

REFUSING AND CHOOSING

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." Hebrews 11:24-26.

This text introduces us to one of the grandest characters, and it refers to the greatest event in his life. This single choice shaped his whole after-life. As a statesman, law-giver, poet, prophet, priest, and general, Moses had no superior and few equals. In a marked degree he had those three absolutely essential qualities to success: talent, ambition, and energy.

From his Hebrew ancestors, Moses inherited those qualities of character and religious principles which form the surest foundation for life's highest achievements. From the cultural influences of the palace and the court of Pharaoh, he learned the arts, sciences, and literature which enabled him to interpret the thoughts of God to man in a remarkable way.

Moses was born of a despised race that was in captivity in Egypt. He was doomed to destruction. He was saved by the shrewdness and love of his mother, then adopted into the family of the royal house. He was reared as a prince and educated to the last degree of knowledge that then was attainable. With a mind peculiarly fitted to take on education, he stood apparently upon the threshold of all the things that men most desire in this world. There was nothing that wealth can give that he could not have. There was nothing in pleasure that was not accessible to him. There was nothing in position, honor, and government that was not open to him.

The momentous hour had come for him. His education was completed; his power was fully matured; his age was about forty; his hour of decision and destiny had come and he was at the forks of the road. He had to decide whether he would identify himself with the suffering race who were his kindred and whose cause was the cause of righteousness and mercy; or whether he would choose to rank on the side of their oppressors with whom in upbringing and position he was already associated. Moses did not act rashly or unadvisedly in his choice.

Crises always come. They came in the day of Abraham. They blackened the horizon during Daniel's captivity. They imprisoned Joseph but his imprisonment gave him a supreme opportunity for service. They made black the skies of Israel's sojourn in Egypt and gave Moses a platform on which to stand to emancipate his people from the house of bondage to the land of freedom.

What one does in a crisis reveals one's true character. The national crisis into which Moses was thrust revealed that he was a stalwart giant, not a puny pigmy; a man of vision, not a man of short-sightedness; a man who was sacrificial, not an indolent; a man of creative ingenuity, not a slave of circumstances. Moses was not satisfied merely to exist; he strove to live gloriously. He regarded life as an entrustment, not as an evasion. He turned imponderable obstacles into vehicles of victory. He lighted a night of pessimism with a torch of genuine optimism. He was directed by faith, not by fear. He refused to lounge on beds of ease but chose rather to sacrifice himself on the cross of service. He lifted the dread of his day by the dream of a better tomorrow.

1. Moses refused to lounge on beds of ease.

He chose to sacrifice himself on the cross of service. Moses was no timeserver; he was a servant of all time. He did not follow the dictates of popularity; he chose the course of principle. Pleasure was not his objective; high purpose was his destined goal. Ease did not appeal to him; the emancipation of his people passionately possessed him. Treasures on earth did not interest him; laying up treasures in heaven gladdened his heart. He did not follow the road of least resistance because he knew that "the road of least resistance makes crooked rivers and crooked men." He sacrificed social luxury for sacrificial living.

He refused treasure; he refused pleasure; he refused leisure. The example of Moses is one of the most extraordinary accounts of deliberate renunciation in the annals of all time. His choice showed his low estimate of the worldly, and his high estimate of the spiritual. His choice went contrary to the desires which men have usually cherished through the ages. He refused the very things which men largely give themselves to possess. He sacrificed the things for which men sacrifice themselves. High position and glittering prospects held no charm for him.

Moses forsook royalty for the privilege of fellowship with a nation of broken-spirited, cowering, crouching slaves. He forsook wealth and cast his lot with a poverty-stricken people. He sacrificed himself upon the altar of service for their liberation, emancipation, and salvation. The idolatrous Egyptians laughed at his incredulous dreams, and scoffed at his visionary undertaking. To the Egyptians, gold was power; to Moses, it was trash. To them, life was having something to live on; with Moses, life was having something to live for. Moses threw the might of his indomitable powers on the side of weakness and oppression. He sided with the weak minority instead of the powerful majority. He despised ease, and gloried in a hard task. He showed ingenuity and refused to be enslaved by circumstances.

