

God—Pleasing Preachers Part 3

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 11:7

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.

One would think that if you had faith you would never experience fear. If you really trusted God you would never be afraid. And yet our text today tells us that faith will produce fear. In other words, if you really possess divine faith you will experience fear. You will have a godly fear of God that will lead you to believe all that He says and obey all that He has commanded.

Let's understand what we mean when we say we fear God. The Bible does say, "perfect love casteth out fear." Yet, that fear is a fear that comes from not knowing God's love personally and from realizing you are under His judgment. It's the kind of fear that a sinner receives when God awakens his mind and heart to the fact that he is lost and deserving of God's judgment. It's only when a sinner is awakened that he can truly fear the Lord, otherwise, sinners do not walk in the fear of God. But the godly fear that a Christian possesses is much different. First of all, it is an accurate understanding of God as revealed in the Scriptures. As you see God as He is portrayed in Scriptures, you see His greatness and magnitude. (Just the greatness of God is enough to cause our hearts to tremble. His holiness quakes the heart with terror.) The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge" (Proverbs 9:10). To fear the Lord is the same as having a biblical view or wisdom and knowledge of the Lord. Thus we can say a right and accurate view of God is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge for when you see God as the Bible portrays Him, you will fear Him in a godly way. So, the fear of the Lord begins by a correct understanding of the revelation of God as He is seen in the Bible. That doesn't mean a complete or full understanding of God, none of us have that, but a accurate view of God based upon the whole of Scripture and not just parts of the Bible.

This is the problem with our generation. We have chosen certain passages concerning the Lord God that we like and have left alone the ones we detest or are puzzled by. Therefore, we have a god of our own making, and it is not the God of divine revelation. This modern church age has an improper view of God because it does not know the God of the Bible.

The holiness of God jolts the heart with terror. You see that God alone is Holy. Every creature, angelic or human, derives its holiness from God, but only God is holy in and of Himself. Only God is separated from all others; He is in a class all of His own. There is no one else like Him, and when you see God in His holiness, your heart will quake!

Secondly, the fear of God is a fear of God's discipline of disobedience. It's something like when your father said, "Now don't you do that because if you do, I will discipline you." And so, you believed him. You made sure that you didn't do it, or you tried to make sure he wouldn't find out if you did disobey, because you feared his discipline and displeasure.

Third, fear of God involves a fear of ourselves. We know our weaknesses and unholy inclinations. Thus, we do not trust ourselves but walk with a fear of sin as well as of God. This is what the Bible means when it says godly or holy fear.

Oswald Chambers said, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else."

Our text tells us that Noah feared God. Now why did Noah fear God when no one else in the world did? Was there something that Noah had, or something about his personality or temperament that made him different from the world? Was there something that Noah had in his possession that was missing in everyone else in the world?

I ask you do you really fear the Lord? Do you really fear God, and is there a test that will help us to determine if one truly fears God? Is there some way we can objectively examine ourselves this day and discover, yes, I do fear God, or no, I don't? Why, yes there is, it is the test of faith.

We have discovered in verse four through the life of Abel, who like Noah is another God-pleasing preacher, that faith produces a proper theology about Jesus' substitutionary and atoning death. It's faith that allows you and me to understand the cross and to believe it. And last week we saw in the life of Enoch that faith produces a proper fellowship with God. You cannot have faith in God and not desire fellowship with Him. The longing and the hunger of your heart, if you are operating in the realm of faith, is to have sweet communion with God.

Today we are going to discover that:

FAITH PRODUCES A PROPER FEAR

Noah was motivated by a faith that produced a fear of God. It was this same fear-creating faith that also promoted and produced in Noah obedience to what God had told him to do.

Faith is Produced By the Word of God

I want us to see once again, that this faith that Noah operated on is a faith produced by the Word of God. That's all that the writer of Hebrews in the eleventh chapter is communicating to us. That God is the source of faith, and faith is the divine impartation of reality as God sees it.

None of us are able to judge reality accurately. We have been given only five senses to take in information. And those five senses are not adequate to determine all there is to know about reality, for reality includes invisible things, things not yet seen. The five senses cannot understand or discern these invisible realities. Faith is the ability to see what the five senses cannot discern. God allows the eyes of the soul to behold the invisible. Therefore we say that faith is the ability to see reality as God sees it concerning whatever circumstance He chooses to disclose.

