

From Riches to Rags

Heroes, Part 8

Hebrews 11:23-28

In a recent publication I was given, I read the fascinating story of the history of the automotive industry and the personal fortunes that were won and lost in the early 1900's.

One of the most interesting characters among them was an entrepreneur by the name of William Durant.

Billy Durant was the owner of a carriage business in the 1880's and he built it by controlling everything that it took to put a buggy together. And that's exactly what he did later with his engine-powered buggies – and a corporation he called General Motors.

In 1905, he rescued financially a car maker from bankruptcy by the name of David Buick.

Billy would form a partnership with Buick and together they would create an empire by buying out smaller car companies – also named after their founders; names like Ransom Olds – of the Oldsmobile; a man named Walter Chrysler.

Durant teamed up with a French auto maker named Louis Chevrolet. Then a French Canadian joined the group who'd named his company in honor of his ancestor's last name – Cadillac; the same ancestor who founded the city of Detroit, Michigan in 1701.

At one point, Henry Ford agreed to sell his young automotive plant to Billy Durant, but Henry Ford refused stock options in General Motors and insisted on cash, instead. They finally agreed on a price, but Billy Durant missed the closing deadline and Henry Ford changed his mind – which, of course, changed the course of automotive history.

Over the next few decades, Durant and his partners made a fortune. In fact, I read that more than 70 men became millionaires by joining or supplying General Motors – and that was in the early 1900's.

But Billy Durant would lose his fortune and regain it and then lose it again. His last attempt at car making ended in bankruptcy on the eve of the great depression.¹

In 1936, this ingenious creator of a billion dollar industry, was penniless, managing a bowling alley in Flint, Michigan. In fact, before he and his original partner, David Buick, died, they were both too poor to own one of the tens of thousands of automobiles they had actually created.

That's what you call going from riches to rags.

Frankly, that fall from fame and riches to obscurity and rags is nothing compared to our next hero of faith.

And you'll discover one of the key differences between Moses and Durant – and most everyone else – for that matter, will be the fact that Moses walked away from it all – willingly . . . in fact, he walked away, because of his faith.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 11 – and while you're turning, let me review with you five ways you could measure the fact that Moses was the greatest leader Israel ever knew.

Five Measures of Fame

1. First of all, Moses was Israel's greatest prophet.

God distinguished Moses from all other prophets when He said; *If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all my household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings (or riddles); and he beholds the form of the Lord. (Numbers 12:6-8)*

You remember it was Moses who came so close to the presence of God that for days he had to wear a veil because he face shone so brightly with the light of God's glory.

2. Secondly Moses was Israel's greatest lawgiver.

Virtually everything any Jewish person knew about the law and ordinances of God came from the writings of Moses, who penned, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number and Deuteronomy – 5 inspired Books called the Pentateuch.

From the Greek word, *pente* meaning *five*, and *teuchos* meaning *volumes*. Pentateuch – all 5 volumes – were written by Moses.

3. And what would follow then would mark Moses, thirdly as Israel's greatest historian.

4. Fourthly, Moses was Israel's greatest saint.

The *Book of Numbers adds the inspired commentary, which by the way, vindicated the character of Moses which was typically being questioned or challenged – God recorded Moses was the most humble man alive on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3).*

In other words, he really didn't have a personal agenda or some personal ambition after all, other than obeying God's call.

5. Finally and fifthly, Moses was Israel's greatest human deliverer.ⁱⁱ

At the end of Moses' life, God provided the final eulogy when He said, "*Since [then] no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, at his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)*

In spite of it all, he will end up in an unmarked grave – without a physical marker where veneration at best and idolatry at worst would be taking place to this very day.

He never entered the land he led millions of people to inherit.

He never regained the luxury of a palace or the status of royalty.

Unlike William Durant, however, Moses went willingly from one chapter to another in his life – and the key word that marks each chapter in his life, according to *Hebrews 11*, is this word, faith.

The writer of Hebrews will lay that out for us – and to do so he's going to filter a lot of scripture regarding the life of Moses: in fact, he will condense the entire Book of Exodus, and more, into 7 verses in this ledger of faith.