2. Moses was not satisfied merely to exist.

He strove to live gloriously. So many people just exist. Their lives are not radiant. They do not maintain the burning, glowing radiance. Calling causes do not challenge them. Worthy ambitions do not possess them. A worthy life's purpose does not inspire them. They just exist, and that is all.

Moses had his choice in his day. He made the right one, and thus projected himself into immortality. Well has it been said: "There are opportunity breakers. There are opportunity takers. There are opportunity makers." Moses was in the last category.

Mere existence is not enough. The days call for glorious living. Here are two blind men. Our hearts go out to them. The one is seen daily on a certain street corner eking out a mere living by begging. He is content just to exist. The name of the other is William Braille. He did not sit down on a street corner and mourn his fate. He arose and emancipated the blind of the generations from handicapping disadvantages by working out an alphabet for the blind.

When one passes from the sphere of a mere existence into the realm of glorious living, a transformation revolutionary takes place. Then there will be no reservations as to where he may go nor what he may do for the Lord. For such a soul, the wilderness becomes a paradise, the desert an oasis, the mountain fastness a rhododendron dell, the heathen country a highway for the Lord. Then religion is not a sentiment, but a glorious reality; worship is not an irksome bore, but a genuine blessing.

3. For Moses, life was an investment, not an evasion.

Moses did not stand around and declare that time served him hard. He did not lament the fact that if it were not for his enslaved people he could live a life of ease. He did not evade the issue by blaming the Israelites for their pitiable plight. He could have shut his people out of his life, and gone on his selfish way of ease and pleasure, but he could not have done that and been Moses. He had an investment to make -- one that would bear dividends in eternity, and he made it.

4. Moses was guided by faith, not by fear.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years ..." are words which hold the secret of a life of service. His day was a dark one indeed, but he lighted it with the torch of faith in God, and thus drove back its blackness and made the day luminous with the glow of God's fires. Faith was the force that kept him alive. Faith bore him onward; faith inspired him upward; and faith exalted him gloriously. Faith is not a passing experience; it is an active force. Faith is not something done to us, but something which is done in us. Faith is not a tacked on adornment of life; it is an ingrowing endowment of character. Faith is not a submissive servant; it is an aggressive master. Faith plows its path across the tractless seas and discovers new worlds. Faith blazes the way through the forest, and builds new empires. Faith rises into the air and carries the commerce of nations. Faith builds railroads, constructs cities, organizes big business, establishes colleges, builds orphanages, and erects hospitals. Faith glorifies God, crowns Christ, honors humanity, makes manhood, and secures success. Doubt is destructive, dangerous and deadening. It depresses, discourages, and dooms. Faith works, builds, and progresses. Faith made Moses what he was and faith makes every man who is worthwhile. We may not be able to keep step with Moses and his heroism, but we can do our best in exercising courageous faith. The child of faith can smile at the threats of the world, and laugh at the tides of time.

5. Moses overcame imponderable obstacles and made them vehicles of victory.

What a daft undertaking was his! He went out to emancipate an enslaved nation. Among them were no noblemen. They had no prestige. They did not have any friends in the courts of Egypt. They were slaves in the direst sense of the word. They did not have any money or any well-wishers. They were the chattel in the hands of a strong and wicked nation. They had known nothing but slavery. They had never tasted the sweet fruits of freedom. Its aroma they had never inhaled. Its privileges they had never enjoyed. Moses was seemingly butting his head against a wall of adamant. But, his seemingly insurmountable obstacles became the vehicles of victory.

6. Moses lifted the dread of his day by the dream of a better tomorrow.

We must think of tomorrow as we busy ourselves in the tasks of today. We are not to be opportunists. We are to think of eventualities. Gladstone said: "I know that I shall receive the bitter reproaches of the people, but there is a tomorrow coming, and I must follow the clear behest of right."

Moses made an indelible imprint upon his day, and transmitted blessings to generations unborn. His life had the stamp of the eternal and divine destiny woven into it. He had no abiding city, but under the silent stars, beneath the majestic canopy of the blue, he learned more about God and rendered greater service for him. The circumstance of the moment is not a criterion of what the ultimate outcome will be. For example, Jesus died on the cross. His ministry had run into what seemed a deadend. He was buried, but Up from the grave He arose. Thus what looked to be the blackest defeat of history became the world's brightest victory.