The author wants to drive this point home in the hearts of his readers, and no better way exists than to illustrate the truth in the lives of these men whom the Hebrews would have greatly admired. He knows that to comfort their troubled hearts he must be sure to prove to them the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). That's all the writer of Hebrews is trying to say. He is saying you need this kind of faith in order to persevere for God. You need this kind of faith, God's kind of faith, a God-produced faith, in order to endure what you and I have to endure in this world. So, again look at the text:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet... (Hebrews 11:7).

How blessed Noah was that God revealed Himself to him. I could spend the whole message on just that fact alone. Here was a man in whose life God showed up. If there was nothing more about the life of Noah, no flood, no ark, no animals, and no rainbow, why the story would have been wonderful enough. Indeed, that God would reveal Himself to a human being is sublime! Oh, dear friend, do not minimize the moment when God came on the scene of your ruin and showed you His marvelous mercy through Christ Jesus. Do not forget that day. Don't be so enamored with things of the future that you forget the glorious past of conversion when God manifested Himself to you. That's the cornerstone of our walk with Christ, that God revealed Himself to us. Blessed was Noah that God showed up one day! And it's my prayer for those of you who are not saved that God would show up. I have spoken with the Lord already, early this morning, for you. That is indeed salvation when God shows up and makes Himself known to the vile and evil. Surely "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord"; God showed up.

But again, we can see that faith is the ability to see reality as God sees it, which includes the visible and the invisible. Verse seven,

Being warned of God of things not seen as yet...

God showed Noah something that had never happened before, and was to occur in the future, and Noah believed it as if it had already happened. Why? Because God warned him of it, He spoke to him. Again, I want to encourage you, as I have done repeatedly because of the prevalent teach-

ing in the last twenty or thirty years from “the faith movement” that says, “Just believe a little harder, believe a little harder and it can happen.” “Whatever you pray for, if you have enough faith, it will take place.” It’s full of error, but the problem is, it’s got some truth in it also. It takes a little from Scripture but adds a whole lot of error. It’s true that if I pray, God will answer, but only if I pray according to His will. You may pray faithfully and regularly about a matter, but if it is not in God’s plan for you, it will not come to pass. How then do you and I know what His will is? There is only one way, and that is when He tells us what His will is. When He tells us what His will is, we can then pray and believe it, and it will come to pass. That’s God’s kind of faith. It was this kind of personal word to Noah from God that created the faith to do what he did. It wasn’t because Noah was such a fabulous saint; it wasn’t because he was the grandson of Enoch. It was because God revealed Himself to Noah’s heart and placed within him a word.

What we need as a church, and what we need as believers today is for God to speak to our hearts. But you say we have God’s Word recorded in a book. Yes, and God be praised for it. It is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant revelation of God. But our hearts are neither inspired, infallible, or inerrant. We must not desert the wonderful doctrine of our Lord who said He would give us His Spirit to “guide us into all truth.” Without the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts through the Word and applying it correctly to us, we would never believe it. Men’s brains and hearts unaided are not enough. Intellect is sufficient to understand a great deal of it, if not all of it, but the heart is too weak to believe it or value it.

Once again we need the Spirit of the Lord to quicken our hearts with a word that will fan the smoldering flax into a burning blaze again. We need a move of heaven in our souls to make the truth in our heads burn in reality in our hearts. We need God to show up today for faith is produced by the word of God.

Secondly, I want you to see that:

Faith Motivated Noah to Fear God

It says that Noah was, “moved with fear...”

Noah not only believed God for the promises and the blessings, Noah believed God when He said, “I am going to judge.” He believed God’s warnings and threatenings. Faith not only accepts the blessings, it also accepts the warnings of God’s Word. I thank God for the promises of Scripture. In this last twelve months, the promises of God have meant more to me than at any other time in my entire walk with God. I scan, I search, I thumb, I read, I browse this Book to find promises that I can claim for my own and stand on. I love it when God makes promises because I know He’s a “promise keeper.” I have my doubts about all of these men who call themselves “promise keepers.” I don’t know about them, but I know of One who keeps His promises, and He’s the only One who has ever kept all His promises. But, dear friend, He has also made some other statements in this Bible, statements of threatenings, and of warnings, and of judgments. Faith says, “If I am to believe the promises, I will believe the warnings.” You cannot believe one and not the other for it is the same God who spoke both promises and warnings.

