

SEEING THE INVISIBLE

Hebrews 11:23–31 • Pastor Luke Herche

Please turn with me if you would in your Bibles to Hebrews Chapter 11. Our sermon text for this morning will be Hebrews 11 verses 23 to 31. And before we read that text, let's pray to our Father.

Our Father, this is your world. Every square inch of it belongs to you. It was made by you, and you are redeeming us and will transform this world on the last day when Jesus returns. We thank you for the gift of this world; that we get to enjoy it and delight in it. We pray, Father, that we would not look to it as the source of goodness, but see it as a gift of you, the source of every good and perfect gift. Father, we pray that you would come and be with us now that you would pour out your Spirit on us, that you would open hearts and minds that we would receive the truth of the Gospel, that we would that we would hear, that we would understand, that we would believe and receive the truth of your grace as it's offered in your son Jesus. Father, direct us to your Son by your Spirit. We need your Spirit, Father, and nothing I can say in and of itself can turn our hearts and minds to you. We need the work of your Spirit in us, moving us, changing us, transforming us, and so we pray that you would do that this morning, Father. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hebrews 11, beginning with verse 23:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith

Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Making decisions is hard. But it is especially hard when you don't have all the information. I don't know about you, but I am one of those people who likes to have every last piece of information before I do anything, which can be a bit stifling at times because of course, I can't know everything because of course, I'm not God. But then there is the other side: when people shoot first and ask questions later; the ready-aim-fire/the ready-fire-aim group making decisions without all the information can be disastrous. Jesus said someone who wants to build a tower must first count the cost and a king wishing to go to war must first consider the outcome [Luke 14:28-31]. But what if I were to say to you, more often than not, when we approach decisions, we leave out the most important data from our decision making process.

A few years ago, I was regularly seeing a counselor and I painted a picture for him (not literally, but in words). I painted a picture for him of some of the struggles in my life, describing what was going on. When I was done, he made a simple but profound observation: God was not in my picture. I could see the trials, I could see the temptations, I could see all the people whom I felt were against me. I could see the hardships. I could see my failures. I could see my weaknesses. But I couldn't see God. And not just because God is invisible, but I just didn't know how God was at work. Seen things had more weight in my heart than the unseen God. Now I'd like to say something profound and deeply insightful about how our present age is a visual age and we are tempted more than ever to focus on the flesh and not the spirit, but on the one hand, I don't have that kind of insight into our age or any age. And on the other hand, I'm not so sure it's true. This is the temptation of every age and of every person in every age to live by what our eyes see rather than by what God says. Eve saw that the tree was good for food and she made the decision to take and eat, and we have been seeing things wrongly and deciding things wrongly ever since. Well, this morning we are looking again at Hebrews Chapter 11, and today we're focusing in on verses 23-31, and we will see people like Moses, who **endured as seeing him who is invisible** and seeing in that way changed everything.

Do you ever get muddled about what is most important in a given situation, or do you ever get confused about what is most valuable or about what is the main thing, or what is most essential? Maybe you've left out some of the most important data: where is God in this picture? You will only be able to make the right decisions in your circumstances when you see not just your circumstances, but the God who is over every circumstance. You will only be able to make the right decisions in your circumstances when you see not just the circumstances, but the God who is over every circumstance, because only when you see Him can you see your circumstances rightly. It is in His light that we see light, says the psalmist [Psalm 36:9].

Otherwise, we are like someone who sees in black and white: we're missing half the picture. Well, in our text this morning, seeing Him who is invisible allows us to see three other things rightly: seeing Him who is invisible enables us to see true goodness, to see true wealth, and to see true power. And that's what we're going to look at this morning: those three things. When we're seeing rightly, we see true goodness, true wealth, and true power.

So first, true goodness.

What is good? Have you ever been in a circumstance where you couldn't figure out what was good, much less how to proceed? Have you ever listened to an argument over a moral issue and not really known who was in the right and who was in the wrong? Well, I clearly can't sort out every moral problem for you this morning, but I can say a lot of our confusion and ambiguity is because we keep our eyes focused on the here and now and don't look up. If God is out of the picture, moral issues are confusing. There's nothing objective, there's no standard, there's no norm, there's no ideal. There is just the ever-changing circumstances of life. And once you remove any transcendent moral standard, morality tends to devolve into a power grab. Whoever has the most power gets to say what is good and what is not. And Moses faced such a situation before he was able to talk (really, his parents faced such a situation). We've been talking about the faith of Abraham over the past couple of weeks, and in this week, we come to Moses. Now, Moses, next to Abraham, is one of the great figures in Israel's history. He led the people out of Egypt, he received the law on Mount Sinai, he is both deliverer and law giver, he brought freedom and order to Israelite society. But when he was still just a baby, his life was threatened. Pharaoh had commanded that all male Israelite babies be put to death. You see, Pharaoh was afraid; he was intimidated by the fruitful and multiplying Israelites. He feared that the slaves might revolt, and he decided that male Israelite babies were bad (bad for him, that was), and therefore they should be destroyed. And this left Moses' parents with a real decision to make.

