

"A Faith That Endures - Noah"
Sermon Series on The Hall of Faith
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(Genesis 6:5-22)

Introduction.

We are living in the middle of a global crisis with Covid-19, and it has rocked our world, hasn't it? Many people are speculating that just as 9/11 changed the world forever and air travel has never been the same since, so this pandemic is going to change our world and it will affect our way of life for many years to come.

There was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* a couple of weeks ago which said that after 9/11 it took three years before as many people were flying every day as had flown the day before the attacks on September 10, 2001. And it took six years before the airlines were profitable again. I suspect we will feel the impact of this pandemic for several years to come.

We aren't the first generation to ever deal with a global crisis, and we won't be the last. Someone sent me a photograph of a sign that was posted in the town of Kelowna, British Columbia in Canada back in 1918 during the Spanish Flu pandemic. Schools, churches, and movie theaters were all closed back then just like today, and social distancing was at the heart of their strategy to deal with the problem as well. You'll also see on the sign that all public gatherings of more than ten people were prohibited just like now. However, they didn't have the ability to live stream their worship services back then like we do today. Aren't you grateful for technology?

It is instructive to study how people in the past have dealt with global crises, and that's especially true in discovering how the people of God have dealt with such challenges. From them we can learn how we can best handle the problems we face today. In the book of Genesis, we read of a person and his family who also had to deal with a global crisis, and it changed their world forever. His name was Noah, and the crisis he faced was a catastrophic flood that destroyed the world. While the problems we're facing aren't nearly as great as the destruction of the Flood, I still think there is a lot we can learn from how Noah dealt with his calamity, and we can learn from his life.

I. The Character of Noah.

In Genesis 6:9 we read, "*This is the account of Noah.*" The biblical story regarding Noah runs throughout the next 4 chapters of the book of Genesis, and it becomes the longest story of any individual in the Bible up to this point in the book. It's a story of a person of character when no one else around him was, and it's also a story about a faith that endures.

There are three things that are said about Noah in this passage which indicate he was someone who put God first in his life. **First, we read, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" (6:9).** Noah is the first person in the Bible of whom this is said, and it's an amazing statement in the context of the time in which he lived.

Earlier in chapter 6 we read that the evil of humanity had become so great that every inclination of the thoughts of the hearts of the people was only evil all the time. We also read that the world had become filled with violence (6:11). The result was that God regretted having made humanity. (Someone recently told me that they think one of the reasons God allowed this pandemic to happen is because He was so tired of all the acrimony and bickering down here on earth that essentially He said, "I'm sending all of you to your rooms. I'm putting everyone in Time Out!")

Noah stood alone as a righteous person in his generation, and he didn't live like everybody else around him. 2 Peter 2:5 also says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and he called others to faith. The Bible says that he sought to persuade his neighbors about the truth concerning God, the coming destruction, and how one should live a life pleasing to the Lord.

Second, we read that Noah walked with God (6:9). This is only said of one other individual in the entire book of Genesis, and that person is a man named Enoch. Enoch's relationship with God was so intimate and close that he never died a physical death but instead he was taken up into heaven (Gen. 5). Here Noah is put on a par with Enoch. Scripture says that Abraham, Isaac and other faithful people walked *before* God, but only Noah and Enoch are said to have walked *with* the Lord.

What a marvelous thing to be said about someone - that they walked with God. Have you ever known anyone like that? I've known a few in my lifetime, and I can tell you that whenever I'm in their presence, I sense something special about their life and the quality and depth of their faith. God is so real to them, and the intimacy of their relationship with the Lord is quite apparent. Praying is as natural to them as breathing, and they live their lives in the constant awareness of God.

I had a professor in seminary named Dr. J. Christy Wilson, and he was a person like that. I saw Jesus in him, and it seemed like the Lord oozed out of every cell of his body. When you were with Dr. Wilson, you wanted to be like him, and you wanted some of the good stuff in his life to rub off onto you.