If you truly believe God, then you will believe all He says. If you don't believe God will damn unrepentant sinners to Hell, then you don't believe God will usher His saints to eternal glory, or at least you can't be sure of that. If you don't believe in the judgment of sinners, then how can you trust in the redemption of sinners? If you doubt one Word of God, then how can you be assured of the one word you do believe? No, faith takes all that God says and believes it, even if it doesn't paint a very pleasing picture. Even if it's ominous, even if its weight crushes your heart, you believe it because God has said it, and that kind of faith is what Noah was motivated by when he built the ark.

Oh, I wish that my friends in this room, who do not walk with Christ, could have the certainty and the reality of God's threatenings and warnings this morning. I pray that the Lord will let you see the awful magnitude and terribleness of your sins. Oh, my friend, if you could only see your sin as God says that it is. If you would only believe that He says it is an abomination and a reproach and His wrath abides on you. "Why, Pastor, I don't understand what you are talking about, I am not a bad person. I am not an evil man." "I am not a wicked teenager, and I obey my Mom and Dad." Dear friends, when you rest your eternal weight upon how good you are, or how not so bad you are, you don't believe what God says about sin. It was for our sins that Christ died. The greatest demonstration of God's thoughts about sin is not hell, or a lake of fire, or flames and worms; it is the cross of Jesus Christ. That's the greatest demonstration of God's thoughts about sin. He hates it enough that when His Son took our sins upon Him, God killed Him!

Oh, sinner, would you believe God hates your sin? Would you see your carelessness about the things of God as a wicked abomination to Him? Would you see your lightheartedness about the pleasures of this world as a weight around your neck that will sink you to the lowest pits of hell? Oh, we need God to help us, to illuminate our eyes and our hearts to see and to understand what God has said about sin, not just what He says about Heaven, not just what He says about a blessed life and promises; we need to believe all that God has said.

Thirdly, I want you to understand that:

Faith Moves Us From the Realm of the Comfortable to the Realm of the Uncomfortable

Faith will always move you from the realm of the comfortable to the realm of the uncomfortable. No, not some of the time, but all of the time. You'll be walking in a realm uncomfortable to your flesh if you walk by faith, because the flesh and the faith are diametrically opposed. Look at the life of Noah, and look at what God warned him of, and what God told him to do. He was asked to do something he had not done before, build a boat. But his faith in what God had said motivated him to do it.

Now some say the earth had never seen rain because the Bible says in Genesis 2 that the garden was moistened by a mist that arose from the ground, and not by rain. We have no assurance though that by the time we get to Genesis six rain had not fallen on the earth. In fact, I don't

know how it would have been possible that it had not rained. So it's not a matter of whether he believed in rain or not, or even understood, though I believe he had to have understood the concept of rain. When God explained to Noah it was going to rain, He didn't stop and explain what rain was. Noah seemed to understand, and God continued on with His instructions. But friends, he'd never built a boat. Frankly, I don't think he'd ever built a canoe before. Yet God said, "I want you to build a boat." In fact what the Lord required of Noah was not boat but a ship that was on the size of a "cruise liner." A major ship! You take the dimensions of this great vessel and it is wrong for us to refer to it as a boat; it was a ship.

I wonder how many times God has asked us to move out of the realm of the comfortable into the realm of the uncomfortable by simply asking us to do something that we've never done before? Faith will always ask you to do something you've never done before.

And then there was the scorn of others. He surely received much ridicule and sarcasm. How do you prove meteorologically the prospect of a flood when there never has been a flood before? How do you tell others, "listen, there is a flood coming," when they had no idea of what a flood was?" For those years as he was building that ship, he came under great sarcasm and ridicule by the others in that community in that part of the world. But faith moves us out of the realm of the comfortable and the acceptable, into the realm of the uncomfortable and the unacceptable. Friends, it's not acceptable to the flesh to be ridiculed and mocked.

Tradition says it took Noah one hundred and twenty years to build the ark. Others say it took less than a hundred years, but suffice it to say, it took a long time. And let's say you were a small child when Noah started, and now you've grown, and now you've got children, and perhaps even by now, you've got grandchildren, and still Noah is working on that flood surviving vessel. What would you have said about the man that preached a flood, and built a cruise liner? What would you have said? Youth grew up to adulthood, adulthood passed on to old age, and still there were no signs of a coming storm. Yet Noah continues to do that which others mocked and ridiculed him for.

I am sure Shem, Ham, and Japheth had heard every boat story and joke about a flood during their childhood. They heard all the mocking and teasing of all of their friends, but Noah, Noah feared God more than he feared the ridicule of others. He feared God more than the abuse his family received. Why? What motivates a man to be willing to be made the laughingstock of the world? I tell you what, hearing God. When you hear God, you will have faith.

