

LIVING BY FAITH IN THE PRESENT, FOR THE FUTURE
HEBREWS 11:7

I don't have to tell you that we live in a perverse world. When you open up your news browser you are assaulted by that reality. Just this week:

- ✓ The latest Supreme Court nominee refused to provide a definition for the word "woman" saying she couldn't because she is not a biologist.
- ✓ A biological trans-gender male "won" the women's NCAA swimming title for the 500M freestyle.
- ✓ Disney is releasing a new cartoon movie for children featuring a homosexual kiss.
- ✓ A Christian news agency self-reported sexual harassment from two of its former leaders, including its president, over a period of about a decade. Worst of all, they acknowledged that allegations had been regularly made at the time of the events and the accusations were both ignored and ridiculed.

It's clichéd to say it, but the world just seems to be going from bad to worse and sometimes you wonder, "How bad will it get?" I don't know how much good news this is, but it has been worse in previous generations. *Much* worse. In fact, there was a time when the world was in such bad shape that there was only *one* godly family on the whole earth, and God decided to judge the whole world apart from that family and start over with humanity through that one man's line.

I am speaking, of course, about Noah. Moses describes it this way: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:5-6).

Yet in the midst of such pervasive perversity, Noah thrived spiritually. Along with Enoch, Noah was the only other man of whom Scripture said that he "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). He had an intimate relationship of fellowship and trust in God while surrounded by astounding rebelliousness. So the story of Noah is an encouragement for every believer who lives in a dark and perverse world (e.g., Rom. 1:28-32; 2 Tim. 3:1ff), for however wicked our world is, the world in which Noah lived was far worse, since it contained only one righteous man and his family. That's why the writer of Hebrews points to Noah as an example of living by faith in Hebrews 11:7. In this one verse, we will find that —

LIVING BY FAITH MEANS OBEYING GOD BY FAITH.

In the opening verses of this chapter we've seen that Abel worshipped by faith and Enoch walked (fellowshipped) by faith; today we see that Noah worked (obeyed) by faith. His belief in God's word was so profound that it shaped what he did when *no one else* was obeying God.

In these verses, the writer demonstrates **three aspects of Noah's obedient faith:**

1. The CONTEXTS of Noah's Faith

- In verse 7, the writer uses the phrase **by faith** for the fourth time (vv. 3-5; contrast **without faith**, v. 6). He has established already a clear pattern for the chapter — this is what faithful living to Christ looks like (10:37-38; Hab. 2:4). But we are already beginning to see nuances of faith — in this verse he is highlighting an obedient faith — Noah unhesitatingly taking God at His word and acting on it.
- There are two contexts in which Noah acted — one explicit and one implied. The writer clearly identifies one context — it happened **being warned by God... He obeyed when warned.**
 - ✓ The warning is a divine message — a divine injunction. Noah was not acting on a hunch, but because of divine, special revelation of what would happen in the future.
 - ✓ It is also important to observe that “it was the voice of God that carried conviction to him.” [Morris] He acted because God spoke; and when God speaks, He always speaks authoritatively demanding particular responses from us (1 Thess. 2:13-14).
 - ✓ The warning is given in Genesis 6:13-16 — God will destroy the world with the flood. Remember that faith is acting when we haven't seen (v. 1); Noah **had not yet seen** two things: judgment, rain.
 - He had seen/heard of judgment (Adam out of the Garden, 3:22-24; Cain cursed, 4:11-12), but he had not seen an immediate wrath and judgment of death like this.
 - While there were seas on the earth, Noah apparently had not seen rain (2:6), and had certainly never seen a flood, nevermind a world-wide cataclysmic flood.
 - This is a good reminder that we don't act by faith in what we know; we act by faith in who God is. We believe that **He is** (v. 6) — and Noah is a shining example of that faith.
 - Just because we haven't seen something about God doesn't mean it isn't a reality; there are realities about God that are yet to be revealed and seen for us also (11:1b).
 - In a similar way to Noah, we also have been warned about a coming judgment of God (2:2-3; 3:7ff); though we have not seen it, we believe that God will judge sin and restore righteousness.
 - ✓ It has been noted that “Noah...is the first of the attested witnesses whose faith meant taking God at his word, a faith that is clearly forward-looking.” [O'Brien] Noah is anticipating God's action in the future even though he has never seen God act in that way previously.
 - ✓ So Noah acts because he has been warned by God about a judgment that is coming; he must act to prepare himself and his family for that judgment.
- There is also an implied context in which Noah acted. The writer expects us to know many of these stories, and certainly Noah's story would have been as familiar to his readers as it is to us. They knew (and we know) Noah was not only faithful in the context of the warning of coming judgment, but he was faithful in the midst of pervasive perversity and relentless rebellion. **He obeyed when no one else did.**