Finally, we read that Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (6:8). The Hebrew word which is translated "favor" can also be translated "grace." Some people read these verses as if Noah found favor with God because he was righteous and lived a blameless life, but that's not the case. Verse 9 doesn't come before verse 8. The favor of God, the grace of God, preceded the righteousness of Noah. His righteous life was the product of Noah's having found favor with God, and it is therefore the proof of that favor, not the ground of it.

This a great biblical principle we all need to keep in mind. The grace of God always comes first before anything else. You and I may think that God loves us because of what we do or what we become, but God doesn't love us because of any of that. Nor does He give us His grace because of the good life we live. Rather, He loves us solely because He loves us.

God doesn't give us His grace because we deserve it. God gives it to us simply because of His love and mercy. Noah found this grace, and that is what shaped his character. And the result was that Noah stood alone in his generation and lived for God. He refused to compromise in his commitment to the Lord or adopt the values of the society around him. Instead, he remained steadfast in his devotion to God, even when no one else would. And all of this happened because He found grace and favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Character isn't built in a crisis. Rather, character is revealed when you're in a crisis and when things go wrong. Noah was a man of character, and he rose to the challenge and dealt with the crisis of his day. How is God revealing your character during this pandemic, and how does He want you to grow and change to become more like the kind of person who reflects the character of Christ? God has put each of us in the school of discipleship, and He uses the hardships we face in life to chip away our rough edges and build in us the character of Christ so we can be more like Him.

II. The Ark of Noah.

In chapter 6 we read, *"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. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood...'"* (6:13,14a). The Hebrew word that is translated "ark" (*tebah*) is used in the Bible only one other time, and it's in reference to the basket that saved Moses when he was a baby (Ex. 2:3,5). You'll recall that Moses' mother made a basket watertight by putting pitch all over it in the same way as Noah did the ark. *Tebah* isn't the usual Hebrew word for "boat" or "ship," and our English word "ark" is taken from the Latin Vulgate word *arca* which simply means "box." Noah's ark was a big box.

There is disagreement among scholars as to the type of wood that was used. Some say the Hebrew word, which appears only here in the OT, refers to cypress wood. Others say it refers to gofer wood, and still others cedar. We really don't

know. What we do know is that it was a very large vessel. A cubit is about 18 inches long, so the size of the ark measured 450' long, 75' wide, and 45' high. It contained 1.5 million cubic feet of space, and the deck area of the three stories would total 101,250 square feet! You engineers know just how big a space that is. It was enormous.

The plan for the ark was not dreamed up by Noah. He was no naval architect. Rather, the plan for the ark was given to Noah by God Himself, and the Lord gave the directions for the building of the vessel. It was a box-like structure which had three decks, a roof, windows and a door, and Noah was told to cover the ark with pitch, inside and out.

Then the Lord directed Noah to begin an extensive zoological collection of two of every kind of animal, male and female, and He told Noah to take them with Noah and his family into the ark. He would be the means of their salvation, and inside the ark they would be preserved from the destruction of the Flood. The floating zoo wouldn't be a sight-seeing attraction. Rather, it would be a means of rescue. Here we see again the mandate for stewardship that God gives to humanity as Noah is not only responsible for providing safety for his family and himself; he also had a responsibility to care for the animals of the world which God created and to ensure that they had a future after the Flood was over, too, just like humanity.

The most important feature of the story of Noah and the flood is to realize that God is the one who saves, and He will be with us through whatever crisis we have to face. He is the one to whom we can look to rescue us. For Noah that meant building an ark in response to the call of God. For you and me it will mean something else. But in each case it requires faith that endures, and this leads us to the final matter I want to talk about this morning.

