

“Faith Demonstrated Through Obedience”

Heb. 11:7

- INTRO. - We’re going through the great “Hall of Faith,” and so far we have seen the life of faith demonstrated through worship and through walking. Today we are going to see it demonstrated through working. We’re going to see it demonstrated through Noah’s obedience to God in building an Ark.
- James 2:26 says, “...faith without works is dead.” That is a major theme in James, and the message is, that genuine faith always is demonstrated in some sort of action.
- If you truly believe God, there is going to be some sort of evidence of that faith. In other words, your faith will show itself in works. And (of course) we know that no one can be saved through works. We are saved through faith alone in Christ alone. But true faith always *produces* good works.
- We (really) see that with *all* of these examples in this chapter, but there is no one who demonstrates it more than Noah. He is the epitome of obedience to God. He showed his faith in God by doing what God commanded – against incredible odds (and incredible opposition).
- Abel demonstrated the worship of faith, Enoch demonstrated the walk of faith – but Noah demonstrated the work of faith. What we see in Noah is the bedrock of genuine faith – which is obeying God.
- The Bible is crystal clear that salvation can never be achieved by works, but the Bible is just as clear that the person who is justified by faith will *produce* good works (as evidence of that faith). The person of faith *will* obey God.
- I mean, just think about the passage of Scripture we generally turn to when we want to make the case that salvation is *not* by works. What is it? Eph. 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”
- That’s pretty much a “slam dunk.” But do you know what v. 10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
- In 1 Tim. 6:18 Paul wrote, “Instruct them [wealthy Christians] to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share...”
- There are a variety of ways that genuine faith is demonstrated in good works, but it always produces some kind of evidence in this way. We see that all through this chapter. Each of these

examples of the life of faith shows itself in some form of action.

- Faith is a lot like the wind. You can't see the wind – but you can see what the wind *does*. In the same way faith is internal – but it always demonstrates its reality through some external action.
- Faith cannot be seen except by the things it *does*, and that is clearly seen in this example of Noah. In Gen. 6:9 we're told, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God."
- There is no doubt that he worshipped God (as Abel had) according to His will. He also (as it says here) walked with God (as Enoch had). He was a man of faith who lived a life of faith. He is an example of Hab. 2:4, "the just shall live by faith."
- But with the example of Noah, it is as if the author of Hebrews is carrying this one step farther, because Noah *did* something that was absolutely incredible "by faith."
- John MacArthur writes, "Noah's faith...was stupendous because of his absolute trust in God and because of his unhesitating and persistent obedience for 120 years in an undertaking that, from [a] human perspective, looked totally absurd and absolutely impossible."

- Now, we're going to see this in three parts today. We have a very simple outline: Noah's Response, Noah's Rebuke, and Noah's Righteousness. Let's look (first) at:

I. NOAH'S RESPONSE

- Look with me at the first part of v. 7, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household..."
- God warned Noah about some "things not yet seen." What were these? Well, rain, for one. When this warning came there had never been any rain. Up until this time there had been a protective canopy surrounding the earth, and a mist watered all the plants.
- There had never been any floods before. It is hard for us to even understand how Noah could have comprehended this, because he had never seen any of it before. But God told him it was coming – so he believed God.
- And the thing he did in faith – to build an enormous ship – in an area where there was *not* even any large body of water – is absolutely incredible! Most Bible scholars agree that Noah lived in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers – a long ways from any ocean or even any sizable lake. So it is very difficult for us to imagine how hard it must have been for him to obey this

command from the Lord. And yet, Noah dropped everything and started building the Ark.

- By the way, how would *we* respond to a command like this? Can't you just hear the excuses start flying? Most of us would be too embarrassed, or too overwhelmed to even *begin* a project like this. We would have (probably) done everything possible to get *out* of doing this.

- But Noah immediately went out and started cutting down trees. And remember, Noah had a fraction of the light we have. He did this is on the basis of extremely limited revelation from God. Yes, God spoke directly to him (apparently), but he did *not* even have the OT (much less the NT).

- And think about this – Noah spent 120 years fulfilling one command from God. I think we would have to call that “*long* obedience.” And again, what the author of Hebrews is illustrating is *not* just a single act of faith, but a *life* of faith.

