

“THE SIMPLE FAITH OF NOAH” **(Genesis 6:9-22)**

This morning I want to talk to you about living by faith. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says that we walk by faith, not by sight – and every day as believers we must exercise our faith. The image that comes to mind when I think about faith is the scene from the Indiana Jones movie where Harrison Ford is on a quest to find the Holy Grail – an artifact he must obtain in order to save the life of his father. He has a book of clues given to him by his father that will lead him to the cave where the Holy Grail is located, and near the end of the movie, he finds himself just feet away from his quest. The only problem is that there’s a deep, dark chasm between him and the cave on the other side.

As he ponders his dilemma, he looks again at the book of clues and sees that in order to get to the Holy Grail he must take a “leap of faith.” He says, “This is impossible – nobody can jump this.” But if he doesn’t get across the chasm, his father will die; if he steps out into the canyon, he could plunge to his death. Bolstering up his courage, he takes a deep breath and slowly puts out his left foot and begins to fall. But to his amazement and relief, a stone bridge suddenly appears between himself and the cave on the other side, and his leap of faith is rewarded.

That scene to me brings to life a big part of what faith is. God has so designed the Christian life that we walk by faith and not by sight – that we put our full trust and confidence in Him even when we cannot see Him or see the way ahead. Hebrews 11:6 says that it’s impossible to please God without faith. Living by faith requires that we take not one, but several, steps of faith throughout our life, and God promises to diligently reward those who do.

Because walking by faith is not natural, we need role models – some heroes of the faith that inspire us and show us how to courageously live by faith. One of the earliest role models of faith in the Bible is Noah. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.”

For the next three weeks we will look at the story of Noah, and today we focus on his faith, and in the last part of Genesis 6 we see four characteristics of his faith that serve to inspire us our walk of faith. The first characteristic is that **faith stands out when lived out**. Verses 9-10 say, “This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.”

Noah lived in a time of rampant sin and depravity. In verse 5 we read that “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart were only evil all the time.” Once a society abandons God, the floodgates of evil are opened, and Noah lived in the midst of extreme evil and wickedness. But Noah stood out. Verse 8 says that Noah “found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” He was the exception. While everyone else forgot God and lived as they pleased, Noah recognized His sinfulness and cried out to God for mercy. He recognized that without God’s grace, he would drown in the flood along with the rest of creation. He’s an early lesson in the Bible that salvation is through grace, as Paul will later say in Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “It is by grace through faith that you are saved, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

When you're the recipient of God's grace and mercy, and you fully understand that without God's intervention you are doomed to eternal judgment, the natural response is to say, "Lord, my life is now yours. Out of love and gratitude for all you've done for me, the least I can do is live the rest of my days serving you and pleasing you."

And because of God's grace, Noah did just that, and stood out from the crowd in three ways. First, he was a **righteous** man. To be righteous means that you live right and do what is right – your life conforms to God's standards. Noah recognized that God created the world with a divine order and design – and that there is a right way to conduct yourself before God and others. Noah sought to live according to God's design in his marriage, in his business dealings, and in every area of his life.

Second, Noah was **blameless** among the people of his time. Blameless doesn't mean that he was perfect, but that unlike the people around him, he lived with integrity. No one could look at his life and say, "Noah's a cheat," or "You should see what Noah does when no one is looking." No one could blame Noah of any wrongdoing or hypocrisy. He was the same man in private as he was in public.

It reminds me of a story Chuck Smith, the founder of Calvary Chapel church, told about a man a man who came up to him in church and told him he had recently become a Christian. He told Chuck that he drove a garbage truck and Chuck's house was part of his route. At the time Chuck Smith was becoming a very well-known pastor in Southern California, and the garbage man wanted to see if he was the same person away from the pulpit as he was behind the pulpit. So he began checking out Pastor Smith's trash, looking for questionable magazines, reading material, or any kind of incriminating evidence that cast doubt on his authenticity. After several months of looking, he found nothing. He told Chuck that he began to listen to him on the radio, and because Chuck's life aligned with his message, he accepted Christ. People may not go through your trash, but they are looking – looking to see if your faith is authentic.

Third, Noah **walked faithfully with God**. Like his great-grandpa Enoch, Noah enjoyed a close walk with the Lord, communing with God throughout the day. God was his friend. He walked faithfully with God. He didn't waver. Through good times and bad, he kept walking. While everyone around him was walking on the broad road to destruction, Noah faithfully walked on the narrow road to salvation.

As believers, God calls us to stand out from the crowd. Paul exhorts us in Philippians 2:15 to be "children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." Stars shine brightest in the dark, and like Noah we live in a dark, crooked, and depraved world. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that when they see your good works they glorify my Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). You may be the only reflection of Christ that someone sees. Don't hide your light under a bushel. Let others see your faith humbly lived out so that they might be drawn to Christ.

Next, we see that faith not only stands out when lived out, but it **stands alone when outnumbered**. Verses 11-13 says, Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth."

