

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Characters of Faith (Part 3 – Hebrews 11:4-40)

Hebrews 11:7 (Noah)

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Thus far in our study of Hebrews 11 we have considered a definition of faith, that definition being that faith is a *firm and fully confident trust in the person [who God is], the promises [what God says] and provision [what God does] of God through Jesus Christ resulting in behavior consistent with the Word of God.* We have also seen that definition applied to two characters found in the Old Testament, first to Able and second to Enoch. In Able we saw that it is only by faith by which we rightly worship God, coming to God with right attitudes and hearts, worshipping according to His revealed Word. In Enoch we saw that it is only by faith that we might rightly walk with God, enjoying God's presence now as well as anticipating a greater intimacy with God in the future. This morning, in a greatly abbreviated consideration of the life of Noah, we will see that it is only by faith that we might rightly witness of God in our lives, a witness that reveals both right living and a right relationship to God. Therefore, I submit to you that the only way in which a person may be saved, that is be in a right relationship with God and live right before God is by faith. The example of the faith of Noah demonstrates this in three ways – namely that by faith Noah...

- I. **Prepared an ark for salvation**
- II. **Condemned the world in sin**
- III. **Became and heir of righteousness**

Each of these “works” of faith – works resulting from faith – correspond to a glorious working of God in the life of everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD (Romans 10:17), who believes in the person, promises and provision of God as found in Jesus Christ – that belief, that faith being demonstrative, alive and fully active in the professing believer.

Before we continue, let me turn your attention to our Hebrews 11:7 text and explain its basic structure, as it has a bearing on our understanding. Our text begins with that phrase of emphasis, **“by faith”** – indicating that the actions to follow are not “works” toward salvation, toward making oneself right with God, but rather are the results of a heart that confidently trusts in who God is, what God has said and what God has done for the believing sinner. So, we begin with this acknowledgement, that **“by faith Noah...”** a man, a sinner just like you and me, turned his heart toward God.

As we move on in the text – and before we are presented with the actions of faith performed by Noah, we are offered the reasons or motivations which governed Noah's thinking. First we are told **“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen...”** Just like with Enoch, God interrupted Noah's life at some point and revealed to him a great and dreadful message – a message prophesized some 900 years early through the

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preaching of Enoch – a message of judgment. Let us turn to Genesis 6 and pick up these thoughts. To begin with, we see the reason for this message of judgment in Genesis 6:5 revealing both the culture and condition of man, **“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”** For this reason God said in Genesis 6:7, **“I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”**

Down in Genesis 6:13 we see this revelation given to Noah as the LORD says to him, **“The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.”** This is the message of judgment – man, because he is a sinner and not walking with God, will be destroyed. And yet, in the midst of all this we see grace – the grace of God manifested as we read in Genesis 6:8, **“But Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the LORD.”** And then in 6:9 we read, **“These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.”** Some may be tempted to think backwards here – that Noah found favor or grace because he was righteous, blameless and walked with God; but that is not what the text indicates. Rather it indicates that it was because of grace that Noah was righteous, blameless and walked with God. As one has rightly put it, *“...the grace of God always comes before anything.”*¹ By faith, not by works; by Noah’s trusting in who God is, what God had said and what God had done; not by anything Noah was, said or did, God warned Noah of the impending judgment against sin and enabled him to believe and therefore act on God’s revelation. Remember that when God told Noah about the coming judgment and of God’s provision for escape, he had never seen rain or a flood; nor had ever seen an ark, an ocean-going vessel, upon which to model his own. These are **“things not yet seen”** but which Noah believed by faith.

The second motivation offered in Hebrews 11:7 in addition to this warning of divine judgment was a recognition of the awesomeness of God - as we read, **“in reverence”** or as some translations put it, “moved with godly fear” Noah proceeded to act **“by faith.”** The Greek for this phrase indicates a “deeply felt and devout care or concern.” Noah respected the power, majesty and greatness of God. He was literally in awe of God and in a sense, dared not disobey although his heart was already inclined by the grace of God to obey.

And from this we can already draw an application. Like Noah, people have been warned of a coming judgment against sin. Noah, who did not have the written revelation we do, immediately obeyed God, without questioning, without complaining, without procrastinating. God said it and Noah acted in faith. Many who disregard Christ do so because they question the truthfulness of Christ’s claims, or complain about what they think they are giving up to follow Christ, or procrastinate thinking they have time before the judgment comes forgetting the truth of 2 Corinthians 6:2;

For [God] says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (ESV)

¹ Boice, James M. “Genesis: An Expository Commentary” p. 256.