He'll present four movements – or four chapters in Moses' life and each chapter begins with the words, "*by faith.*"

You might circle them in your Bibles – *verse 23* – by faith; *verse 24* – by faith; *verse 27* by faith and *verse 28* – by faith.

I'll leave *verse 29* for our next study simply because the pronoun will change from *he* – that is, Moses, to *they* – a reference to the faith of the people of Israel.

Four Chapters of Faith

1. Chapter One – Preserved by Faith (v. 23)

Now back in *verse 23*, the condensed biography of Moses begins with the first chapter that I want to simply entitle, A Preservation by Faith.

Notice, ***By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.***

Right away you're struck with the fact that this first chapter is really about the faith of Moses' parents, isn't it?

You need to understand that Moses to slaves, 64 years after the death of Joseph.

The parents' of Moses were married during the darkest days of the Jewish enslavement in Egypt.

In fact, the new Pharaoh, who didn't know Joseph or care about that legacy, had adopted a new policy for this nation of unpaid slaves.

The royal edict ordered Hebrew midwives to suffocate any baby boy born to Jewish parents.

When that didn't work, he ordered that anyone in the kingdom, Jew or Gentile, who knew anything about the birth of a baby boy, was commanded to throw the baby into the Nile River. (cf. Exodus 1:15-22).ⁱⁱⁱ

In fact, if you go back the full story you discover that this slave couple, already had a daughter – and then they delivered a baby boy.

The writer of Hebrews repeats the fact here in **verse 23** that when Moses was born ***they saw he was a beautiful child.***

Which is kind of a redundant thing to add, don't you think? I mean, what parent doesn't think their child is beautiful? And sometimes it's only the parents who have that opinion, right?

I guess that goes for grandparents too.

And what are you supposed to say when they show you their baby? Ooohhhh . . .

As a pastor, this creates a predicament. So years ago I adopted what J. Vernon McGee did when he once pastored a large church in California. Parents would bring their newborn up to him and he'd look down and smile and say, "Well, that's a baby, all right!"

"That *is* a baby."

So why the reference here to Moses being a beautiful child to his parents – of course they thought he was.

I would agree with John Calvin, the Reformer, who wrote that Moses was evidently

marked by something out of the ordinary – although we're never told what it was.^{iv}

Josephus, the 1st century Jewish historian wrote that Amram, the father of Moses, was actually visited by God in a vision that informed him his son would be the promised deliverer.

Whatever it was, Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, risked their lives to save his life . . . and for 3 months they tried to hide him out of sight.

Imagine how hard that would be. How do you hide a newborn? How do you keep a baby quiet – for three months?

Chuck Swindoll wrote on this text that he remembered how their firstborn son never slept through the night for 18 long, weary months. Chuck wrote, there were times when I longed for a wicker basket and the Nile River nearby.^v

Evidently, after three months they knew it wouldn't work. Perhaps Pharaoh had begun a house-to-house search for any hidden babies and they knew their neighborhood was next.

Rather than give in or give up, they hung on – Hebrews tells us, ***by faith.*** They would do the right thing; even if it cost them their lives, they would not take their son's life.

The Book of Exodus informs us that they made a wicker basket and covered it with pitch.

The word for pitch was *bitumen* – a plant they boiled into paste, commonly believed to repel crocodiles – the supposed servants of the supposed divine Nile River.

And they set the basket ***among the reeds by the bank of the Nile (Exodus 2:3).***

It wasn't an accident that they placed the basket in the reeds where they did – Moses's parents knew that was the exact spot along the path where the daughter of Pharaoh would walk.

By faith, they placed him there, leaving him in the hands of God to both spare his life and perhaps fulfill the vision they'd received of his delivering power.

Exodus 2 informs us that sure enough, the daughter of Pharaoh came to bath at the Nile. Not *in* the Nile . . . by the way.

To bathe in the Nile would have opposed the custom of their people, according to historical accounts.^{vi}

In fact, the Pharaoh's had their own bath houses made of marble – where they didn't need to worry about crocodiles getting into their bathtub.

So why was she coming to the banks of the Nile?

Well, the Nile River was believed by the Egyptians to be emanating from Osiris, one of their chief gods.^{vii}

And the waters were considered divinely, magically empowered; supposedly able to not only produce long life but – get this – fertility.