Faith moved Noah into an uncomfortable realm when you realize that Noah had a ministry without any converts. Second Peter chapter two verse five tells us:

And (God) spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

What a test for a preacher! Let's say he was a hundred and twenty years building the ark. A hundred and twenty years of preaching and not one single convert. But can you imagine a hundred and twenty years and nobody even responding to an invitation? Only faith can cause a man to persevere, and faith did its preserving work in Noah. Why? He heard God and he knew God couldn't go back on His word. There is not even a record of a struggle in Noah's heart about whether he heard God right. He knew he had heard God!

He unswervingly preached the righteousness of God and the judgment to come and no one believed. I wonder what the church growth experts would do with those kinds of statistics? Would you dare to say, "Noah, if you'd just change your methodology you would have had converts"? Today someone would advise him, "Hey, you need to pick out songs that sinners would like to listen to. Then they will come and enjoy it." Another church growth consultant would tell him, "You don't need to preach about sin so much, Noah. Just talk about God's goodness and how He's there when they need Him. Why, they'll listen to you and they will even get on the boat with you." That's what the modern experts tell us we need to do today. These are the things you do to get people to come. Friends, I still believe the Bible. The Bible tells me gimmicks and methodology will never change the heart. It might change outward behavior but it will never change the heart. And that is what we need; we need God to change hearts. Has your heart been changed by God or are the changes that have occurred in your life the product of your own hand? It doesn't matter how many churches you're a member of, or even how many times you've been baptized, you need a new heart and only God can do that!

Preacher, I must tell you that I don't know of any test that's harder for any preacher to endure, not ill health or financial difficulties; no, the greatest test to a man of God is to be tested by a lack of visible results in his ministry. And yet this man endured it, and God called him righteous.

Have you prayed so long without your prayers being answered, and now do not believe they will ever be answered? Let me ask you a question, have you prayed for a hundred and twenty years about it as Noah did? Does it seem that you have labored so long without any visible results? Has your effort gone unrewarded and you grow weary in well doing? Remember Noah, my friend, and remember God judges success by a much different standard than man. I am convinced that because of discouragement we sometimes give up way too soon. Had we kept fighting the fight, the answer would have come. Yet, we must never forget that there are some battles that we fight that will never be won with visible success, but whether we persevere in battle or not. Faith perseveres.

Well, fourth:

Faith Condemns Those Who Do Not Have Faith

Faith will condemn those who don't possess it. Look at the text again. He says that,

By the which he condemned the world...(Hebrews 11:7).

Noah's faith was an evidence of the "guiltiness" of the world. Noah believing God was an evidence that the others did not believe God, and that condemned them as being unrighteous. It's Noah's faith in God's word that led him into the ark when God said it was time. The Bible says that God told Noah that the time had come for the flood to commence and to go into the ark. And the Bible says that God closed the door of that ship, and for the next seven days, Noah and his family were separated from the rest of the world before one raindrop fell. For seven days God was testing his man. Isn't that remarkable? God doesn't do things the easy way for us. He will test you and He will challenge you until you're able to say, "Lord, I do believe, no matter what."

I wonder what Mrs. Noah had to say. Was she anything like Job's wife? You know what those seven days had to be like if she was. What was the purpose of those seven days? Why be shut in with all of those animals? Why put the family through such an ordeal? It was to teach all who would learn that in order to walk the pathway of faith you have to be shut up with God and away from the world. Being shut in with God, Noah was dead to the world.

Hear God's command, folks, "Come out from among them and be ye separate." So very few of us are willing to be "dead to the world." We enjoy too much of the world's entertainment and pleasures to be shut up alone with God. We cannot stand the prayer closet's door to be closed. We've got to keep it open because we still want to hear and see the world's play. I like the way Charles Spurgeon said it in a message he preached. He says,

"You might as well be dead cries one. You might as well be dead to society." Exactly so, and that is what the child of God looks for. "Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Buried with Him by baptism in death." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by the whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." That separatedness which Noah took upon himself so willingly was involved in his salvation; for if he had lived with the world, he would have died with the world. Only in separation is salvation.--C. H. Spurgeon

It does not mean that if you make yourself a hermit or a recluse you can be saved. No, it doesn't mean that. It means, that if you really belong to God, you will not be like the world. Noah was still "in the world," but he was not "of the world." How do I make us to understand this, this morning? There is something about the life of faith that will not allow you to enjoy the entertainment and the pleasure of this life. It just can't happen.

