



Don't hold this against me, but I loved math as a kid. In fact, I even thought I would be a math teacher or an accountant someday. Math came rather easy to me except I remember struggling with these two little signs... greater than or less than. I could never remember which one meant what... until one wise 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher taught me to draw little teeth in the mouth and make it look like an alligator. She then went on to say, "You always want to eat what's greater."

That trick helped me tremendously when comparing numbers. The alligator will always eat 8 instead of 2. But what's "greater" when it comes to other areas of life? It's not always so clear cut. Is staying home to raise your child greater than going back to work so you can provide other things for your children? Is getting shoulder surgery and going through painful rehab more desirable than living with the constant dull pain? Is attending a prestigious university that's 1500 miles away a better choice than attending a local junior college where you'll know other people and be more comfortable? Sometimes it's difficult to figure out what's greater than and what's less than. And to be honest, often there is no right or wrong answer.

But do you know what I marvel at? It's not the person who makes the obvious choice. It's not the person who makes a decision that could go either way. It's the follower of Christ who astutely chooses the "greater than" sign when the rest of the world would have marked "less than." A follower like Noah who thought it was the better choice to build a boat in the middle of the desert. A follower like Rahab, who risked her life by welcoming spies into her home. A follower like Abraham who sojourned to a foreign land simply because God said. A follower like Moses:

Consider the equation that stands before you. You are the son of Pharaoh's daughter. As such, you received the premiere leadership training this world could offer. Basically, your pedigree allowed you to be trained at West Point Academy. You received any an Ivy League education. The very sound of your name commands respect and awe. You have fame and fortune, popularity and power. Since the Egyptian throne is handed down via the daughter, you stand to be next in line for the throne, assuming your mother places you there. Arguably, at age 40, you hold in your hand the greatest potential for power in the world as well as all the pleasures that came along with it. Or... you can choose to identify yourself with and subsequently be mistreated along with a bunch of whiny, accusatory, malcontent, brick-making slaves who just happened to be the people of God. Follower of Christ, which will it be? Is the unmatched fame and fortune, prestige and power greater than or less than being part of the persecuted people of God?

I know what you want to answer and I know what I want to answer. But I also know what I often answer. Why would I want to be associated with whiny, accusatory, malcontent, brick-making slaves when I can top every Who's Who list in the world? Why? That's wrapped up in these words... *people of God*. "Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time."

How often don't I, how often don't we, forget the treasure we have in being a family of believers, fellow followers of Christ, people of God? Instead of taking advantage of the encouragement we can get from one another, instead of utilizing the joy of working side-by-side with one another, what do we often do? We work ourselves into a tizzy because other believers use their Christian freedom to worship in different styles than we prefer. We talk condescendingly about our fellow pew-sitters. All too often, we see the negatives instead of the positives. The bad instead of the good. Why? Maybe it's because we're so surrounded by fellow Christians that we fail to see the blessings we have. We live in a community where over 90% of the population claims to be Christian. There are 36 WELS churches within 20 miles of us. We take the people of God for granted.

On the contrary, when Mary and I went to Israel two years ago, we were doing some souvenir shopping in the streets of Jerusalem. Even though Jerusalem plays an important role in the history of Christianity, the percentage of Christians there today is miniscule – less than 5%, but the vendors still all sell Christian products because it's such a hot spot for tourism. So here we are in this shop in the Muslim Quarter, and we watch an Eastern-looking man buy an olive-wood cross from the vendor. And as they start talking, they realize they are both Christians. And the vendor gets up from behind the counter, throws his arms around the customer, and has tears in his eyes because he found another Christian from his same ethnic background. And he gets his picture taken with him and he gives this guy an armful of wooden crosses that would have sold for hundreds of dollars. (At which point I wanted to say, "I'm Christian, too.") But the hair just stood up on my arms, as I witnessed the joy of two Christians celebrating their unity as people of God. Brothers and sisters – and I don't just throw those titles out there to transition paragraphs – brothers and sisters, those are terms of endearment that express what you

and I have here. We are a family. Cherish it. Cultivate it. Crave it. Like Moses, may we realize that being counted among the people of God is greater than being known as anything else.

Now while there are joys and privileges to being part of the people of God, there are also challenges. As we heard last week, there is a cost that comes with our Christianity. Jesus tells us that by following him, we can expect persecution in some way, shape or form. If the world rejected Jesus, it's going to reject you. If the world mistreated Jesus, it's going to mistreat you. If the world heaped insults on Jesus, it's going to heap insults on you.

Now if your equation looked like this – receive insults because of your faith or enjoy the treasures of Egypt, which would you choose? Before you answer, understand that the “treasures of Egypt” means a little more than what your bank account says. You've heard of King Tut – the boy Pharaoh – he was just a few generations removed from Moses. When they discovered his tomb in 1922, they found thousands of pounds of pure gold and many other extravagant artifacts. So, by professing his faith in the Triune God instead of the gods of Egypt, Moses was not just giving up a modest inheritance. He wasn't just giving up a cottage on the Nile River or a second home on the Mediterranean. He was giving up millions, if not billions of dollars. But he did it. Why? *“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.**”*

And here's the good news... the reward that Moses considered more valuable than the billions he had in his Egyptian trust fund – is the same reward that awaits you and me, namely heaven. Because of Jesus, the wages of your sin is not death, rather your reward, the gift placed at your feet, is eternal life. And yes, I don't think I'm springing anything new on you today. Before you walked in here today, you knew by God's grace that heaven is yours. You knew that Jesus wiped away all your sins that separated you from your God. But may the actions of Moses move and motivate you today to not simply give your heavenly home, your heavenly treasure a passing glance. Look what it says here: *he was looking*. He kept looking. He never stopped looking towards that heavenly home. By keeping his focus on his heavenly home, Moses realized what a treasure God had in store for him; a treasure that outweighed, a treasure that was greater than all that Egypt could offer.

And you say, that's great for Moses. U-rah-rah Moses. But that was Moses. He's in the Hall of Fame of believers. I'm not even in the minors. How can I expect to live in such a way that I could consider my future home more valuable than the “real” things I can enjoy, touch and see that are right in front of me? How can I ever be able to live in such a way that considers my relationship with the people of God greater than my relationship at work or in society? How can I want to remain a follower of Christ and expect persecution, when I could follow different paths and escape persecution?

Might I direct you to two little words: *by faith*. By faith Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. By faith, Moses turned down the treasures of Egypt. And faith is not something you get from or for yourself. It's a gift from God. It's a gift he's given you through the Word. It's a gift that he's strengthening right now. It's a gift that increasingly equips you to cherish your role in the people of God. It's a gift that keeps you looking forward. Faith's eye sees not only the present, but especially the future. Faith's wisdom calculates not only the beginning, but especially the ending. And by faith, there is nothing greater than the ending that is in store for you. AMEN.