Add to that the fact that Jewish historians had long held that this was the 19th Dynasty of Pharaoh's and this particular daughter was childless.

The daughter of Pharaoh wasn't coming to the Nile with a bar of soap to take a bath and hopefully beat away the crocodiles; she was coming to ceremonially bathe with water from the Nile in hopes of having a baby.

She didn't need to be clean – she wanted a child.

God perfectly timed her desire and longing to coincide with a 3-month old baby boy in a basket floating there for her attending maidens to just-so-happen to discover. And when they opened the lid of that basket, their hearts melted like butter.

Jewish or not, the princess announced, he's mine!

Josephus adds that the princess took the basket around to several of her maidens to see if one of them could nurse the child, without any success. Only then did Miriam, come out from behind a bush and ask if she needed some references. And the princess said, "Of course." And Miriam went and got her mother.^{viii}

And the Bible tells us in *Exodus 2:9* that the Princess paid Moses' mother to raise her son . . . is that a great or what?

Imagine, his mom gets the allowance.

And what started it all? It was all an act of preservation, by faith.

2. Chapter 2 – The Renunciation of Faith (v. 24-26)

That leads us to the second chapter of Moses' biography – we'll call this one, the renunciation of faith.

Notice *Hebrews 11:24*. *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25. Choosing rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, considering (that is, factoring it all out) that the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.*

In the Exodus account we're told that the princess made Moses her son –that is, she made him her legal son and heir.^{ix}

In Stephen's message in *Acts chapter 7* he speaks of Moses being educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and that he became powerful in speech and in action.

On the outside he looked and spoke like a member of the Egyptian royal class, just like Joseph before him. But just like Joseph, Moses was a Jewish believer on the inside.

His mother had taught him well in those early years before he moved into the palace, most Bible scholars agree that is was around the age of 12.

The faith of his slave parents would take root and become the faith of this young man.

Extra biblical historians tells us that by the time Moses reached the age of 30, he had already led the Egyptian army to a strategic victory over the Ethiopians; he had grown to become a military strategist; a bronzed warrior; a seasoned soldier; a wise and competent leader.^x

And he happened to be a leader in the greatest united empire power currently reigning on planet earth.

Perhaps, some believe, the heir to the throne of Egypt.

F.B. Meyer, a British pastor and expositor from the 1800's summarized the wealth and grandeur of Egypt during the days of Moses with this description . . . listen to this;

What a magnificent land must Egypt have been in those days; the banks of the Nile were covered with cities, villages, stately temples and all the evidences of an advanced civilization; while mighty pyramids and colossal figures

already towered 100 feet [above Moses' head]; the cream of all this was poured into the cup of Moses. He was brought up in the palace and treated as the grandson of Pharaoh. If he rode forth into the streets, it would be in a princely carriage; if he floated on the Nile, it would have been in a golden barge, amid the strains of beautiful music. If he wished for anything, the almost unlimited wealth of the treasures of Egypt was within his reach. He was sent to be educated in the college there at the Temple of the Sun –called the Oxford of Ancient Egypt. He would have learned to read and write the mysterious hieroglyphs; he would have been instructed in mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry, in all of which the Egyptians were [renowned]. But he was more than a royal student; he had become a statesman and a soldier. Josephus writes that when the Ethiopians invaded Egypt, routed the army sent against them and threatened the capital city of Memphis; in the panic, the oracles were consulted and on their recommendation, [thirty year old] Moses was entrusted with the command of royal troops. He immediately took the field, surprised and defeated the enemy, captured their capital city and returned to Egypt victorious, laden with the spoils of victory.^{xix}

Less than 10 years later – he's sick of it all. The writer of Hebrews says here that Moses ***refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.***

That word *refused* means to disown. And the tense of the verb indicates that his refusal was decisive – it was conclusive.^{xii}

Moses literally disowned the royal family. And he renounced an incredible future.

The prince of Egypt walked away from it all!

He's volunteering for one of the greatest riches to rags stories ever recorded in human history.

Chapter 3 – The Separation of Faith (v. 27)

And that begins chapter 3 in his biography of faith. There was the preservation by faith; this renunciation by faith and now, thirdly, the separation of faith.

Verse 27. Informs us that ***by faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.***

If you've studied the life of Moses in any detail you've discovered that he lived for 120 years, and his biography can easily be divided into 3 sections of 40 years.

The first forty years were spent in the splendor of the Egyptian palace. The second forty years were spent in Midian where after having killed an Egyptian, Moses escaped to live. And the final forty years were spent in the wilderness leading the people of Israel.

Because of that easy division, you might automatically think that ***verse 27*** follows naturally to talk about Moses' 40 years in the desert of Midian.

But that can't be what this is talking about here because of one very good reason – we're told here that Moses left Egypt ***by faith, not fearing the wrath of the king.***

Exodus chapter 2 specifically tells us that after murdering the Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave – and I'm quoting ***Exodus 2:14 – then Moses was afraid and said, Surely the matter has become known. Verse 15, and when Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian.***

He was running, not in faith, but for his life!

That can't be what ***Hebrews 11*** is talking about. In fact, if you notice ***verse 27*** again we're told that ***Moses endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.***

Who was Him? Go back up to ***the last part of verse 26 – he was looking for the reward?*** Who's the Him who's going to bring a reward? Go to ***beginning of verse 26*** and you are introduced to the Person Moses was ultimately trusting in – ***the Messiah.***

Moses wasn't impressed with the splendor of Egypt because he compared it to the description of the coming kingdom, passed down from Abraham . . . plans of a city made by God – a kingdom unrivaled by the glory of any earthly city – and that story came down through Joseph, whose bones Moses will take with him when he leaves Egypt.

To Moses, Egypt was nothing more than a windy sandbar when compared to the coming glorious kingdom of the Messiah.

But wait Moses, what about all the pomp and ceremony; what about the wealth and comfort – what about – here in *verse 25 – the pleasures of sin*.

You're at the top of the food chain – you've got the world by the tail.

Are you really going to walk away from it all?

Well, some super-saint is going to be quick to say, there aren't really pleasures in sin – they pass away so quickly.

Yea, but that's not what it says here – Moses doesn't walk away from the passing of sin – he walks away from the pleasures of sin.

Let's get real.

G. Campbell Morgan, the great expositor wrote nearly a century ago in his commentary on this verse – and I quote – “What a foolish thing it is to say there is no pleasure in sin” . . . [as if that'll keep somebody from finding out.] Of course there are pleasures of sin.”

Gordon's hymn for the church reads, My Jesus I love Thee I know thou art mine, for Thee all the – what? – follies of sin I resign.”

Morgan said, “That's not what Gordon wrote. He originally wrote, “For Thee all the pleasures of sin I resign.” But some pious soul thought it would be bad to sing about the pleasures of sin in church and so they changed the words.^{xiii}

That also happens to be a pet peeve of mine; we've changed, “Would He devote that sacred head for such a *worm* as I” to read, “Would He devote that sacred head for *sinner*s such as I.”

What's wrong with worm? I think worm fits me just perfectly,

Listen, what was it that aided Moses to be able to walk away from the pleasures of sin? We're told here – he compared the pleasure of sin to the reward of Christ – the pleasure of immortal joys.

He didn't try to say sin wasn't fun, he just knew heaven would be funner . . . heaven is funner . . . bad grammar, but you get the point.

Isn't it true that we lose heart because we lose sight of the eternal glory that far *outweighs*

our troubles and temptations? (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I love the way Kent Hughes cleared the fog away in his commentary on this passage in Hebrews 11. He talked about Moses waiting for the glory of Christ and how that allowed him to endure 80 years as a nomad. *He saw Him who is unseen*.

He wrote, Just think what it would mean to literally see the fulfillment of our promised glory in heaven for just 60 seconds while still living on earth. Just 60 seconds; the first fifteen seconds to view the face of Christ; then if you can tear your view away from Him which you wouldn't be able to do after 15 seconds, but if you could, then take the next fifteen seconds to survey the angelic millions; then another 15 seconds to scan the architecture of heaven and finally 15 seconds to scan the faces of friends and loved one already there – that 60 seconds would change your life.^{xiv}

But wait, it changed Moses' life without a 60 second tour . . . and every believer like him has changed their perspective and their focus ever since – by faith, seeing the invisible as reality.

