

Those things that are most Precious #8

George Mifflin had the brightest of all futures ahead of him. He was the vice president of the U.S. and President James Polk had already announced that he would not be seeking a second term. All eyes immediately turned to George for he would make the perfect president. Born a member of a respected, Philadelphian family, George had been educated at Princeton University. Then he had returned to Philadelphia as mayor, become U.S. district attorney, and then a U.S. Senator. And now as vice president of the U.S., nothing seemed to stand between him and the Democratic presidential nomination next term. That is nothing except for one tariff bill.

This tariff bill was getting a great deal of national attention. The Senate had split right down the middle in voting for it- 27 for, 27 against. As the presiding officer of the Senate, vice president George Mifflin had to cast the deciding vote. George knew what he must do in order to save his political future. He knew that to vote "yes" meant to risk the loss of support of the very states that he needed to win the presidential nomination, the states that formed the power base of his entire career. But to vote "no" would have violated his conscience for he knew in his heart that such a vote was not in the best interest of our country. George voted his conscience that day; he voted "yes" in the face of public outrage.

The day before the vote, George had been Pennsylvania's favorite son. The day after, they were hanging him in effigy. In fact, the response was so violent in his hometown of Philadelphia that the Senate's sergeant of arms was dispatched to rescue George's family in the midst of the violent threats they were receiving.

George Mifflin only received 3 votes at the Democratic nominating convention in 1848. He then retired to private life, never to hold public office again. A brilliant political career was finished as he passed into the anonymous annals of vice-presidential obscurity. George knew that he had made the right decision, but his constituency had not agreed. So George Mifflin was forgotten. But his name has not been forgotten.

For George made his politics ending decision in the very same year that the state of Texas joined the union. And a group of Texans recognized that the decision that George had made was courageous and right. So they decided to honor George by naming a tiny, little town after him. It's ironic that George's vote at once lost him his political career, but eventually would make him to be one of the best known vice-presidents of all time, George Mifflin Dallas.

There are times in life when we all have to make critical decisions, decisions that have the potential of altering the entire course of our lives. Very often at these times we are torn between what we know in our hearts to be right and what other people might think about that decision. Sometimes we might even risk disgrace and dishonor and misunderstanding in making our decision. But if we are to be successful in the eyes of God, we must each realize that there is something that is more precious in life than immediate popularity. Clarity of conscience, the knowledge that we are doing the right thing, even suffering disgrace for the sake of Jesus Christ is a very precious

possession in life – it should be precious to us because it is so precious to God.

Moses learned this lesson in life, and it helped Moses to become one of the great men of God in the entire Bible.

Hebrews 11 records one of the greatest sermons of all time for us. It was a sermon extolling the virtues of faith. The text for the sermon is found in 10:38 "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him." The author then develops that thesis statement in 2 major sections of his outline- the first part of chapter 11 discusses the nature of Biblical faith- what faith is, why it is important. Then the last part of chapter 11 illustrates Biblical faith thru the lives of selected, godly individuals. You might remember that we studied this chapter at some length shortly after I came to RBC.

In the midst of this great hall of fame of faith, the inspired author focuses on this courageous leader named Moses. And he indicates that Moses was a great leader and a great man of faith in part because he realized something in his life that was most valuable. Notice it with me as we read the Scriptures.

READ Heb. 11:24-27.

HEB 11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Now Moses had a decision that he had to make in life that was critical to the entire course of his life. Very frankly, it is a decision that is difficult for us to even imagine for we are so far removed from the cultural setting of Moses' day. Moses as a child had been rescued from the Nile River by a princess in Egypt. As a result of her compassion upon him, Moses, after the irony of being weaned by his natural mother who was even paid for the privilege, had been raised in the palace of Egypt as the princesses own child. Now any nation attaining a stature of world supremacy reaps material blessings for that conquest. Such a nation is in a position to dictate world policies and trade agreements rather than just reacting to the policies of others. History has demonstrated that the greatest national empires also became very lucrative financially. The Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek and Roman Empires, and on and on we could go. In fact, even though our own country has never assumed a position of being a world-wide empire, for we haven't really had such a power since the Roman Empire fell, we would all agree that our nation's world influence and power has greatly benefited the quality of life for each of us.

Now we must realize that Egypt was the dominant nation politically in Moses' day. The powerful influence that Egypt exercised on others had also brought a great measure of material prosperity to the land- especially to the Pharaoh and his household. In fact, it is difficult for us to even imagine the luxury and grandeur of the palatial

setting for we really have nothing to compare it with today.