- There is no indication he ever questioned God – he just obeyed. He continued to obey through thick and thin. He continued to obey when there was ridicule and opposition. He continued to obey when it wasn't easy to obey.

- MacArthur says, “Among the countless faithful saints who have endured and persisted in obedience to God, Noah stands supreme, if for nothing else than the sheer

magnitude and time span of his one incredible assignment from the Lord.”

- Just think about the enormity of this task! The Ark was over one and a half football fields in length. Depending on the length of the cubit (which is somewhat unclear) the ark would have been anywhere from 438 feet long to 510 feet long.

- It was at least 73 feet wide. It was more than four stories high (at least 44 feet). It had a total deck area of 96,000 square feet. The total volume within the decks was about 1.3 million cubic feet.

- God had to tell him exactly how to build it, because nothing like this had ever been built before. There is no doubt that he had no concept of an ocean-going vessel like this.

- Naval engineers have determined that the dimensions and shape of the ark make it the most stable floating device ever built. It was *not* designed for maneuverability, but for stability. The main thing was that it was able to float for a long period of time without capsizing.

- And think about this – Noah probably had to build this thing all by himself, because Gen. 5:32 tells us that even his sons were *not* born until he was 500 years old.

- By the way, I'm *not* even going to bring up any of the liberal arguments against the reality of the flood, or the

accuracy of the text (here) – I’m just going to *assume* that you believe God’s Word, and that you believe this literally occurred in human history.

- But all these things that took place (with God judging the world through a world-wide flood) were things that had *not* been seen before. This is why Noah had to exercise faith. He clung to “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1).

- “By faith...Noah prepared an ark...” He had nothing at all to go on except God’s word. But for *him*, that was enough. For Noah, God said it, and that settled it. He would devote his entire life in obedience to God.

- He believed God, so he labored for 120 years with no regard to what anyone else thought. He sincerely believed that he could trust God (even if it took 120 years). And his actions proved his faith was real.

- But notice some details in the text of v. 7. First of all, the phrase “being warned by God” implies direct revelation. Gen. 6:13 tells us, “Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them [the wicked people]; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.’”

- Immediately after that (in Gen. 6) God told him exactly how to build it. He told him what it was to be built with. He told him high large it was to be. He told him how many decks it was to have. He told him about building a door in the side and a window at the top. He told him

exactly what steps he would have to go through to build it, etc.

- And notice how Noah responded. Heb. 11:7 tells us he began preparing the ark “in reverence.” This word likely means “with godly fear.” It implies deep devotion to God. He treated the warning from God with great respect and awe.

- By the way, this probably implies (also) that Noah had been a man of faith in God long before the Lord gave him these instructions. He had likely obeyed God in many smaller things (prior to this) before God gave him this one GREAT thing to do.

- That serves to remind us, that if we want to accomplish great things for God, we have to start with being faithful in the small things. To move to the graduate school of obedience, we have to start in Kindergarten.

- Now, another thing to note (here) is that when God called Noah to this gargantuan task, He told him of the covenant He would make with him. We see that in Gen. 6:18. The Noahic covenant is the first covenant mentioned in Scripture. This covenant promised the safety of his family, and the preservation of all the living creatures in the ark.

- And please understand – the rainbow was given by God as a sign of that covenant. This symbol has been stolen by the LBGTQ community, but it belongs to God, and it will forever be a sign of the Noahic covenant. When you see

it, it is obviously of God, as it stretches across the heavens.

- Well, Noah's response to God was one of genuine faith. Faith and obedience are biblical synonyms. His active obedience proved his faith. But there is a second thing we need to see here, and that is:

II. NOAH'S REBUKE

- Go back to v. 7 again, "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..."

- The Ark was the vehicle of salvation for Noah and his family, but it was also the symbol of condemnation for the rest of the world. And what we have to understand (here) is that Noah was doing more than just building the ark. He was also passing on God's warning to the rest of the world.

- In 2 Peter 2:5 Noah is called "a preacher of righteousness." In other words, God called Noah to be a preacher while he was building the ark. (He was kind of like I am – part time preacher and part time construction worker...)

- Seriously, the preaching part was (no doubt) harder than the building part. MacArthur says, "Hard jobs are always easier to deal with than hard people." And Noah's

preaching was during the most wicked time in human history.

- In Gen. 6:5 we're told, "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." That's why He determined to judge the world through the flood.