III. The Enduring Faith of Noah.

In verse 22 we read, *"Noah did everything just as God commanded him."* In just a few words the writer of the book of Genesis commends Noah for his faith. Later on in Scripture, the writer to the Hebrews elaborates on this when he said, *"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he...became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (11:7).*

I wonder if you and I fully appreciate what it took for Noah to do what he did. In some ways his actions must have seemed ridiculous. The sheer size of the ark was overwhelming, the magnitude of the trees he had to chop down and the length of time required to build the ark were enormous, and the apparent foolishness of what he was doing to everyone around him all would have been reason enough to abandon the project. So many animals to collect, so many provisions to store away. "Lord, this is absurd!" he may have thought.

In addition, Noah didn't have any physical evidence for the coming of a Flood. Up to this point in the biblical narrative it had never rained, and Scripture says that *"streams [or mist] came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground"* (Gen. 2:6). Under such circumstances, what could have been more ridiculous than for Noah to build a gigantic ocean liner – and on dry ground at that!

And yet Noah worked faithfully, trusting in God, and he was obedient to the task. The Lord told Noah to do it, and he responded in faith. He based his actions not on what his reason told him, nor on what his neighbors said. Rather, he based what he did simply on his knowledge of and relationship with God. What a model of faith for you and me today. The passage says that Noah did everything God told him to do. I want to be a person like that. How about you?

This passage is an amazing testimony of the impact that the grace and favor of God can make in a person's life when an individual is willing to take God at His Word and do what He says regardless of the cost. The grace of God triggered in Noah a life of faith and sacrificial obedience. What has the grace of God triggered in you? How have you responded to the grace He has poured into your life? And what do you think He is up to with you as you go through this pandemic we're in?

Last week I read about the faith of someone who lived during another pandemic. The year was 1944, and polio, much like COVID-19 today, was an illness that seemed to live in the shadows. In both cases, doctors were mystified by the onset of the illnesses, and each sent its own shock wave of fear through the general population.

Back then polio flared up in the summer months, so people especially avoided swimming pools or congregating in large groups. Meanwhile, the medical community tried to figure out the virus. Because so little was known back then about the transmission of polio, patients who were admitted to hospitals couldn't have any visitors, just like today.

In 1944 one of those patients was Jean Ford, the sister of Billy Graham and the wife of Leighton Ford who has preached at our church. She was 11 years old when she contracted polio. A painful spinal tap confirmed the diagnosis. Jean remembers overhearing a conversation outside her hospital room as she laid there all alone. She says, "That night, I heard the nurse tell my mother and father out in the hall that I would not make it through the night." The doctors were concerned because polio had paralyzed her throat, and they feared it might spread to her heart or lungs too.

Jean says, "I was so sick. I had a temperature of maybe 103, 104 and a terrible headache and neck ache. And I didn't care whether I made it or not. ... But I do remember this very clearly, that if I died that night, at that age, it would not have bothered me so much because I knew then I was going to heaven."

It was Jean's faith that sustained her, much as Noah's faith sustained him. She was able to cope with the pandemic of her day by keeping her eyes on Christ, and she trusted in Him. Thankfully, Jean recovered, she went on to meet and marry Leighton when they both attended Wheaton College. They've had an amazing life together, raised a wonderful family, and have led a remarkable ministry. The polio affected her voice and her ability to swallow somewhat, but to see her today you would never know she had such a difficult struggle back then. Jean will tell you it was Christ who rescued her in the middle of her crisis. And it was her enduring faith in Him which pulled her through.

Conclusion.

Think of the darkest time in your life – a time when your world fell apart and everything you knew was stripped away. You woke up one day and the world had completely changed. How did you make it through? What role did your faith play in helping you cope with your crisis? Do you have a faith that endures?

Noah did, and so did Jean Ford. And so can you and I in the middle of this pandemic. Wherever you are this day and whatever crisis you're facing, God wants to be there for you. Turn to Jesus and call on His name. He will rescue you, and He will provide His grace to you in your time of trial. Ask Him to give you a faith that endures. Amen.