

Hebrews 11:7 Heroes of Faith: By Faith Noah Took God's Word Seriously

Have you ever thought about what Noah must have gone through leading up to the time of the flood? Think of what he did for a moment. He built a boat, but not some little sea craft to take his wife and kids out on the lake on the weekend. He built a floating barge that was one and a half football fields long and three stories high-an ark big enough to hold a pair of all the animals. And Noah, most likely, built this thing in the middle of the dry land. There may not have been an ocean or a sea anywhere in sight. And it probably took Noah 120 years to build it. And when the unbelieving people around him would ask why he was doing such a thing, he would tell them: Because God is going to send a flood which will cover over this entire world because you've rejected your Lord and your unbelieving hearts are only evil all the time. *"Yeah, right, Noah. Ok, Noah! You're a fool, Noah!"* To face ridicule like that-and worse-for 120 years! Can you imagine? How could Noah have gone through with it?

The words of Hebrews 11 give us terrific insight from the Lord's perspective: **"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of righteousness that is in keeping with faith."** Noah built this ark, and endured the scorn which no doubt came from doing so, because, simply put, he had a faith that took God's Word seriously.

In the first place, Noah was gifted with a faith that took God's Words of warning seriously. You know, as we've looked at Hebrews 11 for this last month of our worship, we've been reminded that faith is certainty in things unseen. And the story of Noah is a prime example of this principle. Neither Noah nor anyone else had ever seen anything like what God told Noah he was going to do because of the world's wickedness. Trusting that the Lord could and would send a destructive flood was something Noah believed by a Spirit-given faith. But I suppose it didn't take faith in things unseen to know how wicked the world had become in Noah's time. That Noah could observe quite readily.

It's pretty striking to hear what the early verses of Genesis chapter 6 say, in the lead up to the flood. It says that ***"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."*** That might make us ask the question, "How could the world have grown so wicked and godless and so full of unbelief?"

Well, the opening verses of the flood story in Genesis 6, and the chapters before it, Genesis 4+5, give us some background. Those early chapters of the book of Genesis reveal that there were two main family lines from which people came: the family line of Adam and Eve's son Cain, who killed his brother Abel; and the line of Adam and Eve's son Seth, whom God gave to Adam and Eve after Abel had been killed. And the line of Cain is depicted as a family line of unbelievers, who embraced worldly pursuits and wickedness. And the line of Seth is the family line of our Savior Jesus. Seth's family line is depicted as people who clung to God's promises of salvation and who devoted themselves to sharing that promise with their descendants. They were families and family lines who embraced very different things....until we get to the beginning of Genesis chapter 6 where it says, ***"When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God (believers, the line of Seth's family) saw that the daughters of humans (referring to the unbelievers, the daughters of Cain) were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose."***

Why was the world becoming more and more corrupt leading up to the time of Noah? Because men of faith, when they started looking for future wives, didn't focus on the spiritual priorities, didn't focus on finding wives which shared their faith in God's promises, but rather focused on a misplaced priorities-the physical attractiveness of a potential wife. And they did so to their own spiritual detriment. Believers married unbelievers and it resulted in a failure to prioritize passing their faith on to their children. And that led to generations of people who didn't know the Lord, who hadn't been raised on his salvation promises, and who reveled in the corruption of unbelief and wickedness. And that sort of godless living was what was celebrated. Genesis 6 points out that there was the group of people called the Nephilim, a word which seems to indicate that those people were attackers and bandits, and they were **"the heroes of old, the men of renown."** Guys, I take time to delve into that part of the backstory of the flood because, well, I think we see parallels in our world today, and it reminds us to take God's Word about his coming judgment seriously. But I think it offers us lots of important food for thought as we think about the company that we keep and the way we choose

to spend our time. I think it has a lot of important stuff to say to you young people who are thinking about what to look for in a future spouse. There's food for thought for you parents as you talking about dating and future spouses with your children.