So we read in Hebrews 11, verse 23, **By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.** Now I should say when I first read that verse, I thought, "How can Moses, [do something] by faith when he was born?" But it's not talking about Moses' faith there. By faith he was hid, that is, by the faith of his parents. And we'll come back to this part about his parents and their lack of fear in just a minute, but I first want to talk about Moses' Beauty. There's something strange about this statement, something that always bugged me. Moses' parents hid him because they saw that he was beautiful? I mean, does that mean if he were an ugly baby, they would have handed him over to be slaughtered? And I would have to say that just about all the commentators make some comment like, "Well, Moses' exceptional beauty showed that God had set him apart." But as far as I can tell from

Scripture, this is precisely what it cannot mean. In 1 Samuel 16, when Samuel is looking for the next king in Israel, Samuel sees the kingly form of David's eldest brother Eliab, and he thinks, "This is him." But God responds, **"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"** [1 Samuel 16:7]. Now, that for Samuel passage, you may know, it goes on almost immediately to describe the beauty of David. And one commentator said of this that, "Despite God's words to Samuel, Samuel, and the writer of 1 Samuel were so struck by David's beauty that they just had to mention it." Other commentators go even further and completely contradict God by saying that David's beauty somehow fit him for kingship. No, I'm sorry, that is not the case. David's beauty, actually, is in contrast to his warrior brother's stature. The words used to describe David are those used elsewhere to describe women and babies. And the point is David is a pink-cheeked, girly, little, pretty boy. He looks nothing like a warrior king. And so, we can have confidence in God's word to Samuel that God means what He says when He says God sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Which brings us back to Moses' beauty. Did his parents really save him because he was more beautiful than other babies? Well, for starters, let's go back to Exodus. In the Book of Exodus, it's not the word "beautiful" that it's used, but the word "good." It's a generic Hebrew word, *tove*. It's the word God used in the beginning to describe his creation. God saw what he had made, and it was good. Now what Moses' parents see is not exceptional beauty, but goodness; as in God saw all that He had made, and it was good. And Exodus, especially the early chapters, are filled with creation language, and that is what is going on here. God is about to do a new creation, so to speak, in the life of Israel. And Moses is good. So sure, Moses' parents see his beauty, but not beauty marking him out as something special, but the beauty inherent in God's good creation; the goodness of the world that God had made. Babies are good. Now that's not a comment about original sin; it's just about God's creation. Pharaoh had declared what was good [Israelite babies] to be evil, and he designated it for destruction. Moses' parents see the goodness of what God has done, and they save their son from that destruction.

You see, apart from faith, our values get confused. We judge by what is pragmatic or what is good for us (not that we can really understand even that), but we think something is good for us and so we go with that. We cannot distinguish good from evil. And there's an obvious example connected to this context: we cannot distinguish good from evil, and so, we kill our babies in the womb. We call what is good (a new life) evil and we hand it over to destruction. Well, Moses' parents refused to do that. They saw what was told, what was good as in the creation, or as the creation was declared to be in the beginning. But when we make ourselves out to be God, as Pharaoh did, we declare our own good to the harm of others. When we

see the true God, we see even His world differently. We're able to see the goodness and beauty inherent in God's good creation, and we make choices that preserve the goodness of God world when possible, rather than seek to destroy it for our own purposes. Moses' parents saw the goodness that God had put into this world. They saw the beauty that God had put into this world and so they protected that. Seeing Him who is invisible enables us to see true goodness.

Second, seeing Him who is invisible enables us to see true riches.

Look at verses 24 to 26: **By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.** Now, very few people who have everything are willing to give it up. There are some, just not many. I've read that Buddha was one. Henri Nouwen was another; he left teaching at schools like Notre Dame and Yale and Harvard to work with intellectually and developmentally disabled people. He said, "I moved from Harvard to L'Arche, from the best and the brightest wanting to rule the world to men and women who had few or no words and were considered at best marginal to the needs of our society." Now, what causes one to make such a move? Well, they begin to see things as they really are. Now anyone can see the emptiness of this age, but for Christians (though, it is not always), it should be obvious. Consider Moses, he was one who had everything. Though a member of the subordinate class, the slave people of Israel, he happened to be raised in the House of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. He had everything one could want. Every pleasure of that age was ready at hand. Every treasure of Egypt was his for the asking. But verse 25 says he chose **to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.** Why would he choose mistreatment rather than pleasure? Well, there's already one answer in verse 25, the pleasures were fleeting; they wouldn't last. But that's not really an answer, because if I have the choice between fleeting pleasure or fleeting pain, I'm going to choose fleeting pleasure.

