

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 11:23-31**

To better understand how faith is often costly.

Read the Text:

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. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. 29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.
(Heb. 11:23-31, ESV)

Study the Text:**Faith Costs**

Hebrews 11:23-31 continues the exposition of faith, highlighting the “cost” often associated with it, mostly through examples from the Exodus. Beginning with Moses’ parents, then Moses, then the people of Israel in Egypt, Joshua, the conquest of Jericho, and Rahab, the author of Hebrews demonstrates how faith requires real risk. The cost of faith often puts our actual lives at risk. To walk in faith means to risk that which we hold dearest to ourselves. Below is a breakdown of key examples that illustrate the costliness of faith.

MOSES’ PARENTS

The first example given involves Moses’ birth parents, who defied the orders of Pharaoh and kept their male baby alive after he was born. Because of the increasing number of the Israelites in the land of Egypt, the wicked Pharaoh demanded that all male-born children in Israelite families be thrown into the Nile (Ex. 1:15-22). However, Moses’ parents chose to defy the orders of Pharaoh, risking their lives and the lives of those

they loved by keeping their child alive (Ex. 2:1–2). Even the midwives who helped deliver Moses defied Pharaoh's orders and lied to him when he questioned them (Ex. 1:19). Exodus concludes: "And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families" (Ex. 1:21). Such faith to do what is right even if it possibly costs your life is rewarded by God.

MOSES' ROYAL CLAIM

Moses is further used as an illustration in the following verses. After he grew up, he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. 11:24). The level of power and privilege that came with being a part of Pharaoh's family was incomparable. Yet, Moses rejected this, "choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25). But how? Exodus never says outright that Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," but there is another clue that provides additional insight. The phrase "when he was grown up" in Hebrews 11:24 likely provides a textual connection to the story the author of Hebrews has in mind. In Exodus 2:11, it says: "One day, when Moses had grown up," and then proceeds to tell the story of Moses murdering an Egyptian and hiding him in the sand because he was "beating a Hebrew" (Ex. 2:11b-12). In other words, when Moses struck the Egyptian for beating a Hebrew, this was essentially equivalent to his rejection of Pharaoh's family in order to identify as a Hebrew himself. Moses' act of faith to identify as a Hebrew and do what was right cost him tremendous wealth, privilege, and power, which Hebrews 11:25 describes as "the fleeting pleasures of sin."

MOSES' PLAGUES

Additionally, the Passover is mentioned as a costly act of faith, though not in the way you might initially think. It might be tempting to associate the costliness of faith with "every firstborn child" that the Passover required, but remember that the Hebrews did not suffer this fate because they had the blood of the Lamb that required the angel of death (described in verse 28 as the "Destroyer of the firstborn") to *pass over them*. The cost of keeping the Passover was the anger it provoked in Pharaoh, as mentioned in Hebrews 11:27. This anger was kindled against Moses irreversibly. The Egyptian army's fury was unleashed upon them as they fled from Egypt in the Exodus.

ISRAEL'S EXODUS

The illustration moves beyond Moses to all of Israel in verse 29. The "people crossed the Red Sea as on dry ground," which was a costly act of faith in and of itself. Imagine the terror of watching the Red Sea part and then having to walk through it. Imagine the wall of water on either side, presumably with large fish and other water-dwelling creatures swimming past you. Imagine the young mothers, carrying their babies through the dark night, knowing that at any moment, if the walls of water collapsed, both she and her baby would drown. We sometimes glamorize the parting of the Red Sea without connecting with how much risk was actually involved. And all the while, the Egyptian army was close behind them, and closing in. And just to illustrate the risk they took, the author rightly points out that the fate of the Egyptian army that followed them into the Red Sea path did not enjoy the same ending: "But the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned" (Heb. 11: 29). The implication is that it was the faith of the Israelites that preserved them through the waters, and a lack of faith that led to the demise of the Egyptians. Either way, the potential cost of faithful action was very high.

JERICHO'S WALLS

Verse 30 mentions the walls of Jericho falling, a story chronicled in Joshua 6:1–21. What does this have to do with the aforementioned Exodus illustrations? While the story occurs in Joshua 6, consider that Joshua was present among the Exodus community as Moses' heir apparent. Although Exodus does not mention Joshua's early life, it mentions him shortly after Israel fled Egypt. He is identified as Israel's military commander against Amalek at Rephidim (Ex. 17:8–16). He is also identified as Moses' assistant, accompanying him partway up

Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:13). But how do Jericho's walls illustrate the costly nature of faith? Consider that Jericho was a fortified city that was thought to be impregnable (Josh. 6:1). To attack such a city would result in certain defeat, and likely death. However, God said to Joshua in Joshua 6:2: "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor." Therefore, to act in faith meant to take that which God had given them, the impregnable city, however crazy it might seem, knowing that if God did not deliver his promises, they would ultimately meet their demise.

RAHAB'S RISK

Finally, Rahab is used as an illustration, and an appropriate illustration at that. Rahab lived in Jericho and cared for the two spies Joshua sent to scout the land (Josh. 2:1–21). Because she was willing to sacrifice her own well-being by helping two spies against her own people, God granted her safety, and she eventually became part of the genealogy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5).

What About Now?

One of the biggest takeaways from this passage is that faith is not cheap. To walk in faith means to take risks. To take God at his word means to risk the things we hold closest, including our very lives. Often we think about faith as a glamorous, easy thing: "God says this, and so I'll do it!" But we forget the many examples that show faith isn't always easy to live by. Faith requires real risk. Sometimes it requires us to defy authorities in order to honor God. Sometimes it requires us to give up our comforts and face persecution. Sometimes it requires us to risk our lives. Sometimes it requires us to do the unthinkable. Faith is not as clean-cut as we want it to be, but that's part of what makes it so remarkable. It requires us to trust God to do what no one else could do.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 11:23. How did Moses' parents exhibit faith? What was at stake?

2. Read Hebrews 11:24–25. How did Moses exhibit faith? What did he give up? What did he receive in exchange?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 11:26. How did Moses receive the "reproach of Christ" as a result of his rejection of his family?

2. Read Hebrews 11:27. How else did Moses exhibit faith? How did he endure, according to this verse?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 11:28. How else did Moses exhibit faith? What “risk” did Moses take in leaving Egypt?

2. Read Hebrews 11:29. How did the people of God exhibit faith? What is implied about why the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, but the people of God did not?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 11:30. How does the story of Jericho exhibit the cost of faith?

2. Read Hebrews 11:31. Who is Rahab? How did she exhibit faith?

Discuss the Text!

Session 28 Discussion: Big Costs

One of the main ideas in this passage is the cost related to acting with faith. As a group, talk about the various ways your faith has cost you.

1. Icebreaker: What is something worthwhile that required you to give up comfort, time, money, or convenience?
2. Which cost of following Jesus is most difficult for you personally: comfort, approval, security, control, or something else? Why?
3. How can you distinguish between a faithful, God-directed risk and an impulsive decision?
4. What specific step of obedience is God calling you to right now that you have been putting off because the cost feels too significant? What do you need to do to take that step in faith?
5. Kid Talk: Talk to your child about a toy or game they really want, and ask them: “What would you be willing to do for it (e.g., clean your room for a month, no allowance, eat only broccoli, etc.)?” Talk to them about how the cost of faith is sometimes even higher, and yet we should always be willing to pay it if it honors God. Sometimes we have to stand up and do what is right, even if it means losing a friend or being made fun of, simply because it’s the right thing.

Takeaways:

1. Faith often requires us to take risks, as Moses, Israel, Joshua, and Rahab have shown.
2. Faith is often costly, but it is worth it.