So the world of Noah's day was so corrupt-perhaps as corrupt as it's ever been. And it got to the point where the Lord was concerned that pretty soon there would be no one left who embraced his promises of salvation and followed his ways. And that's a pretty fair concern on God's part, don't you think, since every indication is that they only believers left on the earth at the time of Noah were Noah and his wife and his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japeth, and their wives. Eight believers left. That was it, it seems. So the Lord knew that he needed to start over, so to speak. He needed to exact justice on those who embraced wickedness. He knew he needed to do something to keep his promise of a Savior alive. And he chose to do it through the one man and his family who, by God's grace, still embraced his promises.

So the Lord told Noah to build an ark. To do something which had never been done before to prepare for an event that had never before been seen. *"Noah, build an ark, because I'm going to destroy the world. Believe that my righteous anger and my justice are real, Noah."* And by faith, Noah took God's Word of warning seriously. He built an ark that probably took him longer to complete than any of us will even live.

Do we always take God's Word of warning that seriously? If we're being honest, we have to admit that we don't. Perhaps it's easy for us to begin to think that God's anger over sin is real, but he's angry with the sins of others, not mine. God's angry with the people who, you know, commit the real big ticket sins. But my sins, ach! They're so small and inconsequential that God hardly notices them. After all, I'm so exemplary in so many aspects of my faith life. God's actually kind of fortunate to have someone like me. When we think like that, we fail to realize that we have a sinful nature that fits every bit of that description of the unbelievers of Noah' day, that we have a sinful nature that is so corrupt that it is only evil all the time. The truth is it takes a Holy Spirit-given faith to see and believe the depth of our own sinful hearts. Lord, forgive us when we fail to see the seriousness of our sins against you.

Our Lord does. He's as gracious to us as he was to Noah. You know, it might be easy for people to think that God saved Noah from the flood because he was such an outstanding guy, that Noah was the candidate God chose to save because he was just so morally upright. And while it's true that Noah was a man whom the Scriptures describe as "righteous," as a man who walked faithfully with God like Enoch did. But it wasn't as if Noah was without moral fault. After all, the Scriptures recall the time after Noah got off the ark, when Noah raised a vineyard, drank of its wine, and got so drunk he fell asleep naked in his drunken stupor. Yeah, that part of Noah's story doesn't make the children's Bible story books, does it? That's a guy that the Scriptures describe as "righteous?"

Yes! Because, when the writer of Genesis refers to Noah as a righteous man, it's not a reference to Noah's unimpeachable moral character. Rather, it refers to a righteousness that was gifted to Noah. Listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says, **"(By his faith Noah)....became an heir of righteousness that is in keeping with faith."** Noah was an "heir of righteousness." An heir is someone who receives an inheritance. And any heir, especially in biblical times, didn't receive an inheritance because he or she had done something to earn that inheritance. Rather, an heir receives an inheritance as a gift simply because of their position as members of a family.

By his grace God brought Noah into his spiritual family. God made Noah his child. By his grace God placed Noah into an earthly family that prioritized the passing down of a promise. It was a promise which had originally been made to Noah's oldest and greatest ancestors, Adam and Eve-a promise about a Savior who would remove our sin from us and who would credit us with his righteous life of perfection. That was a promise that Noah, no doubt, heard over and over from his parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. And by God's grace, Noah believed those promises. By faith, Noah took seriously God's Word about a Savior. It made him God's child and God's heir, an heir of the righteousness.

And that righteousness which was gifted to Noah showed itself in the way Noah lived. It led Noah to build an ark to save himself and his family from the flood waters of God's judgment. And through Noah's act of faith, the Lord

preserved the family line which would eventually bring our Savior into this world. Think about that for a minute: Noah was at the same time an ancestor of our Savior and an heir of our Savior's righteousness, a child of God.

That's what you are, too. An heir of righteousness that is yours by faith. Your sins were drowned at the cross of Christ-drowned in the waters of your baptism. Safe from the destruction in the ark of God's holy Church. You're a child of God. God gives you his Word on that. Take that Word seriously. May his Word of warning and especially his Word of promise make us bold to witness our faith, like Noah did, in everything we think, say, and do. Amen.