- But part of Noah's job was to warn the people of this impending judgment. He (no doubt) pleaded with them to repent of their evil and wickedness and unbelief. After all, they had the same opportunity to know God and His ways as Noah did. The difference was *not* in the amount of light they had, but in how they responded to it.

- And (by the way) there was another important element to the condition of mankind at this point in history. Gen. 6:2 says, "...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose."

- I believe these "sons of God" were demons who cohabitated with women and created an unredeemable race. 1 Peter 3:19-20 tells us there are some "spirits" who are now in the abyss, who were disobedient during the days of Noah. I believe this refers to these demons.

- But this just adds to the wickedness of these days. The Spirit of God could *not* strive with these wicked people forever. There had to be judgment. But (as always) God's judgment was tempered with His mercy. He allowed them

120 years to repent. He sent them a preacher to warn them. So we read in 1 Peter 3:20, “the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark...”

- The people had ample warning of the coming judgment and they had enough knowledge of the truth to respond in faith (as Noah did). In fact, the very Spirit of God was striving with them, seeking to turn them back to their Creator.

- But ultimately all this served as a rebuke against them. No one repented. Think about this – Noah preached for 120 years without a single convert!

- And it was *not* just his preaching that was a rebuke. It was also his life of faith. In the same way that black always looks darker when you put something white next to it, so a godly life becomes a rebuke to those in wickedness and spiritual darkness.

- It is said that a young man in Athens once said to Socrates, “I hate you, because every time I meet you, you show me what I am.” A man of faith is an indictment to those in spiritual darkness. That’s why our world often reacts so negatively toward those who are seeking to live a godly life in this world.

- So that was Noah’s Rebuke. But there is a third thing we see in this passage, and that is:

III. NOAH’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

- Look with me one more time at v. 7, “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.”

- Noah (also) became an OT saint through faith. He also (just like Abel and Enoch) had the righteousness of Christ imputed to his account through faith (even though they lived thousands of years before He came into the world.

- He is declared in Gen. 6:9, “...a righteous man, blameless in his time...” That doesn’t mean he was without sin. He was born with a sin nature just like all the others since the Fall. It just means he became righteous through the exercise of his faith in God.

- In Noah’s day, the world was pronounced “guilty” while he was pronounced “righteous.” This is that forensic righteousness that the author of Hebrews is talking about. It is the righteousness that is acquired by faith like Habakkuk was talking about.

- And what we need to understand here, is that the Ark became a symbol in Scripture of the salvation of God. There are many ways in which we see the connection between God’s physical salvation of Noah and his family through the Ark, and the spiritual salvation of His people through faith in Christ.

- For example, the Hebrew word for “pitch” has the same root word as the Hebrew word for “atonement.” And (as I’m sure you know) that pitch was what kept the water out of the Ark – so it is the atonement of Christ that keeps God’s judgment away from those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Our eternal security in Christ is pictured by the Ark. We are safe and secure in Him. And the salvation of God is never pictured as someone hanging onto the *outside* of the Ark (trying to survive) but as someone who is safely *inside* the Ark (in which God Himself has shut the door).

- Oh my friend, please understand, your eternal security has nothing at all to do with *you* trying to hang on. Our eternal security is all of God. He is the One who holds us safe and secure forever.

- The Apostle Peter points to the analogy of the Ark as a comparison of our salvation in Christ. In fact, turn with me for a moment to 1 Peter 3. (Pause) Look at v. 18, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.”

- The context is clearly the days of Noah and the construction of the Ark. He talks about those demons who are now in the abyss, who co-habitated with the

“daughters of men.” He talks about those 8 people who were brought safely through the flood in the Ark.

- But notice how he *applies* this in v. 21, “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

- This is *not* talking about water baptism here, but spiritual baptism into Christ. It is talking about the cleansing of spiritual regeneration. In other words, this is speaking of the salvation we receive through faith in Jesus Christ today – and the Ark is the picture of that salvation.

- It’s also significant (I believe) that the NT uses the illustration of Noah to highlight the suddenness of the future judgment of God at the Second Coming of Christ.

- Turn with me for a moment to Matt. 24. Look with me at v. 37, [Jesus said] “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”

- Now, that's *not* really talking about the wickedness of the days of Noah (although we know it was a time of extreme wickedness). No, this is talking about the suddenness in which the judgment will fall. People will be doing normal, everyday things, *not* expecting the judgment of God – but suddenly it will come upon them (as Christ returns).

