSE CHRIST IN EVERY UNCERTAINTY.

The world was not safe for Moses. The world was not safe for the Hebrew readers to whom this letter was written. The world is not safe for us. Dangers of various kinds (particularly spiritual dangers) surround us virtually every day. The temptation will be to be fearful and give up Christ for the sake of safety. The life of Moses (and three particular evidences of his faith) **provides three examples of how to fight fear with faith...**

1. **Combat the Fear of PERSECUTION by Looking at the PERSON of Christ (v. 27)**
2. **Combat the Fear of DEATH by Looking at the BLOOD of Christ (v. 28)**
3. **Combat the Fear of the UNKNOWN by Looking at the GLORY of Christ (v. 29)**

1. Combat the Fear of PERSECUTION by Looking at the PERSON of Christ (v. 27)

- Last Sunday as we drove home from our worship service, Raye Jeanne and I were talking about Moses, and she made a comment that Moses wasn't afraid of Pharaoh — and I said, "Yes, but *Moses* also tells us that after killing the Egyptian and defending the Hebrew slave, he *was* afraid and went to Midian (Ex. 2:14-15) — and I have seven days to figure out how Moses can say he was afraid and the writer of Hebrews says he wasn't afraid" (Heb. 11:27). My time is up, *right now*.
 - ✓ Our passage tells us that *by faith [Moses] left Egypt* (but *not fearfully*). The assumption is that the writer is talking about the event that led to him going to Midian (Ex. 2:16ff).
 - ✓ That seems to keep the chronology in order: Midian, Passover, Red Sea.
 - ✓ But the problem is that Exodus says that he was fearful. A few commentators say that this is the event the writer of Hebrews has in mind, but that Moses wasn't really fearful — but they don't say how he was and wasn't fearful at the same time.
 - ✓ There is another time that Moses left Egypt — when he left with the nation after the plagues (Ex. 13:17ff). The problem is that it messes up the chronology: Exodus, Passover, Red Sea.
 - ✓ I think the writer of Hebrews is thinking about the exodus for two primary reasons:
 - When he left for Midian, he came back (40 years later, Acts 7:30); so the argument can be made that he didn't completely leave then. The writer also emphasizes in this verse that Moses *left Egypt* — the word is "forsake, renounce." He turned his back on Egypt and everything that he might have been entitled to enjoy there as Pharaoh's adopted grandson.
 - While the Passover was in Exodus 12 and the departure of the people began in Exodus 13:17, notice what happens in Moses' last recorded words with Pharaoh in Ex. 11:6-8 — the final words are Moses' own commentary on what happened: *he went out from Pharaoh...*

"Never has there been a greater expression of faith and spiritual courage than this....Moses was indignant about Pharaoh's obstinate rebellion against God. He had in front of him a bloody tyrant, armed with all the power of Egypt, threatening him with death if he persisted in the work God had given him. But, far from being terrified, or failing in his duty in any way, he professed his resolve to carry on and called down destruction on the tyrant himself. This is how Moses left Egypt. He did not fear the king's anger." [John Owen]

- ✓ In the Plagues, the Pharaoh (and this was different king than Moses' adoptive grandfather) repeatedly made threats against Moses and the Israelites (5:4-9; 8:32; 9:34-35; 10:28). He was unwilling to let the nation go because he wanted to keep his "slave force" to provide for Egypt.
- ✓ But Moses was resolutely *not fearing the wrath...* (even as his parents had been unafraid, v. 23).
 - Certainly he was tempted to fear (and he was fearful at other times); but now, he was unafraid.
 - "Fear is one of Satan's most effective, and therefore most used, weapons..." [MacArthur]

