

## Hebrews 11:1-7

### Living by Faith – Noah’s Example

*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith – v. 7*

The key to this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter in Hebrews is found in a couple of verses that lead in to the chapter. In 10:37,38 *For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith.* The emphasis in v. 38 is on *now*. Now the just shall live by faith. You’ll recall that in our last study I said that this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews is devoted to answering the question – *what does it mean to live by faith?*

And the first thing that Paul does in order to answer such a question is to demonstrate a contrast to living by faith. That contrast is created by the definition that Paul gives to faith in v. 1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* Things hoped for are things future and things not seen have something in common with things hoped for – both are unseen things. And so the contrast is set up in this verse between walking by faith and being governed by unseen but true spiritual realities or walking by sight and being governed only by the external circumstances of life or things that we see with the eye of flesh.

Sight places emphasis on things that are seen. Faith places emphasis on things that are not seen. The temptation that the Hebrews were facing and that we as Christians often face is the temptation of ascribing greater ultimacy to things we see than we ascribe to things that we don’t see. When we succumb to such a temptation then the things of God and indeed God himself becomes surreal and things that are transient in nature are assigned a higher value than they deserve. And when this shift of priorities takes place and we find ourselves governed more by sight than by faith then it becomes all the harder to continue with Christ when Christ seems like a distant and abstract theory and trials and afflictions bear a stern and overbearing reality.

And so this matter of walking by faith is of the utmost importance and this is why we find an entire chapter devoted to that subject. This morning I want to direct your attention to one of the most well known characters in the Old Testament. It’s the character of Noah.

I love what the narrative in Genesis says about this man for it keeps us from exalting him higher than we should. It says in Gen. 6:8 that *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* This statement is given to us in the context of God being so grieved with the inhabitants of the world that he regrets having made man and he is determined therefore to bring judgment upon man. But in the context of this statement of the sinfulness of man we read that *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* He found undeserved favor in other words. In the following verse (Gen. 6:9) we are told that Noah was a just man and that he walked with the Lord. We’re also told in 7:1 that *the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.*

The thing we have to keep in mind, then, is that these statements about Noah being just and Noah being righteous have to be understood in the light of Noah finding grace in the eyes of the Lord. If Noah possessed inherent righteousness then he would not have been in need of grace. Our text in Hebrews clarifies this matter completely by telling us that Noah *became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*. He gained his righteousness by his faith. He gained the same kind of righteousness that Abel, in v. 4 obtained. It was the righteousness grounded in that more excellent sacrifice which pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. Just like Abraham and David that are referenced by Paul in Rom. 4, Noah was the recipient of Christ's righteousness being imputed to him and received by faith.

What I want you to consider this morning, therefore, is this example of Noah. Remember the question I raised and endeavored to answer in our last study – what does it mean to live by faith? This morning I want you to consider with me:

## What It Means to Live by Faith – From the Example of Noah

### I. Living by Faith Means that We Heed the Warning of God Regarding Judgment

Notice how v. 7 begins: *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house*. Notice here yet another reference to the relationship between faith and things not seen. Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet. You know of course, if you're familiar with the story of Noah that Noah was warned of God about coming judgment.

So we read in Gen. 6:13 *And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth*.

Now we know from the many historical narratives that we find in the scriptures that God is true to his word and this faithfulness pertains not only to the promises God gives regarding salvation but this faithfulness to his word also pertains to the threatenings that God gives regarding judgment. This word was given to Noah somewhere in the area of 120 years before that judgment came. And we know from the narrative in Genesis that the judgment did come through a universal flood.

We know in the history of Israel that they were warned about the judgment that would come upon them if they failed to repent of their sins and return to the Lord their God. And we have the account of judgment coming first upon the Northern kingdom and then later judgment also coming upon the Southern kingdom.

God, you see, doesn't merely use the subject of judgment as a mere scare tactic without being serious about the execution of his judgment. We as parents may do that. How often do we threaten and warn our children of punishment to come and then seem to forget about it. And if we issue many threats but never execute our threats then children soon learn that they don't need to take those threats or warnings very seriously.

This is the same kind of rationale that governed the rebellious world of Noah's day and that governs the rebellious world in our own day. So Peter writes in his second epistle 2:3ff *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.*

Here is the danger of walking by sight rather than by faith. You see the world as it is and you note the continuity of the world the way it is and this kind of sight leads a sinner to be willfully ignorant of history in which the world was judged by the flood and therefore willfully ignorant of judgment to come.

If you have occasion to visit the Creation Museum and to see the exhibit that contains a true to size portion of Noah's ark then you'll see in that exhibit a life-sized model of a skeptic. He's an elderly man with a white beard and a scowling expression on his face. He mocks the idea of coming judgment and you hear him say in a scoffing tone *all things continue as they were. Nothing will ever change.*

Those who walk by faith know better because they know something of the character of God. They've been delivered from the rebellious propensity of suppressing the knowledge of God and the knowledge of God's judgment. And they also know something of what sin deserves. They know that sin calls for judgment.