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Beloved, the favorable time has come because of Christ, who, according to 1 Peter 3:20, is a greater Ark than that of Noah's in whom men may be saved "by faith" alone. Are you "in Christ?" And for those who already believe, let us learn this lesson from Noah, he was told and commanded of things he did not yet see, yet he obeyed. Is God's command to you enough? In Mark 1:15 we are told that Jesus began His ministry with the words, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel [the good news of salvation through Christ].**" This was Christ's message while here on the earth. And how does Christ end His ministry on earth? By commanding His followers, all who profess Christ with these words found in Mark 16:15, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**" Do we question, complain or procrastinate at this command? Let us repent and believe.

With this background concerning the motivation of Noah's faith, let us now consider those three demonstrations of Noah's faith, which again I submit to you, picture the only way in which a person may be saved, that is be in a right relationship with God and live right before God – that is by faith.

I. By faith Noah "Prepared an Ark" for Salvation

Our text clearly tells us that "**by faith Noah...prepared an ark...**" As we already noted, Noah had no experience with ship building, he had never seen rain much less a flood, and yet, because God commanded, because God said so, because God gave orders to build the ship that could be followed, Noah exercised obedience and "**prepared an ark**". This statement teaches us a couple of things. First, Noah's faith was careful. The Greek word for "**prepared**" speaks of thoughtfully, carefully and thoroughly crafting something. The obedience of Noah was not something he just threw together. He was careful to follow the LORD command and design. His devotion to the LORD required more than 15 minutes in the morning and saying grace at meals. When God called Noah to build this ark, it was most likely hundreds of miles from water. Some believe that when God called Noah to build the ark, his sons would have been at best boys and so he started this project alone and that first axe to the tree was perhaps one of the greatest demonstrations of faith the world has ever know.

Second, the faith of Noah was committed. According to Genesis 5 and 6, Noah was 500 years old when he had Shem, Ham and Japheth and he was 600 years old when the ark was completed. Genesis 6:3 tells us that the LORD intended to give mankind 120 more years to repent. Genesis 6:10 and following implies that Noah received the command to build the ark sometime after these three boys were born, meaning that Noah took right around 100 years to complete this project. Can you even imagine what it would have been like to live with the questions; to live with the ridicule; to live with the temptation to give up when day after day, month after month and year after year passed without a drop of rain? But "**by faith**" Noah was committed and "**prepared an ark**" according to God's specifications and according to God's timing.

And here is the key, by God's grace, Noah built that ark. He finished his God-appointed task in spite of his lack of ship-building experience. Noah lived an obedient, committed life. His life was set apart for fulfilling the LORD's purpose. How about you? Do you have the faith of Noah? Have you heard the LORD's call upon your life, to live differently than the world? I

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submit to you that in the faith of Noah we have a picture of “sanctification” – the process by which a person is made more and more holy, more and more into the image of Jesus. Every day Noah went out to work on that ark, he was committing himself more and more to the LORD. With each passing day Noah was getting older, denying opportunities live as the world lived in their godlessness and thus dying day by day things of this world. How about you? Are you dying to self and saying no to godlessness day by day thus becoming more and more like Jesus? You can only do it **“by faith”** – by believing that God has called and enabled you to become more and more like Christ. This is the testimony of Paul who said this in Titus 2:11-12, **“11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age...”** This is sanctification. This is becoming more and more like Christ, when by faith we believe the grace of God is calling us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires to live uncompromisingly unto Jesus. When such a calling seems difficult; when such a calling seems to make the days drag on and on; consider and imitate the faith of Noah, who in the midst of discouraging and challenging circumstances lived a set-apart, blameless and holy life unto the LORD. By faith, you and I can be so sanctified. But know that there is no middle ground here. With God there is no grey. It is all black and white. Either you are living a sanctified, set-apart, holy life unto the LORD by faith, or you are living an unsanctified, unholy life unto self by unbelief. No one is saved in such unbelief. Let us believe, let us obey.

Before we consider the second act of faith on the part of Noah, notice that he **“prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.”** While Noah was faithfully following the LORD by revelation and in reverence, he also had faith that his obedience might impact others, which it did, on his wife, his three sons and their wives, delivering them from the judgment as well. This pictures the fullness of the life of faith. By faith we obey the call of God, who gifts His people with divine enablements by which they exhibit their faith and become witnesses to others of grace and salvation of God. This is the call of 1 Timothy 4:14-16 which calls Timothy to this principle, **“14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”**

Does the exercise of your faith ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you?