- There are many kinds of fear — the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM V; and I am not endorsing it) doesn't list all phobias, but it does list five categories of phobias:
 - ... **Natural/environment type:** phobias of nature, weather, and environmental events. These can include the fear of thunder and lightning (astraphobia) or water (aquaphobia).
 - ... **Injury type:** phobias related to a fear of physical harm or injury, including a fear of the dentist (dentophobia) or injections (trypanophobia).
 - ... **Animal type:** phobias of animals or insects, like the fear of dogs (cynophobia), snakes (ophidiophobia), and insects (entomophobia).
 - ... **Situational type:** phobias triggered by specific situations, including the fear of washing (ablutophobia) and enclosed spaces (claustrophobia).
 - ... **Other types:** Fears that don't fit into the other four types are included in this category. This can include things such as a fear of dolls, vomiting, or loud sounds.
- The temptation for Moses would be to be fearful of the explosive anger (**wrath**) of the Pharaoh that could have led him to be afraid of greater persecution and even death. *He was not afraid.*
- What happened to turn Moses from a fearful man (Ex. 2:14) into a bold man (Ex. 11)?
 - ✓ He was not fearful because (**for**) **he endured**. This is not the normal NT word for endurance (this is the only time this word is used in the NT). It has the idea of strength and courage — he intentionally fought his fears and made himself strong.
 - ✓ How did he make himself strong to endure (and not become fearful)? **as seeing Him who is unseen**. Moses was strong because He was looking to the Lord for his strength and help.
 - It is notable that if this leaving is the Exodus, it happened after Ex. 3:1 — Moses “saw” the “unseen” God. And that vision emboldened him to stand against Pharaoh in Egypt.
 - We also know that Moses was one who later cultivated unique fellowship with God (**Ex 33:11**).
 - ✓ While we cannot see God physically, we can cultivate fellowship with Him that will enable us to endure in similar ways (Ps. 27:1, 8). While we cannot see the Father, He has given us the Son, so that we might “see” the Father (**Jn. 1:18**). Thinking on the person and work of Christ and His endurance and provision for us will strengthen us (Col. 3:1ff).
 - ✓ Do you remember when the disciples crossed the Sea with Jesus (Mk. 4:35ff)? When we are fearful, it is worth asking whether we are looking at the storm or the Savior.
- The writer of Hebrews is using this example of Moses to remind us of the importance of remembering the One who we cannot yet see, but we trust (**Heb. 12:1-2**).
 - ✓ Just because I don't see Him doesn't mean He is not acting on my behalf.
 - ✓ Just because I don't see Him doesn't mean He is inattentive or incapable.
 - ✓ Keep your eyes fixed on the Savior who has authored your faith — and watch what He does (**12:2**).

2. Combat the Fear of **DEATH** by Looking at the **BLOOD** of Christ (v. 28)

- I mentioned at the beginning that living by faith means trusting God in *uncertainties*. When I say uncertainties I mean things that are unknown, unpredictable, and unsure (non-guaranteed).
- This verse reveals a massive uncertainty: ***the Passover and the sprinkling of blood***.
 - ✓ ***Passover*** refers to the final plague in which a ***destroyer*** (said to be God in Ex. 11:4; 12:12-13, 23, 27, 28; and a group of angels Ps. 78:49) killed the all the firstborn in Egypt, including cattle (11:4-6).
 - ✓ Specifically, “Passover” referred to God “hovering over” and not destroying some. He would hover over each home and examine it and make a verdict of judgment or grace.
 - ✓ The verdict was based on ***the sprinkling of blood*** — each family was to slaughter a lamb and then place the blood on the posts and lintel of the door (12:3-7). The ***destroyer*** would look for the blood on the door and if he saw it, he would “pass over” without entering with death.
- It is this practice that Moses ***kept by faith***. In fact, the sense of the word is not just “kept,” but “initiated and kept perpetually.” The practice continued after Moses instituted it.
 - ✓ There were two things that demanded faith from Moses:
 - There had been no explicit command like this previously (though perhaps Gen. 3:21; 8:20; 22:9).
 - There is no inherent power in blood to hold back the angel. It was symbolic.
 - ✓ And this was a previously unseen symbol. There was nothing in history or personal experience to “justify this action.” But Moses and Israel believed and trusted God with their lives.
 - ✓ Moses and Israel believed that God:
 - Would be wrathful against the firstborn in all Israel
 - Would withhold his wrath on the basis of blood
- Moses and Israel staked their lives on this faith — they fought the fear of death by looking at blood, and though they didn’t understand it fully (Heb. 12:39), they were looking forward to Christ who is the ultimate means of God sparing sinners from death and passing over sins:
 - ✓ God is still wrathful against sin and sinners (Heb. 4:13).
 - ✓ Christ gave Himself as the ultimate sacrifice and blood sprinkling for sin (9:11-14; 10:10-14).
 - ✓ When we believe that He will pass over our sins because of Jesus, we will be saved from God’s wrath.
 - ✓ Of all our fears, death is our greatest fear — for good reason, since death is 1/1 (9:27). To combat that fear, Moses looked to the blood of the lamb; we look at the blood of the final Lamb.
 - ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, I urge you to repent and begin believing today...
- This truth about Christ’s blood is also a reminder to the readers that they were looking to escape a temporary death by leaving Christ; and in leaving Christ, they were facing an eternal death. Bad trade.
- There are no guarantees of physical protection on earth; but there *are* guarantees for protection from eternal death in the person of Christ (which is why 2 Tim. 4:17-18 is so encouraging).