Many have had the opportunity to visit just a small portion of the wealth uncovered from King Tutankhamen's pyramid tomb as it has been displayed at several locations here in our country. I remember seeing King Tut's treasures myself at smaller portion first in Chicago and then the complete treasures in Cairo. Even though he only reigned as a youth for 8 years, the wealth that they buried with King Tut was more than any single person owns in the whole world today. Just think of all that was left behind for the next Pharaoh? Just think of what it would have been like for a Pharaoh who had an illustrious, long reign?

Moses was raised in this kind of lavish luxury. There wouldn't have been a convenience known to his world that Moses wasn't aware of and that he couldn't have enjoyed. Moses could have purchased anything that he wanted. Moses would have been treated with the respect reserved only for the gods for he was in line to be a Pharaoh possibly himself. And Moses had an entire lifetime of this kind of lifestyle to look forward to.

But in spite of all that had been offered to him, Moses did that which was totally unbelievable in his day. Moses turned his back away from it all. He willingly gave it all up. His contemporaries probably couldn't believe Moses' decision. Why would Moses be willing to sacrifice all of the pleasures of Egypt? Because there was something that Moses came to value more highly- namely his own freedom of conscience before God and the freedom for God's people from their oppressors. So the Bible records, Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. 11:26.

Now what would make a man of Moses' obvious intellectual capacity choose disgrace over treasures? What would influence him to make such a choice as this that ran against the stream of the public opinion of his day? The author of Hebrews gives 3 reasons for Moses' choice- 3 reasons why disgrace for the sake of Christ is more valuable than the greatest riches that this world has to offer to us. Notice them with me.

1. The world's treasures, as great as they may be, are still only temporary- they will pass away in time. READ 11:25.

²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Now Moses lived to be 120 years old. He made the choice to leave the treasures of Egypt at age 40. So, as a result of his choice, Moses lived without the palatial pleasures with which he was raised for 80 years- longer than our average lifespan today. Most of us would not consider 80 years to be a short time. 80 years is an entire lifetime. But the author of Hebrews considered it to be a short time- he speaks of the pleasures of sin for a short time. Now in order for him to consider these 80 years to be a short time, he must have been comparing them to another time period in his mind, he must have been comparing them to the endless eternity that Moses is experiencing now after his death. And verse 26 indicates that this is exactly his perspective.

It is very critical for a person to maintain a proper perspective in life. As Lee Heisman describes his uncle, John Heisman one of the most distinguished football coaches who ever lived, he tells how his uncle would not tolerate

anyone playing on his team who thought playing football was more important than getting his education. Lee tells an anecdote of a confrontation between coach Heisman and one of his star players. "Red", the coach said, "I just want you to know that you aren't going to play today because your grades haven't been good enough." "But coach", Red argued, "don't you know that the sports writers call this right toe the million dollar toe?" According to Lee, Heisman just snapped back, "what good is it to have a million dollar toe if you have a 15 cent head?" It shouldn't surprise us that the most coveted trophy in all of college football today is named after Coach John Heisman for he was a man who had a proper perspective on life.

Today, more than ever, we are having trouble keeping perspective in our culture. Perhaps this is partially because of the rapid speed of life which can cause us to lose proper perspective. According to the Driver's Handbook, at a stationary position, a driver enjoys a full field of vision- 180 degrees or more. But as he picks up speed, his perspective diminishes rapidly. At 20 MPH, his field of vision is reduced to 120 degrees, at 40 MPH, it is further reduced to 72 degrees, at 60 MPH, a driver's field of vision is barely wider than the width of his headlight beams. The faster he goes, the narrower the perspective.

So it is in life. The faster our pace of life, the less perspective we have, the greater the temptation to become obsessed with minor, relatively insignificant priorities. If we are racing 100 MPH thru life, it is very difficult if not impossible to stop and really listen to what our child or grandchild has to say, or to pause to smell the flowers in the garden, or to listen to God's still small voice inside giving guidance and direction.

Moses realized that there was something that was far more important than the treasures of Egypt- that was the destiny of God's people. And he was absolutely right. Whereas the treasures of Egypt have faded and disappeared to the place where Egypt is a land today dependent on the good will of neighbors to balance her budget, the nation of Israel that Moses helped to lead out of slavery continues to grow and prosper and be a center of world attention in the middle east. Moses realized that the agenda in God's program is enduring, whereas the pleasures of sin are very fleeting indeed- so he chose to line himself up with God's program even though at the time it meant disgrace and ridicule rather than enjoy the temporary treasures offered to him.

2. But notice further with me the fact that Moses kept his eyes focused on the rewards that God gives to those who are faithful to him. READ 11:26

²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

In Winona Lake Indiana there lives Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, a fine Christian family. Each year during the Christmas season, they take out a tattered and worn Christmas card and put it in a prominent position under their Christmas tree. The card is composed of red cardboard, with clippings of the 3 wise men pasted on it and the words "Merry Christmas" printed under them. For 45 years, that card has been displayed under their Christmas tree. If you ask Mr. and Mrs. Cooper why that specific Christmas card is so special to them, they will tell you this story.

