

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. (Jas 2:18)

Today we will explore a notion that has been rattling around in my mind for some months now, with the hope of sparking conversation and careful consideration. I want to look at the idea of 'coming to years' for our young people. Old people still have to pay attention, because you have a big part in this, so don't tune me out, please.

Our young people have things pretty good. The parents in this place care for them, teach them the Gospel from birth, provide their every need and in reality probably give them too much stuff. We don't let them just flap around in the winds of fortune, free to make whatever decisions they want, do whatever they want, hang out with whomever they want. We care for their souls as much or more than we care for their bodies, and we take doggone good care of their needs. Of course, God gives us the resources, temporal and spiritual to do all of that, it's not of us that it happens. They are, without a doubt, well cared for.

By contrast, if you go into the schools for any extended amount of time you're going to see a brood of rabid, wild, animals if more than about 3 of them are in a place at one time. I get so used to our kids doing what an adult tells them by at least the second time, but regularly the first, that I forget what it's like to interact with the children of this generation. They got that way because the parents don't care. They don't teach them about authority and they don't exercise authority over them. They have no moral compass, no way to exercise authority; they'd rather have their meth, their fornication, their booze, their adultery, etc., etc. than have these precious gifts God gave them.

By the grace of God, our kids don't grow up that way. While our parenting is no more perfect than any other part of our lives, we do seek to raise them with a spiritual focus. We work hard to raise them in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4), and that impacts them in very positive ways. They are exposed to Truth and they see firsthand the "goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps 27:13). That exposure can prick their young hearts resulting in a professions of faith at young ages.

There's no problem with making a profession of faith at a young age. The Lord moves in His ways, and whether He calls a person at a young age or an old age is not my concern. I'm just taking you down a path to get where my mind has been for some months. This isn't to discourage or encourage anyone in how or when you make a declaration. That's between you and God. Just to be clear.

Focus on the idea that there comes a time, when you will 'come to years'. You will come to a point in your life when you have decisions to make, and those decisions are more important than whether you're going to listen to your Mom and eat the green beans or try to sneak them to the dog. Life decisions. Hard, heart decisions. Potentially gut-wrenching, soul-affecting decisions that require meditation and careful

consideration as to their cost and benefit.

There are things that as a young person, a young adult living at home, you can't truly consider despite having made a profession of faith. When the most difficult decision you must make on a daily basis is about the disposition of your green beans, having your faith fully tested isn't much of a reality in your daily life. This isn't to lessen the legitimacy of a young person's profession or to dismiss the difficulties our young people have in facing the world. This is about considering that there are occasions in life that represent turning points, forks in their road, so to speak. Momentous decision points still happen when you're old, for sure. But for the younger generations they may be harder and more shocking when they first encounter them because they aren't calloused and weathered by age and experience.

I believe there is a moment in every person's life when they have a singular decision to make that will set their course for a long time, maybe for life. This isn't a 'realizing your destiny' kind of thing, and it isn't an irreversible event. But there's a moment in a young adult's life where they have to ask the question and make the decision – will I serve God or serve my flesh? This isn't about the profession of faith. I'm certain that whether you've made a profession or not, at some point you come to a level of maturity where this happens. It isn't an event that happens when you turn 18, it isn't something you put on the calendar, it isn't something that needs calling out or explicit declaration to other people. But it happens. When it happens, and the person decides to follow God and serve Him, it manifests itself as a distinct behavior which demonstrates their faith.

Consider the example Moses is called out for

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;” (Heb 11:24)

Moses came to this point I'm talking about, and his behavior is called out as an example of faith.

A brief interlude...

Before I dissect this further, I want to say something about the individuals listed in Hebrews 11. Sometimes you read an expositor calling them 'heroes of the faith', and I have to say I really don't like that labeling. There are a couple of problems I have with it. First, there are no heroes in the Bible. The word hero doesn't appear, so I'm against using a word like that to describe the people whose lives are detailed in its pages. The second issue I take with it is that describing these people as heroes is utterly inaccurate. Before this generation when everyone who gets up out of bed in the morning successfully, or just basically does what is asked of them is a hero, a hero was someone who did some sort of extraordinary thing outside their normal abilities, or

an action that was above and beyond what ‘ordinary people’ would do. Heroes were people who truly sacrificed themselves for a greater or another person’s good, without expectation of reward or recognition. That isn’t what we have in Hebrews 11. Not by a long shot.