- ✓ Moses explains the perversity of Noah’s generation (Gen. 6:5). God grieved over His creation: it was made to delight in God and it rebelled against Him (Gen. 6:6).
- ✓ The writer of Hebrews doesn’t mention it, and Moses only speaks in veiled terms, but how wicked must the actions of the world have been to provoke this response of judgment from God?
 - And how hard must it have been to **walk with God** when every relationship Noah had was opposed to God and him?
 - And how hard must it have been to **walk with God** when Noah was alone for 120 years (6:3)? And it is reasonable to assume that relationships and culture deteriorated over those 120 years.
- ✓ Our world may not be as perverse as Noah’s, but it follows the same pattern as Noah’s world.
- ✓ Since Genesis 3, God’s people (including His Son), have always been opposed by the world and lived in the context of evil.
 - We need faith to believe that the world really does not satisfy and really does have a horrid end.
 - We need faith to believe that Christ + suffering is > world + no suffering.
 - We need to believe in the reality of God’s coming judgment against sin & sinners.

“A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert, is exactly the part he ought to doubt — himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt — the Divine Reason.” [Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.]

- ✓ And while we hate the evil and the brokenness that results from it, don’t you love the power of the light of the gospel that shines in the blackness of that evil (Eph. 2:1, 4; Jn. 3:19-21)? It takes sin to reveal the magnificence of grace.
- ✓ We can reiterate what we said last Sunday: we don’t need to have a sanctified world to live a sanctified life. It is always possible to live in a corrupt world and be pleasing to the Lord (which is a major theme of this chapter: vv. 13, 25-26, 32-33, 35ff).
- ✓ Noah was exemplary in being sanctified while living in a wicked world — and it was a reflection of his faith in God. He believed in God and not the message of the world. We can live in the same way.

2. The **WORK** of Noah’s Faith

- The writer points to one attitude and one action of Noah that demonstrated his faith. What he did was done with an attitude of **reverence**. He was motivated by reverence.
 - ✓ Because of the revelation of God, he acted circumspectly, warily, and carefully. He respected the command of God and was dutiful to do everything that God’s command demanded and implied.
 - ✓ There was genuine spiritual delight and joy in what he did.
 - ✓ The word contains an idea of “fear,” but this is not a cowering fear; it is a fear that compelled Noah to move towards the object of his fear. His “fear” led to worship and delight.

- The action that demonstrated his faith was that he **prepared an ark**. He acted with diligent faithfulness.
 - ✓ I've made no secret of my impatience; one of the influences of 21st century America on my life is that I don't wait well (especially in traffic).
 - ✓ We hold up Job as an example of patience; but perhaps we should hold up Noah as an example.
 - ✓ The text simply says, "He prepared an ark." That doesn't sound like a particularly daunting task.
 - But remember the size of the ark: **Genesis 6:15** — that's ~100,000 square feet on the decks and over three million cubic feet of boat.
 - He cut and fit together the gopher wood planks without a chainsaw, power saw, or table saw. He had no square to make sure his cuts were true. He had no hardware store to get nails or pitch to cover the ark for waterproofing. He didn't have a crew to build out the interior of the ark with living quarters, animal pens, and feeding troughs.
 - He had to load the animals from the cockroaches to the elephants on the ark, two-by-two.
 - And it took him 120 years to complete the ark (6:3)!
 - ✓ We also know that while he was building he was also preaching (**2 Pt. 2:5**).
 - We know that at best they ignored Noah (**Mt. 24:37-38**) — they just kept on with their sins.
 - There is no passage that tells us the direct response to Noah, but it is not hard to imagine that he was jeered, mocked, ridiculed, and harassed. "What's rain?" "Why are you building your boat so far from the water?" "Is God really going to judge...?" "You're a fool..."
 - ✓ The writer uses the life of Noah to remind us that a life of faith is a life of obedience. We don't wait for the acceptance of the world to obey. When God commands, we follow. Noah exemplified what Jesus spoke of in the Upper Room (**Jn. 14:15, 21; 15:14**).
 - ✓ Is there something which you are delaying obedience to God? You know His command, but you are hesitant, slow, or maybe even apathetic? If He has said it, then it demands diligent pursuit.
- The reason (**for**) that he built the boat was for **salvation**. He acted with a desire for salvation.
 - ✓ The word "salvation" is used in two senses in Scripture. It can mean physical salvation, and that certainly is in view here: the ark kept them alive and kept them from dying.
 - ✓ But "salvation" also refers to spiritual salvation, which is also in mind here: by building the ark, Noah kept himself and his family from the **condemnation** experienced by the **world**, and became **an heir of righteousness** — spiritually saved.
 - ✓ Noah hadn't seen rain; we don't know if he'd seen the sea or a ship. He had not seen the judgment of God directly against sinners. But when God spoke, he unquestioningly obeyed, even when it took time and even when he was ostracized by the world.
 - ✓ Noah was concerned to hear the approval of God more than he was concerned to stop the disapproval of the world — because he was convinced of what was coming.
 - ✓ "Noah provides an explicit model of the future-oriented faith of a person who acts in the present on the basis of a promised future which as yet cannot be seen." [Thiselton, *Hebrews*, 112-13.]