And in the delay of the execution of that judgment they know that God is being gracious by being longsuffering. I've said it before from the pulpit that the warnings of judgment are manifestations of God's grace. Sinners sometimes treat such warnings as the mad rants of fire and brimstone preachers but in fact such warnings are given by a God who gives men space to repent of their sins and flee to Christ.

What does it mean, then, to live by faith? After the example of Noah we learn that living by faith means taking God's warnings seriously. Just as surely as a flood destroyed this world once, so, according to God's word, the heavens will be dissolved by fire and the elements of this world will melt with fervent heat (2Pet. 3:12). The Hebrews needed to be impressed with the reality of such judgment so they might know how to compare their light afflictions to that coming day.

So should we ever keep that judgment in mind lest we become too attached to a world that will soon pass. By taking the issue of judgment seriously in our walk by faith we will also take seriously the need to sound the warning to those around us and to those we love. Too often we hold back for fear of a little reproach. What will that reproach amount to in comparison to the judgment to come upon Christ-rejecters? May the Lord help us, then, to walk by faith.

This matter becomes even more heightened when we consider next that:

## II. Living by Faith Means that We are Moved by Fear

Note again the words of v. 7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...*

It is, of course, a fearful thing to receive a word from God that says he will destroy the world and everything in it. It is a fearful thing to receive a word of judgment from one who is all knowing and all powerful and has the sure capability of making his word good. And for us it should be a fearful thing to contemplate *Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat* (2Pet. 3:12).

We have seen and contemplated already the verse back in 10:31 which tells us that *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. And a few verses earlier we read of those that fall away from Christ that there remains nothing more for them *But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*.

Paul writes in 2Cor. 5:10 that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And in the very next verse he lets his readers know that there is a very fearful element to that event. *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men* he writes in v. 11.

We cannot escape a certain sense of dread that the very nature of judgment brings upon our souls. Even the most eminent saints of God trembled when they were brought into the presence of God. *Moses feared and quaked* we're told in Heb. 12:21. Isaiah pronounced woe upon himself when he beheld the Lord's glory in Isa. 6. Daniel fell to his face and had no power to stand before God until the Lord strengthened him we discover in Daniel 10. Ezekiel fell upon his face in Ezekiel 1 when he beheld the revelation of the glory of God and could not rise until the Spirit of God entered him and enabled him. And John on the Isle of Patmos fell on his face as a dead man in Rev. 1 when he beheld the glory of Christ.

Should we be so presumptuous as to think that it will not be the same for us when at last we stand before Christ? The fear of God begins with the knowledge of God's holiness and splendor and might. And these accounts of the glory of God and the effects of that glory on the saints of God are given to us that we too might learn that there is a terrible aspect to the fear of the Lord.

This to me is what makes much of contemporary Christianity so repugnant. There is no sense of this awesome splendor and terrible majesty of God. There is little of the kind of attitude that is called for in Hab. 2:20 where we read that *the LORD [is] in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him*. In contrast to the kind of reverence that is called for in this verse we see instead an attitude and demeanor among Christians that says *Look at me God – aren't you impressed with me God? – Wouldn't you be so much poorer without me God?*

I believe some time ago I made reference to a Christian music CD that I came across in a bookstore that was entitled: *Here I am to worship*. How that CD title captured the narcissistic spirit of our age where we flatter and deceive ourselves into thinking that we

can flaunt ourselves before God and God is somehow pleased with our self-centered flauntings because in a secondary sort of way reference is made to him too. What ignorance such a spirit reveals when it comes to the knowledge of God. How oblivious we find our generation and our culture to truth that our God is a God of judgment. Our God has judged this earth already and he will judge it again soon. May this aspect of God's character find sound lodging in our hearts that we may learn the meaning of humility and we may (as the second psalm puts it) *Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling* (Ps. 2:11).

I believe this is where Noah's faith began – being warned of God he was moved with fear. It would not be correct to say, however, that his fear went no further than to tremble at the prospects of coming judgment. Our text tells us rather that *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house*. He responded, in other words, to God's provision for the salvation of his house.

The ark, you see, was God's provision. It was God that told Noah to build the ark. And it was God that gave Noah the design and dimensions of the ark. And it was God, in Gen. 7:1 that extended the invitation to Noah and his house to enter the ark. And it was the Lord in Gen. 7:16 that shut Noah and his family in to the ark. And once Noah and his family were shut in to the ark then they were shielded from the judgment that came.

So Noah's faith not only took the warning of judgment seriously but Noah's faith also compelled him to submit to God's plan of salvation. It's the same for you and me this morning. Our faith should compel us to take the warnings of God's judgment seriously but our faith, being moved with fear, should also compel us to flee to Christ.

Christ, you see, is God's provision for our salvation. Just as Noah and his house found shelter and protection from the storm of God's wrath, so being joined to Christ shields us from the judgment to come. Christ's death on Calvary's cross, you see, was a terrible manifestation of judgment. Here is yet again a scene that ought to convince us that the threatenings of judgment are not idle threats from God. He judged his own Son in our place. This is why we sing: *Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Now in the case of Noah we are given in the narrative of Genesis something of an account of the judgment that came upon the world. *The fountains of the great deep were broken up* we read in Gen. 7:11 *and the windows of heaven were opened and the rain was upon the earth for 40 days and 40 nights*.

When it comes to the judgment of Christ, however, we enter into a realm that cannot be penetrated. We read how there was darkness upon the earth from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> hour. And it was during that time of impenetrable darkness that we hear the cry that came from Christ *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Here is Christ functioning as our propitiation. Here is Christ bearing his Father's wrath that you and I might be shielded from that wrath just as Noah and his family was shielded from the storm.

And when we, by faith, behold Christ dying in our place and in an act of faith we flee to Christ for refuge then godly fear is tempered into solemn reverence. Instead of flaunting ourselves before Christ in such ways as to suggest that we're doing him a favor to worship him we instead humbly bow before his throne and confess that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And with grateful hearts that are mindful of the great cost of our salvation we worship him in solemn and humble reverence, our hearts being filled with peace and joy and thanksgiving for so great salvation.

What an example Noah's faith provides us, then. He took the warning of judgment seriously and he was moved with fear – a fear that recognized that the warning of judgment was real and a fear that compelled him to submit to God's provision for salvation. Noah's faith does one more thing for us as well. Would you consider with me finally that:

### III. Living by Faith Sets Us Against the World

Note again the words of v. 7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

See how the text tells us that Noah condemned the world. It doesn't say he accommodated the world – it doesn't say that he made friends with the world – nor does it say that he tried to be like the world in order to reach the world – it says, rather, that he condemned the world.

His actions, of course, accomplished such a task. Can you imagine what others would have thought of a man who was devoted for years and decades and perhaps even a century or more to the task of building an ark? Every board put in place and every nail driven into a board became a sermon. The sermon subject was remarkably consistent – judgment is coming. Judgment is coming but refuge can be found in the ark.

Peter tells us in his second epistle that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Basically what Noah's life accomplished was to preach God's righteousness and the world's sinfulness and need for salvation. So we may conclude that Noah's faith compelled him to be separated from the world and Noah's faith enabled him to rise above the world.

It's been a long time since we've had Dr. Cairns preach here in Indianapolis. The last time he was here was actually back in 2003 which was the first time that we hosted the week of prayer here in Indianapolis. I have never forgotten the thrust of Dr. Cairns' message from the last time he was here. I don't remember his text or even his subject but I do remember how he devoted a lengthy portion of his message to the dangers facing the church.

He noted that as wrong and sinful and blasphemous as the church of Rome was, the church of Rome was not the greatest danger to the church or even the ecumenical movement that is so strongly connected to Rome. He also noted how wrong and immoral and widespread homosexuality has become in our culture but then added that he didn't feel

that homosexuality was the greatest threat to the church. After naming a number of things that we have come to regard as so dangerous in our culture he then expressed his view that the gravest danger to the church was worldliness.

Worldliness, you see, has the power to nullify the testimony of the church or the testimony of the Christian. How many sinners there are in the world that laugh at those that attempt to witness to them because they see virtually no difference between that so-called Christian and themselves.

In our day the same sins that you find in the world can be found in the church. The same vices of the world can be found in the church. The same music, the same immodesty, the same Sabbath desecration – it's all there and it renders the testimony of the church to be null and void.

This is why John tells us in his first epistle that we're to *love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever* (1Jn. 2:15-17).

A couple of weeks ago I was doing some web surfing and I came across a Christian blog in which the topic of discussion was your favorite concert. I expected to see references to contemporary Christian concerts or perhaps some classical music concerts but was shocked to discover that many blog entries made reference to secular rock concerts – the same ones I use to attend as an unsaved sinner. These are rock concerts that blaspheme the name of Christ, glory in sin and mock that which is virtuous. What was even more shocking on this blog site was the way people were signing their names and identifying themselves as being pastors or elders in such and such a church.

If we're going to live by faith, the way Noah lived by faith then our testimonies should not accommodate the world, our testimonies, rather, should condemn the world. We should be seen as apart from the world and above the world. This is not to say that we approach the world with a chip on our shoulder and act as if we're more righteous than those in the world.

Notice that our text points out that Noah became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. The righteousness which comes by faith is the righteousness of Christ. And when this righteousness comes to us by faith it eliminates any grounds for boasting. So our condemnation of the world does not spring from a sense of self-righteousness. Indeed self-righteousness is the very thing that infects much of the world. Our condemnation of the world comes through the humility that we manifest as we acknowledge the altogether insufficiency of self righteousness.

How, then, do we live by faith? Based on Noah's example we can say that we live by faith by taking God's warnings seriously. We live by faith when we are moved by fear, a fear that leads us to reverential awe when we contemplate Christ. And we live by faith

when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds in such a way that we are not conformed to the world.

I wonder this morning as we bring our meeting to a close – are you living by faith? Do you take the word of God seriously? Are you governed by unseen spiritual realities that lead you out of the world to look for a city whose builder and maker is God? Do you see this world as being transient in nature?

May the Lord help us to live by faith. May the Lord indeed increase our faith. May the Lord give us such clear views of the glory of Christ that we our desire will be to be conformed to his image – transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.