Their only son made this card, over 50 years ago, as a student in elementary school. On his way home from school that afternoon, some bullies saw the card and threatened to tear it up. Even though the boy was not a fighter at heart, he told them that he had made this card to give to his parents and he would not let them take it. Well, the bullies were very persistent and kept picking on him. Finally, the Cooper's son took off his coat and defended himself against these roughians. He received many bruises, but he saved that card from destruction. His parents found out about that scene about their son arrived home from school. Still today, over 50 years later, among their most prized possessions is that old, red Christmas card, because it represents the sacrifice and sufferings of their only child.

We can understand the nostalgic value of that card to the Cooper family. But as human beings if we can value an old Christmas card so much, just think with me for a moment of how much God must value fellowship in the sufferings of his one and only son, Jesus Christ. We can't even imagine the preciousness of the relationship between the father, son and holy spirit in the Godhead. We can't begin to imagine the pain that the Father must have endured when Jesus Christ the son of God went to the cross to be made sin for us. Now his atonement for sin was complete- we need add nothing to it for God's holiness is perfectly satisfied by it. But God has given us the privilege of knowing something of the sufferings of Christ. Not anywhere near to extent or intensity of his sufferings, of course, but something of the nature of his sufferings. The Bible speaks of suffering for the sake of righteousness. Peter spoke of those who suffer unjustly. Paul spoke of his desire to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. And when we suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ, God considers that to be very precious to him indeed- for it represents to him the very sufferings of his one and only son. By suffering for Christ, we are identifying ourselves with Christ.

Moses made a decision to reject the treasures of Egypt so that he might endure disgrace for the sake of Jesus Christ. And God was so pleased with that decision that he is going to heap rewards on Moses far greater than he could have ever experienced in Egypt.

3. But finally, Moses chose to value disgrace for the sake of Christ as more valuable than the treasures of Egypt so that he might know God more intimately.

READ 11:27

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

It is true that Moses could have continued his entire life lapping up the palatial pleasures with an insatiable appetite. And he certainly would have experienced more conveniences than he did wandering around in the desert wilderness. But just think for a moment what he would have missed. He would have missed having the privilege of having a brand new revelation of God thru the name Jehovah that he received at the burning bush. He would have missed experiencing the power of God as he performed all of those miracles before Pharaoh. He would have missed receiving from God the very revelation of his law on top of that mountain that we call Sinai. He would have missed

all of those times of intimate fellowship with God in the tent of meeting where he came out with his face shining in brilliance from the presence of God. And we could go on and on. You see, it was because of Moses' choice to be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ that he was introduced into a whole new realm of fellowship with God. Since intimate fellowship with God is the most wonderful experience that we as human beings can ever have, than suffering for the sake of Christ is our friend, for it brings us into deeper fellowship with God.

Great people of the Bible and church history have realized this connection. While not being masochistic in bringing pain upon themselves, they have not rejected suffering when it came their way, for they realized that it was bringing a blessing to them. The Apostle Paul said that it was his innermost heart's desire to know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. Paul realized that there was a necessary connection between choices that would necessitate suffering for the sake of Christ and more in depth knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Now at first we might think that Moses decision has very little to do with our lives today. After all, he lived 3,500 years ago. The world situation has changed to the place where none of us could possibly have the choice that he had for there are no world-wide empires today. So we are tempted to look at Moses and admire him as a committed leader, but think that his situation is not that relevant to us today.

But if we were to think that way, we would miss the whole point of his example for us. For every single person who has ever lived has had the same choice before him that Moses had- not to the same degree, of course, but the same basic choice nevertheless. To every person who is born into this world, the world offers its piece of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eat this and you will be wise, eat this and you will find great pleasure, eat this and you will be happy. Enjoy the treasures that I offer you, participate in the sins that I promote, covet all that I have that can bring you such pleasure. Join all your human colleagues who are worshiping at my footstool.

Now to choose to follow Jesus Christ will bring a measure of disgrace and ridicule. We cannot avoid it. If you follow Jesus Christ at school, you are going to suffer for it- perhaps openly, but more probably in subtle ways, whispering behind your back, the snubbing of fellow students. If you choose to follow Jesus Christ at your place of work, you are going to suffer for it- this cannot be avoided- missed invitations to social gatherings, hushed conversation when you come by, perhaps even lack of promotion. But because of your willingness to sacrifice, there will be a presence of God himself in your classroom or shop. And if you, like Moses, choose that which is more valuable in life, you will be investing in something that is eternal not just temporary, you will be piling up rewards that will be given to you one day by God himself, and you will be in a position where you will be able to grow in your relationship with God thru the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.