- But going back to Hebrews 11, what is the point? The point is, that Noah was declared by God as being “righteous,” meaning that he was part of God’s redeemed remnant.

- O’Brien writes, “The deliverance (i.e. ‘salvation’) of Noah and his family (i.e. ‘house’) from drowning was an essential line in God’s saving purposes for his people, and it provides a way for the listeners to think of salvation from death and judgment...for themselves and others in God’s ‘house’...”

- CONCL – So how should we apply the message this morning? First, I want to warn against the *misapplication* of this text. I’ve heard a lot of *faulty* ways that people have taken this. As with all OT characters, we (as Christians today) cannot take the unique things that happened in their lives as totally normative for us today.

- What I mean by that, is that we can’t assume that God is going to speak directly to us today and tell us to go out and build an Ark. First of all, God is not giving direct revelation today – He speaks to us by His written Word.

- He convicts us by His Spirit to obey the things He has commanded us to do in His Word. But we should *not* read this verse and conclude (today) that God wants us to go out somewhere and build something.

- I heard about at least one preacher who took this as God’s message to him that he was supposed to go out into the middle of nowhere and start building a church building with his bare hands. His project didn’t go so well.

- Besides that, the building of the church is *not* accomplished with gopher wood and pitch – it is made up of redeemed people, and it is built up through the use of our spiritual gifts in service to Christ.

- So what is the proper application of this text? Live a life of obedience to the Lord. Live a life of faith by *doing* what God’s Word says to do. When the Bible says that we are *not* to forsake the assembling of ourselves together for worship, obey that. When the Bible says that we are employ our spiritual gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ, obey that. Use your gifts in faithful service to Him.

- And on and on we could go. A life of faith is a life of obedience. Noah obeyed God and did that which was extremely difficult. We too need to obey God and do all He has called us to do.

- MacArthur says, “The Lord has arks for every believer to build. It is just as important for us to build the ark He

gives us as it was for Noah to build the one God assigned him. Ours may not be as big or as awesome or as time-consuming as Noah's, but it is the only one *we* can build that will please God. And, like Noah's, when we build it in faith, according to God's plan and by His power, it will accomplish what God wants it to accomplish. Also like Noah's, our work for the Lord may look foolish and purposeless in the world's eyes. But if it is His work, it will please Him, the only one a believer needs to be concerned about pleasing."

- Perhaps you've heard the old story about the man who walked up and down the streets with a sandwich sign on his body. The front of the sign said, "I'm a fool for Christ." The backside said, "Whose fool are you?"

- Noah was (no doubt) ridiculed as a "fool" in his day – and our world loves to paint Christians in the same light in our day and time. But the truth of the matter is, in eternity the tables will be turned. It will ultimately be clear who the real fools are – those who do *not* believe God.

- Peter O'Brien wrote, "For the listeners of Hebrews Noah exemplifies those who respond [by faith] to God's Word. [We] have been called upon to do the same, to persevere in faith, looking to comparable unseen things which include God's judgment on the unfaithful and his rewarding of the faithful."

- We're to emulate Noah's faith (even though God is *not* going to instruct us to build an actual Ark). We're to live

the same kind of "life of faith" he did. And we're to demonstrate our faith by *doing* all that God has called on us to do. That's the message.

- God wants us to fully trust Him in the trials we face. He wants us to trust Him that His ways are always best. He wants us to worship Him rightly (as Abel did) and to walk with Him (as both Enoch and Noah did).

- And even though the example of Noah is *not totally* transferrable to us today, there are many similarities between his days and ours.

- John MacArthur writes, "The parallels of Noah's day to our own are sobering. In Noah's day God's message was rejected, as it is today. In his day, wickedness, immorality, violence, lewdness, vulgarity, profanity, lying, killing, and blasphemy were rampant, as they are today. In his day a remnant found grace, just as a remnant believes today."

- And we know that the Bible declares that all this will one day be judged – only next time the judgment will *not* come through a flood. The next time it will come through fire.

- This means we have much work to do, and our life of faith is needed now more than ever. It also means we had better make sure we are in the Ark of God's salvation.

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER