



Faith That Obeys God

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 11:7

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You know, beloved, one of the things that strikes me about this chapter, as I think about it, is the way that each of these illustrations of faith – Abel, Enoch, Noah, later Abraham and Moses and more – each one of them is extremely practical, perfectly applicable to the situation in which the Hebrew Christians found themselves, and underscore in some way the guts of this message to these Hebrew Christians.

For instance, in Abel, we see the picture of worship by faith. His is a faith that speaks of worship by faith, drawing near to God by faith through the proper sacrifice that God required and not as Cain tried to do, in a way that seemed right to him. By his response to the gospel promise, overheard by his parents and passed on to him, Abel's story underscored and emphasized for the Hebrew Christians and for us that it is only by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as our innocent substitute to bear away our sins that we can be forgiven and accepted by God. There are not multiple ways to God. The Hebrew Christians needed to hear this, tempted as they were, to return to Judaism and to forsake Christ in order to escape the persecution around them. We need to hear it in this pluralistic world where we hear that every path to God is legitimate, that we are all worshipping the same God in different ways, where we are tempted to loosen our grip on Christ in order to fit in. Yes, worshipping the One True God by faith in Christ may invite persecution – it did for Abel – but his faith still speaks to us today.

Then you think about Enoch, whose walk of faith pleased the Lord. In Enoch we see that faith is a matter of walking with God in intimate fellowship. It is not flashy or spectacular, not openly impressive, but consistent and steadfast. Walking with God requires discipline, desire, and effort, taking the initiative, choosing to walk with Him when others do not as was the case in Enoch's day. It is a day-by-day, long walk in the same direction, a continual living with the Lord and responding to His leading by faith, believing and trusting Him, not

being tossed to and fro, not wandering this way and then that way. It is a matter of entering into God's rest by "beating a path" into God's presence. Each day, each decision of life, passed through the grid of faith. There are some things you could do by faith and some things that you can not do by faith. Enoch's 300 year walk illustrates this kind of faith. The Hebrew Christians needed and we need to hear that. There was no option to fall away, no possibility that they could act in faithless ways, and still be pleasing to God.

And now, as we come to Noah this morning, the aspect of faith that the writer of Hebrews is going to emphasize and underscore, the aspect and content of real faith that he wants all of us to see, is this: True faith obeys God. True faith obeys God. Those who truly have saving faith respond to the promises and the warnings of God with trust and obedience. And it is an important message to hear. Throughout this sermon, the writer of Hebrews has expressed wonderful promises -- that we have a great salvation in Jesus Christ, **"a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens."** (Hebrews 7:26, ESV); One who has **"perfected for all time those who are being sanctified"** (Hebrews 10:14, ESV); One who **"will appear a second time... to save those who are eagerly awaiting Him"** (Hebrews 9:28, ESV); One who has accomplished the forgiveness of His people and has opened the way into the holy places, into the very presence of God, where we can draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, where we can worship and He has placed us in a body in which we should be stirring one another up, not to sin or faithlessness, but to love and good works (cf. Hebrews 10:19-24). He has given to us great promises, but also very stern warnings.

He has warned them and us not to drift away and neglect that great salvation in Christ (cf. Hebrews 2:1-3). He has warned them and us, to take heed lest there be an evil unbelieving heart in us (cf. Hebrews 3:12) He has warned us against unfruitfulness and no growth in grace (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14). He has warned us of the impossibility of restoring to repentance the one who apostatizes from the faith -- either in an open rejection of Christ or through a life that proves, by its fruit, that one never was a child of God through faith in Christ. He has warned us that **"if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord**

will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26–31, ESV)

God has given to us both promises and warnings. And the writer of Hebrews is going to use Noah this morning to show us that true faith obeys God. Those who truly have saving faith respond to both the promises and the warnings of God with trust and obedience. Now as we get into this text, let’s start with a little background on Noah.

Who was Noah?

Well, to understand Noah, we first need to go back to the story of Cain and Abel. After Cain killed Abel, he was cast out from his family and went to a place called Nod. In his first letter, the Apostle John describes Cain’s character, saying: ***“We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.”*** (1 John 3:12, ESV) Cain was of the evil one, of Satan, and his life bore that out. ***“Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.”*** (Genesis 4:17–22, ESV) Cain gets married and we have the record of the line that comes from him. Cain established a new and a godless society – a society that was absent the presence of God. There are some accomplishments of note that come out of his line. They are experts in herding. They are expert in the musical arts, and they are the founders of metal work... BUT they are godless. You see this clearly portrayed in one of Cain’s descendants, Lamech. Lamech was the first polygamist in history – no big surprise that that would be introduced through the godless line. He is also a murderer, but not only a murderer but one who rejoices in his wickedness. Listen to his song: ***“Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.””*** (Genesis 4:23–24, ESV) So you have this line of the ungodly coming from Cain.

But in contrast to him and Cain's line, is the third son of Adam and Eve, Seth. ***“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 4:25–26, ESV)*** After this record of godlessness, we see the grace of God revealed in the granting of another son to Adam and Eve, another offspring – Seth – the appointed one or the replacement for Abel.

A son was born to Seth – Enosh—and at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord, to call upon Yahweh. That is a significant statement. That phrase “to call upon the name of the Lord” is a phrase that refers to public, corporate worship. It seems that in contrast to the God-rejecting line of Cain, the descendants of Seth began to gather together to call upon God and to worship Him as His people. So you have a godly line through Seth and a wicked line through Cain. And what happened? ***“When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.””*** (Genesis 6:1–7, ESV)

How do we understand this? There are a lot of interpretive questions and I cannot go into all of that this morning, but the way that I understand this text is that the sons of God are the godly descendants in the line of Seth, who called upon the Lord in worship and prayer, and the daughters of men are the female descendants in the line of Cain, who rejected God. The sons of God, those in the line of Seth, in complete rebellion against God's will, did not choose women from the godly line of Seth, but chose instead anybody that they wanted to. Their fleshly desire overruled their faith. They were drawn away from God. The beauty of the daughters of Cain's line and their own fleshly desires overrode their spiritual judgment and they intermarried with Cain's ungodly line and God's anger was kindled. God was angry that those whom he set apart by grace would defile themselves and make a mockery of God's grace and His holiness with the children of Cain, thereby making the two lines, the

godly and ungodly, indistinguishable. God's response to this is clear and decisive. **Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."**

God says: My Spirit will not abide in man forever, will not contend with, will not strive with, will not plead with man forever. The idea is that God will not forever strive with man to restrain him from evil. God will not overlook their wickedness and rebellion forever, instead God will bring judgment and the judgment would come in 120 years. It would come in the form of flood that would consume every living creature on the earth.

Also during that time, the Nephilim, mighty men of renown, arose on the earth. Who are they? The word Nephilim comes from a Hebrew root that means "fallen one" or "tyrant." They were men of reckless ferocity, wicked, hateful and irreverent men, who spread devastation and bloodshed far and wide. And this is the testimony of God; here is how bad it was. **The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5)** God looked right into the depths of human souls. He examined the thoughts of mankind. He looked into the operations of human intelligence. He looked into the convictions that men held. He looked into the way man's reasoning process functioned. He looked at man's imaginations. He looked his desires, his aspirations, his determination and purposes. He looked at his ambitions and at his motivations and we are told that the root of man's existence, God saw only evil all the time and He determined to bring judgment upon the whole earth and everyone in it... except a man named Noah.

"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:8, ESV) Even in the midst of judgment, there was hope. Noah found favor in the eyes of God. The word favor means acceptance or grace. Noah found grace in God's eyes. By nature, Noah was as much a sinner as his contemporaries – not as corrupted and degraded, but every bit as sinful. By his own nature, Noah would have been condemned, but by God's grace, by God's favor, in the midst of an increasingly wicked people, Noah was saved. Listen to the way he is described.

"These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." (Genesis 6:9–10, ESV) These words that are used to describe him – righteous and blameless – indicate that his relationship with God and man was a relationship of integrity. And it indicates when it speaks of him as being blameless that he was "whole-hearted," whole-hearted toward God. That is not to say that Noah had never done anything wrong. It is instead a declaration that Noah's heart was not divided, partly loving the world and partly loving the God that had made him and entered into fellowship and relationship with him. No, he was a man who was whole-hearted in his commitment to God. So he was a man whose actions were just.

He was a man who was in living communion with God and who walked with God, like Enosh. He was a man of faith – a faith that trusted God and obeyed God, and stood in contrast to the darkness of the world in which he lived.

That is the backstory to these words from the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 and verse 7: **“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7, ESV)** There is so much packed into this one verse. So much meat here and I want us to think about all of this under three headings, ok? First, I want us to see that

A True and Obedient Faith Believes God’s Word God speaks to Noah – which is amazing enough in itself – and he tells Noah in essence, “I have seen the wickedness, the depravity, the sexual immorality, the violence, the hatred, the deceit, the corruption and ungodliness of the people who fill this earth and I am going to judge them and destroy them by means of a flood, a deluge that will consume every life on this earth. But I am going to deliver you. I am going to save you and your family by means of an ark, a massive ship, that you are going to construct for the saving of your family.” He gives Noah both a warning and a promise.

Now, let’s be honest, ok? Let’s not just pass over this quickly and pretend like if we heard these words from God we would just hop to and start building an ark. These things of which God speaks are, in the words of the writer of Hebrews, **events as yet unseen**. In other words, they have no precedent in history.

How is that so? Well, two ways. One, God talks about judging all the inhabitants of the earth with a flood. Noah, most likely, had never even seen rain before and he had certainly never seen a flood like the one God was talking about – a flood that would kill all life on the earth. And second, we can be certain that Noah had never seen a boat, an ocean liner like God was describing, a massive ship – by the way, the dimensions of which became the model for the very first battleships. How could he know that it would float? Noah had no categories for what God told him. It was completely beyond his experience, completely beyond his reasoning, completely beyond his wisdom. God called Noah to believe words from Him, to believe a warning and a promise, that were extraordinary.

There was no precedent for any of this and yet he believed. He believed God's words to him. He believed His warning of the coming judgment and he believed God's promise to deliver him and his family. He had faith in the promises and the warnings of God and you must have both to have real faith. Charles Spurgeon says rightly, **“Faith is to be exercised upon the promises; for there its sweetest business lies. But, believe me, you cannot have faith in the promise unless you are prepared to have faith in the threatening also. If you truly believe a man, you believe all that he says. He who does not believe that God will punish sin, will not believe that God will pardon it through the atoning blood. He who does not believe that God will cast unbelievers into hell, will not be sure that he will take believers into heaven. If we doubt God's Word about one thing, we shall have small confidence in it upon another thing. Sincere faith in God must treat all God's Word alike; for the faith which accepts one word of God and rejects another is evidently not faith in God, but faith in our own judgment, faith in our own taste.”** He is so right beloved. Real faith takes all of God's word with earnest sincerity and trust. The truly faithful do not lean on God's Word one moment and then lean on their own understanding the next, when it seems more convenient. Real faith takes God's Word as absolutely true, believes God's Word, and lives in obedience to that word. How do we know that Noah obeyed God's Word? Because...

A True and Obedient Faith is Shown in Action How do we know that Noah believed the Word of God, because *in reverent fear (he) constructed an ark for the saving of his household*. We know that Noah believed God because his faith moved him to obedient action. He started cutting down trees, and laying a keel and building the biggest ship that the world had ever seen, all in accordance with the commands and the instructions of God. If you read through Genesis 6, you see how God gave to Noah detailed instructions and commands all along the way. And the testimony of Genesis 6:22 is, **“Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.” (Genesis 6:22, ESV)**

Now, it wasn't easy. You know that as soon as Noah began all of this, he immediately became the laughingstock of the whole know world. Everyone would have thought him crazy, a loon, a nutcase, absent of any common sense at all. He was the world's first reality show. The gibes, the jokes at his expense, the mockery, the shunning of Noah had to be horrible to endure. But in spite of having no friends to support him in his labors, and in spite of the gargantuan task in which he was engaged, Noah believed the word of God.

But it wasn't just external pressure, beloved. Noah was a man like us. You can imagine that he had to fight against the temptation to doubt, against the nagging questions and natural thoughts that we all would have had – it's not feasible, it will take too long, I don't need a boat this big, this makes no human sense, it's going to cost me a boatload of money to build this boat, there has to be an easier way. This was not a weekend hobby, not some pastime – it was all-consuming, for 120 years. And yet Noah persisted, in the face of what, to worldly ways of thinking, were reasonable objections.

He showed his faith by his actions. And here's why. Noah's faith had a profound effect on him in two ways. First, it affected his heart. He had a reverential fear, a holy awe of God. True faith moves our hearts to reverential fear of God and that reverential fear leads to reverential action. Real faith makes us unwilling to treat God lightly or flippantly, to treat the words and the thing of God flippantly, because it creates in our hearts a reverential awe, a love-based reverential fear. Jonathan Edwards once said, "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections." What he meant by that was true faith is not just a matter of head, but of heart. If we have real and true faith in God, we will not only be moved by love to respond to His great love; we will also be moved in reverential fear in response to His holiness and His warnings. God's truth should not only fill our heads but also grip our hearts and our motivations. Noah's faith affected his heart.

Second, Noah's faith affected his actions. Faith is not an impractical, other-worldly, ethereal sort of thing. It results in real and concrete actions. Noah's faith took up an axe, a hammer, and a saw and completed an ark. It caused Him to work. It caused him to preach. In 2 Peter 2:5, Peter calls Noah, **"a herald of righteousness."** His faith caused him, not only to build the ark, but to preach to the very ones who mocked his faith, declaring the judgment of God that was coming upon their ungodliness, calling them to repent, calling them to join him in reverential fear of God and to build the ark with him. He unswervingly preached the righteousness of God and the judgment to come, the promise of deliverance of God for all who would believe His promise to rescue repentant sinners – a promise that this ark represented – and no one repented; no one believed and they were all destroyed.

I wonder what church growth experts would say about that? Would they say to Noah, "If you would just change your methods, your approach, you would get some converts. Sing songs that appeal to sinners and they will flock to you. Don't preach about sin so much. Massage the message a little and talk about how you can use God to satisfy all of your

earthly desires. Tell them what they want to hear so you can get them on the boat and then you can straighten them out during the flood.” Listen, only the word of God, faith in the Word of God, changes the human heart. Gimmicks and methodology may fill a boat, or a building, but the only the Word of God and faith in God and in His Christ fills heaven. Noah’s faith in God’s Word of promise and of judgment was unswerving.

True faith affects the heart and it affects the actions. Real, saving faith leads to obedience – practical real obedience. As John Calvin so perfectly said it, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith the saves is never alone.” True and saving faith is always accompanied by obedience “which flows from faith like water from a fountain.” Or, like James writes: **“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:17–18, ESV)** Real faith, true faith is marked by obedience to God’s commands, obedience to His word, whether it is in keeping with your human wisdom, whether it is convenient or easy or not.

Real faith leads you, if you are Noah, to cut down trees and get to building an ark. Real faith will make us, if we believe that we must repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ to be saved, to put our trust in Christ alone and begin chopping down the trees of our sinfulness and start building a life according to God’s commands. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark, and it will take a lifetime for our sanctification, but if we truly have faith in Christ, we will get at least get to work right now. True, obedient faith reveals itself in action and it receives the blessing of God.

A True and Obedient Faith Receives the Blessing of God The writer of Hebrews says, Noah ***became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*** He received the inheritance that comes from saving faith – he was rescued from the wrath to come; her received the commendation of God; his life bore witness to the glory and the grace of God; his faith bore real fruit and received Divine blessing. He pleased the Lord and in His living escaped the ungodliness of the world. His faith bore real fruit and received Divine blessing as opposed to the world that was judged. He was saved.

In fact, look what the writer of Hebrews says about Noah. **By this** (by his reverential awe and faithful living) **he condemned the world**. His life of faith put the world to shame. He exposed their ungodliness because his righteousness was so distinctive, his uprightness and faithfulness so definite. Noah robbed the ungodly of all of their excuses. And it wasn't merely because he claimed to believe in God. There were others who did that as well, I'm sure. Just as there are those who are no different than the world in their actions and affections, except that they go to church. His faith was real, just as our faith must be real the works of our faith must make us distinct from the world. Do you love and trust God in Christ in such a way that your life is distinct, that you reject sinful pleasures, sinful pursuits, and selfish gain? Do you love him so much that it shows in your speech, in your obedience to his commands, in your love for your neighbor? Does it show in the way that you love His church and gladly serve her? Does it show in your integrity, in your uprightness, in the respect and dignity you show others, in your godliness, in your love? These and more are the works of Christ that ought to make us distinct from the world that is around us. You cannot separate true faith from the works that it produces.

Noah's faith had a profound effect on those around him. It condemned the world, but it led to the saving of his family. Scripture does not speak of the spiritual standing, the spiritual salvation of his family, only that they were saved from the flood. But at the very least, his wife and sons and their wives must have believed enough in the testimony of Noah, as evidenced by his works of faith, to walk with him and to enter the ark when God gave the command. Noah's faith had a powerful effect on his family for their good. A man of integrity, a man of real faith, has that effect on his family.

The world may have mocked Noah and rejected him and his message, but when the rain began to fall and the deeps broke up and the windows of heaven opened up and the water began to rise, and humanity outside the ark furiously clawed, trying to pry open the door of the ark, Noah's faith was proven to be well-founded in God and he became an heir of the promises of righteousness – the blessings of God and the world that rejected his God and rejected his faith was destroyed.

You can see what a timely example Noah was for the Hebrew Christians who were living amidst a people that were ungodly, who were mocking, who thought them fools for their faith in Christ. Only through faith would they be preserved from the judgment that was eventually coming upon the ungodly. True faith obeys God. Those who truly have saving

faith respond to the promises and the warnings of God with trust and obedience. They hear the warning of God of the coming judgment and they stake their trust and hope in Christ and do not let Him go. They have a faith that holds fast and never lets go. That's what the Hebrew Christians had to do... what we have to do.

What Noah's Faith Say to Us What does Noah's faith say to us? How must we think about the faith of this patriarch as it relates to us? The truth is that what God commanded of Noah is far more than what He commands of us. God spoke to Noah and demanded that he believe something that had never happened before, something without precedent. By contrast, God commands us to believe something that has already happened – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and for our eternal salvation, that we might escape the judgment to come, pictured in the judgment of the world by water – things that were done in the full light of history and recorded for us in the Word of God. God promised to save Noah through the flood by means of an ark – again something without precedent. But he promises us something that he has done countless times before in the lives of other people – to forgive our sins through faith in Christ, to give us His Spirit, and to lead us into a new life, to walk in the good works that he has prepared for us. God called Noah to live out his faith in real and tangible ways, to show his faith by his work of living an upright life in the midst of ungodliness and by building an ark, a ship – something that no-one had ever done and for which he had no model. And he calls us to show our faith by good works, by a life of obedience, by a life of faithfulness to His word, and He has given us a book filled with example after of example of men and women who did just that and so proved that their faith was true.

I know this may sound crazy, but just listen to me for a moment. Noah's faith is not an extraordinary, unachievable, unattainable faith. It is true faith manifested in extraordinary circumstances. It is the very faith to which we are called. No one is a Christian who is one in name only. You cannot claim His name and not obey His commands. Yes, it is God who saves through faith in Christ alone, but godly faith will always produce godly obedience no matter the circumstances. Faith always leaves a godly trail of righteousness, just like Noah's.

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