These accounts of faith are not intended to highlight the special or extraordinary nature of these individuals – they were men like all men. These actions are recorded here as examples of people showing their faith by their works. Look at each of them individually and you have a different and specific example of how works demonstrate faith. These elders have obtained a good report regarding the works they did that demonstrated the faith that they were given. Abel offered his more excellent and proper sacrifice. Enoch walked with God. Noah believed God that rain was going to fall when no man had ever seen rain and built the ark to withstand it. Abraham picked up all that he had and travelled into a place he had no business being except that he was demonstrating his faith.

This ‘heroes’ label leads us to think these individuals were somehow personally outstanding or exceptional in themselves, lending itself to a worshipful viewpoint that is inappropriate. These faithful servants are nothing more than that – faithful servants whose examples we should look to; from the examples learn how to regulate our behavior and emulate their steadfast works in our own individual contexts. No pedestals, no altars, no adoration. Love them as brethren and seek learning from their lives and their examples. That’s all. Remember, that like us, they have no faith without the author and finisher of that faith. This is not a hall of fame, it is a roster of examples. These are individuals who were provided faith and they displayed it through their works in dutiful obedience. They are each an individual object lesson in what James tells us

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (Jas 2:18)

I think what we have to learn from Hebrews 11, and which Jon spoke to in a slightly different way a few weeks ago – is that faith is an active thing.

Belief is not faith. Fearing of judgment is not faith. The next verse in James makes this abundantly clear:

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (Jas 2:19)

Faith requires demonstration and exercise. That demonstration and exercise takes many forms, is individualized, and is distinct from the behaviors of the world. Faith has substance. It isn’t an ethereal, vague, theoretical thing. It is the substance of things hoped for, and while it doesn’t maybe have some specific measurability in a scientific

sense, its presence is demonstrable.

... End of interlude

Moses had faith, and while he has many demonstrations of faith over his life, he demonstrated it in this one very specific and obvious way that closer examination should bear the fruit of understanding.

“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.” (Heb 11:24-26)

This was a deliberate act that deserves some deliberate attention. It might be useful if we first look at the historical information from this period of Moses' life we have in Exodus and Acts. First from Exodus:

“And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water. And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he

sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.” (Exo 2:1-15)

And from Stephen’s sermon in Acts:

“In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father’s house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.” (Act 7:20-29)

So here we have the story of Moses’ early life. Nowhere in these accounts does it call out specifically what we have in the Hebrews account of his faith, that he ‘refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter’. I believe his refusal was multi-faceted and not one single act of standing up at the dinner table, per se, and saying ‘I will no longer be called your son’. I have increasingly come to the conclusion that speculating, as some expositors do, on the details of this is a fruitless and vain exercise. We have a clear and convincing statement that by faith, he did this. That’s enough.

Moses did this by faith. Not by his own logic, or through the power of reason, strength, wisdom or sense of family; no, “by faith”. Consider this

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom 10:17)

Paul tells us plainly that faith comes by hearing, and that’s not unique to the New Testament era; it’s perhaps a little different execution in our case than it was in most of the Old Testament era but not fundamentally unique. We have the book graciously and providentially preserved for us. We don’t have the same passing down of the knowledge of the covenant from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob that they did. But they still had hearing of the Word. I don’t know precisely how it was that Moses ‘heard’. We know that God spoke to him directly many times. It is possible that he came to him in a dream, a vision, or just worked on his heart to come to a point where he saw the path before him and made a choice.

Look at the verses again

“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.” (Heb 11:24-26)

When he came to the age of maturity, Moses assessed his situation. Everyone who comes to years does this. It is unavoidable that at some point on a given day you are going to look at your situation and decide what you are going to do with your life. Even from a worldly perspective, the most die-hard mooch must, at some point, assess their life and decide to either keep being a mooch living off their parents or add something to society. The same is true spiritually. Every individual son and daughter of Adam has to make a decision about whether they are going to serve God or serve their own desires.

Consider these words of Moses as a compendium of this idea. Even though he spoke them to the children of Israel, they apply to everyone:

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.” (Deu 30:11-16)

The elegance of this is just astounding to me. Think about how much more this applies to this generation than it did to the Hebrews when Moses spoke the words. How easy is it to find God's word today? How easy is it to find people who can help you understand it – I mean, it's not like we live under a rock, right?

Moses understood this concept better than anyone, I think, and this would have lent vigor and strength to his words. He had the kingdom of Egypt at his fingertips, possibly next in line to the throne, with all the riches, luxuries and power that came with it. He had a front row seat to the misery of the Hebrews, the pain, the oppression, the anguish, the utter despair that they lived in on an hourly basis. He saw it all with a perfect birds-eye view.

And he made a choice.

“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”.

He made a choice that no seemingly rational human would make. No human that saw the inhumane way the slaves in Egypt were treated would choose that life, much less give up the life of royalty for that. Driven by faith, Moses did, though. He didn't choose his people, he chose the way of God. He looked at the gold and the fleshly pleasures and saw them as the way of death. To the human eye, it was an irrational decision, but to the eye of faith, it makes complete sense.

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

In the human view, the riches of Egypt were boundless, infinite and everything a person should desire. Just like the world of our day. There's nothing our young people can't gain. They're smart, they're disciplined, they're talented. In the world's view, they're grade A prime candidates for anything and everything the world has to offer.

To follow Moses' example, you're choosing to be reproached versus loved by the world around you. Punched in the face regularly instead of hoisted on your peers' shoulders and carried around the room in a victory dance. From any worldly angle, it doesn't make sense. But this isn't a decision that is based on worldly logic. This is a choice made from faith. This is what we have to help our young people understand. To refuse the world is to reject its riches, its comforts, its pleasures. It is to acknowledge and accept the role of salt and light that Ben talked about last week.

But this isn't a choice you just make while you're sitting on the sofa playing some Call of Duty, take a sip of Dew, put the footrest up and move to the next checkpoint in the level. No, this is a choice you make that pushes you to action. Moses 'refused' to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and 'suffer' affliction. Those are verbs. They require more than just some mental exercise. Like faith being more than belief, this choosing is more than a binary switch, an on/off point in your life. If you're going to claim to have refused the world, it requires you to get off the couch and get engaged in the wars of the Lord.

What I'm saying is Moses gives us the example of how faith is demonstrated in a public way. Follow it. Don't claim you're exercising your faith if you're going to stay on the sidelines. The sidelines can look like a lot of different things, from literally hiding when there is labor to engage in to looking at the landscape and giving yourself an out with 'well, someone older owns that thing that aligns to my skills so I'll just wait until they ask me for help'. This is a personal inspection you have to honestly engage in and critically look at yourself. Active engagement is required as an element of faithful service. Consider it from this angle:

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” (Ecc 11:9)

When you come of years, and you’ve gotten an education, a job and a little money in, and your parents give you the freedom of a young adult, are you going to remember that the things you do now have consequences? I certainly hope so.

The choices you make as you come to years, and the actions you take, don’t have to be precisely the ones your parents made, either. This is an interesting element of this decision Moses made that I hadn’t considered previous to writing this sermon, but it’s one that bears consideration.

Moses had an example in whose footsteps he could have easily followed in Joseph. He could have tried to help his people from a position of extreme power. Even if you don’t think he was in line to take the throne, he was a prince in Egypt without a doubt, with power and influence, and would have been able to exert that influence in very positive ways for the Hebrews. He knew the court, he knew the advisors, the bureaucracy, the laws, the influencers, etc. He actively chose to reject that power though, because this wasn’t about, in the end, rescuing the Hebrews for the sake of rescuing them. He wasn’t interested in making things ‘better’. The logical, sensible thing to do would have been to work inside the system and vastly improve the situation for the Hebrew slaves. He, however, believed he was called to do a job and play a part in the fulfilling of God’s covenant with Abraham, and he had every intention of playing that part and completing that calling.

Here’s where people need to take personal accountability as they come to years. The traditional way, the logical way, the same way as others would do a thing doesn’t always make it the right or the only way. Just because we’ve done a thing this or that way for 20 or more years, doesn’t mean we’re right. Change just for the sake of the next generation isn’t necessary, but tradition shouldn’t lock us into never considering how we do things. Sometimes it takes a new perspective and fresh perspective to see a thing differently. If you have concerns, misgivings or objections to something, you have a responsibility not to just go along, but to speak up in an appropriate fashion and exercise your spiritual muscles on the matter. Hopefully my work on the body has helped establish everyone is here for a reason and a purpose – how will you find yours? Young people who are not in ruts, weighed down by decades of baggage and habits can have a refreshing viewpoint we must foster in the light of the wisdom of years – see, there’s the call back to us old people.