And so, we look at verse 26: and Moses **considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.** There is an interesting phrase, "the reproach of Christ," why Christ? Why not Israel ("the reproach of Israel"), or even Yahweh? Well, the short answer is, of course, that Jesus is Yahweh. In the book of Jude, Jude, one of the brothers of Jesus, one of the half-brothers of Jesus, wrote in Jude Verse 5, **Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.** Did you hear that right? Who saved the people out of Egypt? Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, says Jesus saved the people out of Egypt. Jesus, that the pre-incarnate Jesus to be sure, but still Jesus. Which makes the Jewish people in Egypt Jesus' people. Hence Moses, by taking the reproach of the Jewish people, took upon

himself the reproach of Christ. And yet still, how can the reproach of Christ be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt? I mean, why choose reproach over treasure? Well, because verse 26: **he was looking to the reward.** Now, this has been a theme in Hebrews 11 (a mini theme). Hebrews 11:6 **And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.** And what is that reward that's being talked about in Hebrews 11? Well, it's the city with foundation. It's the Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God. It's the resurrection. It's the presence of the Father.

And so you might say, "OK, there is this coming reward, but why would Moses consider the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt?" Well, Paul says we must suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with Him [Romans 8:17]. The dying and rising of Jesus are of one piece; we can't have one without the other. If we hope to enter into His life, we must be willing to enter into His death. But we will only do that as we look to the reward. The very next verse in Romans, Romans 8:18, says, **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** And I want to note again, like I did last week, the word "consider." It's in our text again this morning in verse 26, Moses **considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.** And it's in Romans 8:18, I consider, Paul says, present suffering is not worth comparing to future glory. We've seen it already in Hebrews 11: and Sarah **considered him faithful who had promised,** and Abraham **considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead** [Hebrews 11:11;19]. Apparently, considering is one of the chief actions of faith. Considering God's character, His faithfulness, His power, His promises, but also considering the present age in light of those promises, doing a kind of cost-benefit analysis or a compare and contrast chart of this age and the age to come. This age: it's fleeting, it's weak, it's inglorious, it's wasting away, it's shakable, it's unsatisfying, it's unfulfilling, it's finite, it's mortal. The age to come: it's eternal and powerful and glorious and lasting and unshakable and satisfying and fulfilling and infinite and immortal. The comparison shows that they are not worth comparing; they're not even close to being on the same level. This is not a neck-and-neck photo finish. This is a one runner left the others in the dust type of contest.

This shouldn't be surprising. Jesus said as much when he said in Matthew 6, **Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**

[Matthew 6:19-20]. If you want a wise investment, invest in eternal things; only they last. So Moses made his decision. He chose mistreatment and reproach instead of pleasure and treasure because he was looking for the reward. Now I should say again with the context thinking about Moses and what he left in Egypt, we should say that doesn't mean everyone must leave positions of power in order to follow

Christ. Moses did that, but think of another high-ranking Israelite in Egypt: Joseph. God placed him at the top, and he stayed there to the day of his death. Or consider Daniel in Babylon and you get the same picture. Compare these three men Joseph and Daniel and Moses, and you'll see that it's a matter of calling. But we all must be ready at any moment to choose mistreatment with the people of God and reproach for the sake of Christ, knowing that whatever we do, we look to Jesus for our reward. As Paul says to servants in Colossae in Colossians chapter 3, verses 23 and 24:

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Now at this point qualifies the last point, doesn't it? We should see the goodness of the present age. We should also see that is a relative good. There is a greater reward to come, and we should be willing to give up the goods of this age in the hope of the goods of the coming age. And that was true of the people to whom this letter was written. When they first came to Christ, the writer tells us that they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property [chapter 10 verse 34], because they knew they had a better possession, an abiding One. Well, what do you see? Like Pharaoh, can you only see your own selfish good, or do you see the inherent goodness of this world? Can you only see the pleasures and treasures of Egypt (the goods of this age), or do you see the better possessions (the abiding ones)?

Seeing Him who is invisible; understanding that there is a God over this world enables us to see true goodness and see true wealth. And finally, to see true power.