One of the tests, as far as I am concerned, of whether a man or a woman is really genuinely saved is the affections of the heart towards the world. If they can say they prize the entertainment and the pleasure of this world more than they prize communion with God, I wish not severity but I cannot but be truthful to you, I can't believe they are saved.

Holiness means separation, and that has something to do with the way we talk, the way we look, and the way we act. Far too long we have been fearful of saying anything from pulpits and lecterns about how we, as Christians, separate ourselves, and even the way we dress. Look at the way we dress. Most often for many of us, there is no distinction between the immodest world and our

immodest dress. Now friends, I am not a “ clothes-line preacher.” I’m not here to establish shirt-sleeve lengths, nor dress lengths, but I am here to tell you the Bible says, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate.” That also means in the way we conform or do not conform in our dress. The truth of the matter is, it is not really about dress but about our hearts. Is there a fear of God in our hearts motivating a reverence? Is there a love from Him that wishes to set Him apart in your lifestyle and manner? Do we have a passion for being alone and shut up with God?

Very well then, I believe Noah had a faith that said, “I’ll be shut up with God,” rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

The Relationship Between Faith and Works

Now we have to deal with this last part of this text before I can close this message, because it appears as if what Noah did is what saved Noah. It says,

...and he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

Does that mean that he became righteous because he built the boat and did what God told him to do, and therefore he was saved? Well, the text, as far as I can understand it, is very crystal clear, saying that Noah’s work saved him. It is also clear that Noah’s righteousness was by faith. Notice the last three words of the text:

is by faith

How do we make sense of this? Had Noah not worked and built the ark he would have perished along with the ungodly. That’s not a contradiction, but it’s another of the Bible’s proofs that saving faith produces saving actions. If a man has genuine saving faith, he’s going to act like it. He’s going to obey God because he’s moved with a godly fear. He doesn’t like sin, and he’s fearful of what it does in his relationship with God. James chapter two verse seventeen says,

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

You can say, “I love Jesus and I am a Christian,” but if there is no works, or fruit of the Spirit, then your faith is a faith that will damn you and not save you. One cannot be a Christian in name only. You cannot claim His name and not obey His command. In the end it is God that saves, and He saves through the agency of faith, and godly faith will produce godly obedience. Faith always leaves a godly trail of righteousness.

Where is your godly trail? Whenever a man walks through the forest he leaves a trail that the hounds can follow. Where is your trail so that others can see that you too move with godly fear? What works follow your life that leave clear and unmistakable evidence that you walk a different trail than the world and thereby condemn the world? What righteous works can they see that tell them you believe God when He says He will destroy the world again? Next time God will

not destroy the earth with water but with fire. Are there definite things you do in which they can see you live out your faith in God? I do not mean attend church. Even sinners know that many who go to church are no different than they. I mean the works of Christ. Do you so love God with all your heart that you cannot dare break His heart socializing with the pleasures of sin? Do you love Him so much that you cannot be a friend to the world? Do you love others as He has loved you? Do you have the joy of God as your constant companion? Do you walk in meekness and gentleness as our Lord did? Do you care for the lowly and mend the wounded in spirit? Do you rejoice in righteousness and despise unrighteousness? These and many more are the works of Christ. You cannot separate faith from the works it produces.

But don't make the mistake of thinking I am saying it is our works that save us. Oh no, it is the faith that produces the work. And that faith comes only from God. The ark of our safety is not our goodness but Christ. He is our ark. He is our pavilion and refuge. He is our hiding place. The ark of gopher wood and pitch that Noah made was not Noah's real security. Why, it was God that gave him the dimensions and the blueprints on how to build it. It was not Noah's engineering ingenuity. I ask you, what kept those gigantic tidal waves that ruled the earth those days and nights from breaking that ship in two? What guided that ship upon the vast ocean of the earth, away from mountains or rocks that would have broken it and caused it to capsize? Why, nothing more than the grace of God, the very hand of God. Noah was safe, not in an ark; he was safe in the hand of God. And dear friends, Jesus Christ is our ark of safety! He's our hiding place. Are you in Christ? Then you are saved and you will be building a life of righteousness, which will condemn the world. But if you are not in Christ, then you will stand in the hour of God's fiery judgment having no shelter and no hiding place. May God have mercy on you. Amen.