- Chapter 1 in this biography of faith is preservation by faith.
- Chapter 2 is a great renunciation by faith
- Chapter 3 reveals decades of separation by faith
- And now, chapter four reveals . . .

4. The Institution of Faith (v. 28)

Verse 28, by faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

Again, this takes us back to Exodus and the eve of the nation Israel's departure and freedom from bondage.

The final plague from God – the death angel – more than likely God Himself – would come riding on the night wind and sweep into the land of Egypt to claim the firstborn of every home unguarded by the Lamb's blood splattered on their doorposts.

For those homes so guarded by the death of a lamb, death passed over them.

And thus the Passover began – an institution of faith that pointed to the coming Lamb who would be the final sacrifice, permanently ending the power of death and bringing everlasting life.

It was Moses who kept the Passover – from the verb *poieo* – he literally instituted the Passover ceremony by faith.

And institution that pointed to the future atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Egyptians were trying to do enough good things to hopefully get into the afterlife and they weren't sure they'd done enough – not even the Pharaoh's were convinced.

Religion's favorite word is *do*. Christianity's favorite word is *done*.

But wait a second. Now that you've trusted in what Christ alone has done . . . He turns around and asks you to do.

As Paul wrote to Titus – remember? Be ready to engage in good deeds – not so you *can* be accepted by God, but because you *have* been.

Now you've got a life to live for His glory. And like Moses, you will discover at times that the sacrifices in life will be total, not partial.

And Moses becomes your model . . . of faith: the kind of faith that abandons past desires, present delights and future dreams out of loyalty to God.

I've just begun reading the biography of Adoniram Judson. I had to hunt around for an out-of-print copy which includes many of his letters and journal entries, but found it.

He was another Moses in a way – the very first American Protestant missionary to renounce and walk away from his life in America . . . he would give away everything to spend his life in the land of Burma, just north of Thailand.

Before he embarked on his journey, he had fallen in love with wealthy young lady who also loved Christ, as did her parents.

He wrote a letter to her father, asking permission to marry his daughter – you won't

believe this letter . . . let me read some of it to you; and try to imagine you're the father of the bride.

Keep in mind this is written the early 1800's English. Adoniram Judson writes, "I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure for a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influences of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of Him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you – for the sake of perishing immortal souls – for the sake of heaven and the glory of God. Can you consent to all this, in the [promise of] meeting your daughter in the world of glory with a crown of righteousness, brightened by the acclamations of heathen now saved, through her means, who will there be praising her Savior?"^{xv}

He said yes . . . and of course, so did she.

I don't know what God is calling you to give up, or wait for, or pursue, to begin, to renounce, for His name's sake.

But I do know how we're to go about it – by faith.

Faith is our abandonment of past desires, present delights and future dreams out of loyalty to God – and let me add – in light of the coming promises of God that will compensate you beyond your wildest imagination.

Which leads us to live and think in a manner that constantly says, "Goodbye Egypt . . . I'm on my way to *the* Promised Land."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/18/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Orrin Woodward, *Resolved: 13 Resolutions for LIFE* (Obstacles Press, 2011), p. 269

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- ii Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Hebrews: Volume 2 (Crossway, 1993), p. 115
- iii Ibid, p. 116
- iv Ibid, p. 117
- v Charles R. Swindoll, Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 23
- vi C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 1 (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 428
- vii Bernard L. Ramm, God's Way Out (Regal Books, 1987), p. 18
- viii Swindoll, p. 26
- ix Ramm, p. 18
- x Swindoll, p. 39
- xi Charles R. Swindoll, The Practical Life of Faith: A Study of Hebrews 11-13 (Insight for Living, 1989), p. 37
- xii Stanley Outlaw, The Book of Hebrews (Randall House, 2005), p. 297
- xiii G. Campbell Morgan, The Triumphs of Faith (Baker Book House, 1980), p.
- xiv Hughes, p. 120
- xv Jesse Clement, The Life of Rev. Adoniram Judson (Reprints from the collection of the University of Michigan Library), p. 25