Remember, Moses wasn’t about doing the ‘logical’ thing to make things better for the Hebrews. He didn’t choose to refuse his advantageous position ‘for his people’. There are some expositors who take Stephen’s words at Acts 7:25 *“For he supposed his*

brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not" to mean this was some kind of a nationalist thing for Moses, that he was going to free **his** people. They weren't his people in any way except lineage. He was an Egyptian in behavior, education and environment. I think, based on Stephen's language, he also initially didn't see things the right way. It looks to me as though he saw his 'delivering them' the same way the Apostles saw Christ's kingdom; as a fleshly thing requiring political execution, if you will. Like the Apostles finally seeing it by gaining the light Christ gave them, Moses got that same kind of explanation at the burning bush. There's no indication in the record he got that benefit before then, but the killing of the Egyptian isn't my focus here. The focus is Moses came to a realization that he had a job to do in the service of God, and he went about seeking how to do it.

There are a lot of young men and women in this body who are coming of years. That doesn't mean turning 18. Coming to years isn't about an age, it's about gaining a level of maturity emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It's not a measure of time, it's a measure of attitude and behavior. With this comes a need to find your place in this world. That place isn't sitting on your parents' couch until you're 30, it's about taking action to define for yourself who and what you will be in this body.

The first step in that process is determining that for yourself; no one can dictate these things to you. You have to look at your skills, talents, and desires and juxtapose them against the needs of the body and the declaration of your own faith. Your parents can't do this for you, and you shouldn't look to them to do so. You should look to them and other experienced loved ones for guidance and counsel, but this is a time where you must stand on your own feet and strike out on your own as an individual.

This isn't some sappy, move out to go to college, coming of age movie sort of sentimentality. This isn't about 'breaking free' of your parents' authority over you. It's about becoming part of this body in more than just word. It's about becoming part of this body in deed. Its about realizing

"The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head." (Pro 20:29)

Here is a great Truth. Strength here doesn't just mean physical, how much can you lift, strength. The Hebrew word also means capacity, fruits, vigor, productivity, etc. It is applied to learning and physical capacity both. The strength you young people choose to apply to the work of the Lord is of a great glory to you. Strength used under wise, spiritual counsel is one of the most powerful things in the world. When applied to seeking God's glory to the exclusivity of our own, it can accomplish great things in the name of the Lord.

Moses looked at how he could use his strength, and he made the choice to suffer 'with

the people of God', not with 'the Hebrews'. That's a big difference. It wasn't about family or country. He didn't choose 'his people', he chose to put his energies to the aid of the people of God. We know not all those people were the people of God, as their thankless and maddening behavior at Paran, and other places showed. Moses saw the promises of God and wanted to be associated and involved with all that came with it. He dedicated himself to figuring out what that looked like and he did it.

Now, I'm not going to suggest you go spend 40 years in the wilderness tending someone's sheep to figure out what strengths you bring and what things you can own or how you can be a true member of the body, integrated, functional and necessary. Moses had challenges in his early adulthood, breaking away from the world, shifting from a fleshly to a spiritual approach to life, and those challenges took time for him to figure out and submit himself in humility to God's ways. You will have struggles like that, and like Moses who seems to have learned a lot from Jethro in his years in Midian, you have counsellors and friends who will do everything they can to help you make the right choices and put your strength to proper purpose.

This isn't a call to a 'rumspringa' kind of behavior like the Amish encourage their young people to. You've been in the world, my young friends, so you know what it looks like, how it smells, and what its motivations are. You know there is only death in that pot and hatred in their 'love'. But no one can make the decision to serve God with your strength but you, and if that's not how you decide, well, as sad as it is, it's not personal. This isn't a prison, a cult or anything other than an assembly of like-minded people, and if your mind and your heart aren't in that place, go do your thing, and may God have mercy on your soul in the end.

For those who do have a desire to do as Moses did and suffer affliction and esteem the reproaches of Christ greater than all the riches the world can offer you, take a hard look at what you're doing and how you do it, and why you're doing what you do.

Make your profession of faith more than just an empty set of words. Don't waste your strength and expect it to turn to wisdom in your later years. It won't happen. One leads to the other. This isn't about any one person. This isn't about making your parents proud. This is about recognizing we have a large body of very young souls, and unlike the world who will just throw you into the fire and watch you burn, I want to do what I can for each of you to make sure you see your duty and help you fulfill it, as do all the older people in this place.

Avail yourself of that resource, my friends. Put your strength to the test with actions today, and that strength will continue to grow as you age, building into wisdom and a deep spiritual understanding. It won't just happen by hanging out with people who have already attained to some level of wisdom, though. You must move yourselves to take positive actions to exercise your faith and 'by faith' obtain a good report.