It's one thing to walk faithfully with God when you're at church or surrounded by other like-minded believers, but it's another thing to be faithful to the Lord when you're the only one who believes. There comes a time in every Christian's life – if you strive to live for God and please Him – that you will have to stand alone. Most of the heroes of the faith in the Bible were called to live out their faith in the midst of a pagan, godless environment.

- Joseph served God alone in Egypt, and later Moses was called by God to grow up in the pagan household of Pharaoh.
- Daniel and his three friends – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – were all taken as young men from their homeland to grow up in the heathen empire of Babylon.
- Elijah was one of the few godly prophets in Israel, and bravely went up against 700 false prophets on Mt. Carmel.
- The early church started with only 120 believers amidst thousands who were gathered for the Feast of Pentecost.

We don't get to choose the times in which we live, but God calls to be faithful in whatever environment He places us. Noah was born into a world that was spiraling out of control morally. Earlier in chapter 6 we read that there was something of a demon invasion on the earth in his day, where fallen angels tried to corrupt humanity by possessing the bodies of men and marrying women, who then gave birth to a tyrannical race called the Nephilim. We know that in the last days before Jesus comes, demonic activity will ramp up once again in an all-out effort to prevent Christ's return.

Things got so bad in Noah's day, that there was only evil all the time. What's remarkable is that the people of Noah's day didn't think anything was wrong. Jesus said in Matthew 24 that in Noah's day the people were so immersed in sin and the trivialities of life that they were oblivious to the coming judgment of the flood. The cesspool of sin they were living in seemed normal.

But when God looked down from heaven, He saw that the earth was corrupt and full of violence. The word "corrupt" is used three times in verses 11-12. The word corrupt means to "ruin" or to "destroy." Over a 1600-year time period, mankind had taken the perfect, orderly world God gave to Adam and destroyed it. He gave them the gift of marriage to protect society, and they shoved it to the side. He gave them a divine purpose to fulfill – to take care of the earth and fill it with His glory – and in rebellion they built cities to honor themselves. He made man in His own image with value and dignity, and yet the earth was filled with violence – a total disregard for the sacredness of humanity.

It's not hard to see a parallel begin Noah's world and our world. In fact, Jesus said it will be the same kind of world just before He comes again. In the past 50-60 years we've seen a gradual, downward spiral in our culture that started in the 1960s when God's order and design was tossed aside and replaced with a secular, humanistic system where God was left completely out. Each year since this time, morals have continued to erode. What was once taboo in the 70's, no longer was in the 80s, and what was unthinkable in the 90s became normal in the 2000s. Sin doesn't stand still – once it is accepted and celebrated – it gets worse and worse. In just the past year alone, the world seems to have gone mad. Almost everything that was once considered evil, is now astonishingly called good. And what was for all of human history was called good is now considered evil.

Noah feels our pain – he’s lived in our world. You and I right now are gathered with other like-minded believers to encourage us and support us in our walk of faith, but Noah stood alone. Out of millions of people on the earth at that time, Noah and his family were the only ones to receive God’s grace, and enter the ark and be saved. Do you think Noah was ever tempted to ditch his faith and go along with the crowd? Do you think he ever got tired of doing the right thing and living the right way day after day after day?

Not only did Noah continue to live by God’s order and design and stand alone, but 2 Peter 2:5 says that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” Noah didn’t just live a godly life, but he verbally warned people that a flood was coming, and that they better get right with God in order to be saved. You know how many converts Noah had? Zero. Other than his wife and three sons and their wives, no one believed.

2 Peter 3 says that in the last days scoffers will come and mock the idea of a coming judgment, and Noah no doubt endured lots of ridicule over 120 years as he built the ark and preached righteousness. “Hey Noah, what’cha building?” I’m building an ark. “An ark? What’s an ark?” Well, I don’t know exactly – some kind of a boat, I suppose. “What do you need a boat for? – we’re 500 miles away from water.” Good point. All I know is that God told me to build it because a flood is coming. “A flood? What’s a flood?” Well, I’m not sure, but it has something to do with water – lots of water raining down from the sky and up from the deep – and the only way to keep from drowning is to build an ark. For 120 years Noah stood alone, faithfully building his ark and preaching righteousness, amidst constant pressure for him to conform to the world.

The pressure is strong because we care deeply about what others think of us, and we’ll do just about anything to fit in. The old TV show Candid Camera did the same experiment where they had a group of actors get on an elevator, and instead of facing the door, they all turned and faced the back of the elevator. When others got on the elevator and saw everyone facing the other way, every one eventually turned in conformity and face the same direction.

Nobody wants to stand alone and be the odd guy, the guy that stands out – but walking by faith means that you sometimes have to stand alone. It means, that like Noah, you might be the only one at your school, or at work, or in your family or group of friends, who lives by God’s order and design and doesn’t conform to the values of the world. You might have seasons of loneliness. Men like Noah and Daniel and Elijah inspire us that it can be done.