II. By faith Noah “Condemned the World” in Sin

The second act of faith we find in this text is that **“by faith Noah...condemned the world”** in sin. The word **“condemned”** is used here to speak of pointing out sin by means of a good example. Noah’s life, the way he lived, what he committed himself to, what he thought about and what he said revealed to the world around him that he was in a right relationship with God. In New Testament terms we call this “justification” – that act of God wherein the believing sinner is declared righteous and thus enabled by God’s grace to live according to that righteousness by faith. When a believer seeks to live according to the righteousness of God,

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such actions reveal to unbelievers their unrighteousness, their sinfulness. Such a life of holiness serves as condemnation, a revealing of sin to those who rebel against God.

Have you ever been driving down a street and realized all of a sudden you did not know what the speed limit was? Frantically you look around for the posted speed and if, by chance, you find that you were ten miles over the limit, what happens – (you slow down!) – but you are condemned, your sin has been pointed out. The Apostle Paul would speak this way of the Law. The Law of God is not sinful merely because it points out sin, but the pointing out of sin condemns all people as sinners, separate from God, unrighteous.

Noah's righteous life, his faith-filled obedience, patience, long-suffering, commitment and devotion to God all revealed to those around him their own petty, self-absorbed existence. Even without uttering a word, the life of Noah rebuked the world. As it is written many times in the Scriptures and most recently noted in Hebrews 10:38 – **“But My righteous ones shall live by faith...”** - the justified, the ones made righteous, trust in the Word of God to direct their lives in such a way as to reveal to unbeliever's their sin. Is this how you live? Could it be said of you that your righteous, joyful living unto Jesus causes unbelievers to note their own sin? Do you live your life in such a way that people see what you are doing and are inclined, even in their unbelief, to glorify God? Oh that God might increase our faith that we might so live our lives.

But we must remember that while Noah's actions condemned the unbelievers of his time, Noah's faith also caused him to speak out the truth of God. In 2 Peter 2:5 Noah is identified as **“a preacher of righteousness.”** Beloved, as Noah went about his work, not as a pastor, nor as an elder or church leader, but as a ship-builder, he warned the people of the impending wrath of God. Beloved, we are called to **“go therefore and make disciples...”** - literally, “in your going about, doing whatever it is you do, be it business anyalsis, driving a bus, painting, tending to a home, or even building a ship, have the faith of Noah and make hearers and learners of Jesus Christ. Your life and words will bring condemnation on some but will be words of life to others.

III. By faith Noah “Became an Heir of Righteousness”

Finally, we see that **“by faith Noah...became an heir of righteousness...”** I love this statement. A simple truth. We have seen that by faith Noah, and all who have the faith of Noah, lived a sanctified, set-apart life unto God. We have seen that by faith Noah, and all who have the faith of Noah, lived a justified, righteous life. And now we learn that by faith [not by works] but by faith Noah, and all who have the faith of Noah, became an heir – that is, he was adopted into the family God to enjoy all the benefits and privileges of a child of God. Here we have the New Testament teaching of adoption.

“Adoption,” states the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, “is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have the right to all the privileges of the sons of God” (Q & A 34). By adoption, we are brought into the family of our heavenly Father; by adoption we have fellowship with Him; by adoption we have fellowship with His beloved children; by adoption we receive the full benefit of His grace which means not only is the believer declared righteous, but he also looks forward to receiving the full blessing of salvation – those things **“not yet seen”**. The word **“heir”** speaks of God's sovereign choice, apart from

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any merit on the recipient, to bestow this righteousness and salvation upon the person of faith, in this case Noah.

And if we have the faith of Noah, then we have the confidence as well that this inheritance is ours and its fullness is awaiting us. As Titus 3:7 speaks so clearly, **“so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** The only question that remains is this, “Are you an heir?” How can you know? Let me ask you, are you diligently seeking to walk by the Spirit of God according to the Word of God? You see, that is the faith of Noah. Are you putting the claims of God and His righteousness above everything else (Matthew 6:33)? That is the faith of Noah. Are you so firm in your commitment and devotion to Christ that nothing can seduce you to part from it? That is the faith of Noah. Is your heart so consumed in this God-promised inheritance that you groan within and according to the words of Romans 8:23 are, **“waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons”**? This is the faith of Noah. So, finally, let me ask you, are you walking by faith, in reverence, in godly fear, giving diligent attention to living according to His Word and by which you condemn the world in its sin? This is the faith of Noah. Noah lived and was saved by faith. How do you desire to live? May it be **“by faith.”**

Soli Deo Gloria

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