3. Combat the Fear of the UNKNOWN by Looking at the GLORY of Christ (v. 29)

- If you read Heb. 11:29 without the historical context you might be tempted to think there were no problems when the Israelites got to the Red Sea. But there were problems (*fears*):
 - ✓ The Egyptians closed in on them and they were afraid of death (Ex. 14:10-11)
 - ✓ They preferred their enslavement to death in the wilderness or the unknown (14:12)
 - ✓ The psalmist calls their fear *rebellion* (Ps. 106:7).
 - ✓ While they were weak, they ultimately acted in faith and something remarkable happened.
- They *passed through the Red Sea...* — no one “passes through” a body of water, but God acted:
 - ✓ God blew and created walls of water on their right and left as they walked *on dry land* (14:21)
 - ✓ God stationed Himself (cloud/fire, 14:20) between Israel and Egypt
 - ✓ God *confused* the army of the Egyptians and made their chariots undrivable (14:24-25)
 - ✓ God returned the water to its natural function (14:26)
 - ✓ God destroyed the entire army of Egypt (14:28) — they were drowned (Heb. 11:29)
 - ✓ In all this, God acted to declare the power and glory of His name (Ps. 106:8)
- Just as with the Passover, the Red Sea parting had never happened before. God, through Moses, was saying “watch Me and trust Me. If you watch, you will see My glory and My provision.”
 - ✓ The only job of the Israelites was to watch (and trust, Ex. 14:14).
 - ✓ God *intentionally* put Israel in this hard place and then said, “watch Me.”
 - ✓ Our circumstances are often harsh and hard. We are tempted to say, “let me find the way of ease and safety out of this trial.” God says, “If you watch Me, I will sustain you through the hardship.”
 - ✓ Moses and the Israelites, the Hebrews, and we can all look to God in our troubles, and He will not only keep us (10:36 — the theme of this chapter), but He will also reveal His magnificence to us.
 - ✓ Perhaps we don’t fully see His magnificence because we are looking for another escape from trials.
 - ✓ God fought for Israel and the Hebrews; He will fight for us, even when we are in unknown territory.

CONCLUSION: We live in a world where safety and guarantees are a high goal, if not the highest goal:

- ✓ **Guarantees** of health
- ✓ **Guarantees** of financial safety
- ✓ **Guarantees** of product safety
- ✓ **Guarantees** of personal and relational safety
- ✓ **Guarantees** of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We may not be from Semai, but we often affirm their philosophy: “It is safer to be cautious than brave.”

God says, “It is safer to trust Me than to have any other attempted security.”

BENEDICTION: Hebrews 13:20-21