- ✓ Another passage provides a similar estimation of Noah's righteousness as Hebrews 11. His faithfulness is compared to Daniel and Job (Ezk. 14:14, 16, 18, 20).
 - It is notable that Noah was seen as one who is remarkable in his faith towards God.
 - It is notable that Noah's faith is effective only for him; everyman is accountable to God and no man apart from Jesus Christ can save any other man. Noah's righteousness was *his* righteousness.
 - If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, perhaps you are overly concerned about what the world thinks about you and you are fearful of mocking and hostility. Like Noah, we need to be far more (eternally more) concerned about what God thinks of us.
 - I urge you, if you are not a follower of Christ, to go to the only One who can save you of your sin and trust in Him for your salvation — believing that you are an incapable sinner and that He provides and infinite salvation if you believe in His death and resurrection (cf. 2:9-11).

3. The **RESULTS** of Noah's Faith

- Was everything that Noah did worthwhile? Hebrews notes two results of Noah's faith.
- The first result is that **he condemned the world.**
 - ✓ The word "condemnation" is often used of one person of another person. The author may have his preaching in mind (2 Pt. 2:5) when he spoke of the coming judgment against sinners.
 - ✓ But even more, it seems that it was his very acts of faith in God that condemned the world — **by which** probably refers to his faith as the thing which condemns the world.
 - ✓ The fact that Noah believed made the culpability of his contemporaries even more clear. "Where faith is resisted or rejected it leads to condemnation." [Guthrie]
 - ✓ Note that this condemnation didn't make his life easier (it probably made it harder).
 - ✓ But his act of faith allowed him to have a clear conscience about what he had done.
 - ✓ When the world rejects our preaching and our lives, we don't need to despair. Grief and sorrow may be appropriate, but not hopelessness. If we have been faithful to obey and speak, then we have done our job — even if the world has rejected us. Just keep going to the end.
- The second result of Noah's faith was that **he became an heir of righteousness.**
 - ✓ When the writer uses the verb **became** it reminds us that Noah was not inherently righteous. He was declared righteous by God. While **Genesis 6:9** points to the righteousness of Noah, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God," **verse 8** reminds us that he was righteous because he "found favor [grace] in the eyes of the Lord." His righteousness was by grace.
 - ✓ His righteousness was not something he merited but it came to him **according to faith**. He believed in God and God granted him a right standing and then equipped him to live faithfully to God.
 - ✓ He wasn't righteous because of his obedience; he was faithful to obey because he had been declared righteous by God and enabled to persist in obedience and to persist in walking with God.

CONCLUSION: We often talk about counting the cost of discipleship. Was it worth the cost to Noah?

- ✓ Cost = 120 years of hard labor and rejection and mocking.
- ✓ Benefit = Right standing before God and an inheritor of God's blessings.
- ✓ Living by faith in the present, anticipating the future, was worth it.

“Noah’s faith led to amazing acts of obedience. And seeing such obedience should be an encouragement to us. At our core, we all tend to be skeptics when it comes to radical obedience. We tend to think that nobody really does obey God that way; it is not possible. But Hebrews 11 shows us that our skepticism is unwarranted. It is a long list of people who radically obeyed God when doing so made no earthly sense. Obedience is possible—but only by faith.” [Kruger, *Hebrews For You*, 166.]

BENEDICTION: Hebrews 13:20-21