I like to think that Noah’s ability to stand alone came from his many years of walking with God. The longer you walk with God, the more confident and bolder you become. You care less about what the world thinks of you, and more about what God thinks. You care less about personal safety and comfort, and more about reaching people with the gospel before it’s too late.

So we’ve seen from Noah that faith stands out when lived out, faith stands alone when outnumbered, and third, **faith stands obedient when tested**. Beginning in verse 14, Noah’s faith is tested when God calls him to dedicate the next 120 years to building an ark. We’re so familiar with the story of Noah that it’s easy to forget what a huge step of faith it was to obey God’s instructions.

Verses 14-21 says, So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.

I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you.

You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

Just as Indiana Jones only had his father's book of clues to go on, so Noah only had God's word to go on. He's walking completely by faith and not sight. He's never seen a flood before, and He's never built a boat before, and he's hundreds of miles away from the ocean. To obey God is to step out into the unknown. What if he devotes 120 years to building this thing, and the rains never come? What if his big boat just sits there as a lasting monument to the crazy guy who poured all his time and energy into something that never came to be? Building the ark is one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible, requiring tremendous courage, perseverance, and obedience.

The building of the ark shows that God has a plan to save mankind and keep the godly line of Seth going, through which the Messiah would come. And God knows just what kind of boat will survive the flood He will bring. He says, “Make an ark of cypress wood.” The Hebrew word for ark means a “box.” The only other place this word for ark is used is in Exodus 2 where Moses' mother built a miniature ark to keep him safe from Pharaoh's judgment. Noah's ark was not so much a boat with sloped sides and a curved bottom – but a big, rectangular box. It was not designed to sail or be propelled or go anywhere. It was simply designed to float in the water and keep Noah and his family above water.

God says, “Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.” The rooms, of course, are for the animals, and the pitch would seal the ark and make it waterproof. The Hebrew word for “pitch” is the same word for “atonement.” Just as the blood of Jesus covers our sins and secures our salvation, so the pitch sealed Noah and his family safely inside, covering them from judgment.

When Noah hears the dimensions of the ark, he must have gulped... “The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.” A cubit, they say, is the distance between your elbow and your finger – about 18 inches. This would make the ark 450 feet long, which is 1 ½ football fields – and 75 feet wide, which is about the length from the screen to the back door of the lobby – and 50 feet high – the equivalent of a four-story building.

God had Noah build the ark in such a way that it would preserve life, including an opening in the roof for lighting and ventilation, and a door – one door – on the side of the ark. Inside the ark Noah was instructed to build three decks in which to keep the animals. After the ark was built, Noah was to bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature – bird, animal, reptile – both male and female. God even had a plan for Noah to feed the animals, and themselves, by storing it up food ahead of time.

Many skeptics have wondered how thousands of species of animals could be kept on the ark. It's impossible, they say. Researchers show that, given the dimensions of the ark, the three decks would allow for at least 100,000 square feet of floor space, the equivalent to 20 full-size basketball courts. They estimate that with this space, 125,000 animals – the size of a sheep – could fit on the ark. Some animals would be larger than a sheep and some smaller, but it would be more than enough room to fit all the known kinds of animals.

Verse 22 says, “Noah did everything just as God commanded him.” A big part of faith is simply obeying God. When we walk by sight, we are tentative – we are cautious – we question God... “What assurances can you give me that a flood is coming? I’m thinking that a much smaller boat would be fine – a boat that wouldn’t take decades to make. And I’m thinking Lord, that maybe I should build the ark out in the desert where no one else will see and give me a hard time.” Obeying God is not easy, especially when you’re all alone. And while obeying God might not be too difficult for a few months or years, it’s not easy to obey God over the course of 120 years.

I saw a book one time with the title *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That’s always stuck in my mind, because walking by faith requires a commitment over a long span of time – through trials, hardships, ridicule, and no visible results. Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

There’s a fourth characteristic of faith tucked away back in verses 17-18... **faith stand confident when assured**. God says, “I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.”

In the midst of impending judgment, God makes Noah a promise. He says, “My creation that began with Adam and Eve will continue through you. As a righteous and just God, I must hold people accountable for evil, but as a merciful and loving God, I will make sure that you will be saved from the flood, as well as you family.”

As we live in evil days similar to Noah, we also have a promise from God. Jesus promised that he will return to earth in judgment. He will destroy the earth by fire and create a new heavens and earth. But He also promises to come to save those who know Him from judgment. Just as the ark kept the righteous safe from the flood, so Jesus will keep believers safe from His judgment of fire. Walking by faith is not easy, but we walk in confidence – assured that God will see us safely through to the end to enjoy eternity in His presence.

Noah was called to live out his faith in a similar world to ours, and he stands as a role model and inspiration for you and I to do the same – to have a faith that stands out from the crowd, a faith that stands alone when everyone else conforms to the world, a faith that stands obedient to God even when the way ahead is unclear, and a faith that stands confident on God’s promise to save and reward those who follow Him.