What scares you in life? There are lots of scary things: the death of a loved one, Coronavirus, spiders, we all have our fears. Many of our fears are based on power; "Who has what power to do me harm?" We've already read of Moses' parents that they were not afraid of the King's edict. I wonder why that is? Pharaoh was slaughtering unborn babies; he had the power to put them to death, but they were unafraid. Why? Moses two was unafraid. He apparently took after his mom and dad. And so, verse 27 says this, **By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.** I think Moses and his parents knew this: they knew who had real power. Pharaoh thought he had power. He had the power of death; he could put Israelite babies or Israelite rebels to death. but they, Moses and his parents, could see Him, who is invisible. They could see the one who had the power of death and life in His hands. And the same is true with the rest of the people in this passage. They each had obstacles in their way. When Israel left Egypt, they had the Red Sea in front of them, and the army of Egypt behind them. What were they to do? When Israel comes into the Promised Land, the walls of Jericho must have seemed like an impenetrable fortress. Even at Passover, with the threat of the death of the first born. Or Rahab's having to choose sides. What is it that led each of these people, or each of these groups, down the path of faith? They saw Him who was invisible.

Moses trusted God's word and kept the Passover. Israel repeatedly (unbelieving Israel, no doubt), trusted God and walked through the Red Sea, as the Egyptians who had no such faith were drowned. Joshua and Israel marched around Jericho for seven days. Seven days, right? How foolish they must have looked, but they trusted Him who was invisible. And on the 7th day, they blew their trumpets and brought the walls down. Rahab's faith is really the most striking. Here she is, a Gentile prostitute, and she has more faith than most Israelites. God is once again using the weak things of this world to shame the strong. When Israel was headed into the Promised Land, they sent spies to scout out Jericho. And when Rahab got a moment alone with the spies, this is what she said in Joshua Chapter 2: **I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.** [Joshua 2:9-11].

You see, it was out of her faith in the Lord, the God of Heaven and Earth, that she protected the spies. Why? Because she saw Him who was invisible. She knew that the power of God outweighed the power of the nations. And of course, what happened to Rahab? Dear Rahab, One of the beautiful, weak things of this world, a Gentile prostitute likely rejected by her own people, but full of faith. She goes on to marry Salmon and to give birth to Boaz, who marries Ruth the Moabite (another non-Israelite), who gives birth to Obed, who fathers Jesse, who fathers David (King David, the forerunner and ancestor of Jesus). See, Rahab, by faith, gets to be a great, great, great, great (I don't know how many greats) grandmother of the Messiah, because she believed in the power of God rather than the armies of men.

You see, only as we look to Him who is invisible can we see true goodness, true wealth, true power and there is no greater, of course, revelation of Him who is invisible than in Jesus and in the Cross and the Resurrection. The gospel writer John said of Jesus in John 1:18. **No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.** Or as Jesus Himself put it: **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father** [John 14:9]. And you know as we look at Jesus' life, we see a lot of echoes from the people in this passage. Jesus too, like Moses, when he was born, needed the protection of his parents. Another deluded dictator thought he could define good around his own person, and he sought to kill babies to protect his own power. Jesus too refused the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt. He had a chance to gain at all. You may remember Satan offered it to Him, and He could have had everything without the Cross if only He would bow down and worship Satan. But what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? And so Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. He

considered mistreatment and reproach better than worldly riches, because He was looking to the reward. He was put on trial and brought before rulers and kings, but He never flinched; He did not fear. At one point, Pilate threatened Him and in John 19:10. Pilate said, **“Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”** But Jesus endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and He responded simply in John 19:11, **You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.** Jesus simply trusted His Father, Him who is invisible. And Jesus relived really the whole story, the whole history of Israel. Jesus was the Passover lamb who takes away the sin of the world, so that the wrath of God might not touch us. He went through the waters of death, trusting His Father, and came out on the other side in His resurrection. He is even now placing all His enemies under His feet by the trumpeting forth of the Gospel. If we really want to understand what it means to walk by faith, just look to Jesus; you'll see all that and more.

Seeing him who is invisible, ultimately in the person of Jesus, enables us to see true goodness, true wealth, true power. And it is seeing those things that enable us to walk by faith, to make decisions based on invisible realities rather than to be enslaved to what our eyes can see. And if you want to see the invisible God, look to Jesus because as Jesus said, if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father.

Let's pray,

Our Father, we do pray that you would help us to see Jesus clearly; to see Him in all of His glory and to see you, Father, in Him. Help us to see you in all of your glory, in all of your value, in all of the greatness of your person. Help us to see you in all of your power and all of your might and all of your goodness and help us to marvel and to worship. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.