

Faith that Receives God's Salvation

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Preacher: David Court

[0 : 00] All right, the text from which the sermon is based tonight is Hebrews 11 verse 7, but in the light of that verse we'll also read from Genesis chapter 6 and we'll read verses 5 to 22.

So we'll read Genesis 6 first, that's in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament from Hebrews 11, just one verse there, verse 7. And there's, if you'd like to have a hard copy of the Bible at any time, there's a bunch on the back table, there's some upstairs, feel free to grab one.

We don't mind at all if you get up any time and grab a Bible, that's great. If you're here tonight and you don't own a Bible, we'd love for you to take one as well. We very much would like to have less Bibles tonight than we started with if you would like a Bible and you don't have one, so take one of those with you.

Let's read from God's Word together, Genesis 6 verses 5 to 22, and then Hebrews 11 verse 7. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

[1 : 24] These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood.

Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it. The length of the ark, 300 cubits. Its breadth, 50 cubits, and its height, 30 cubits.

Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, and which is the breath of life under heaven.

[2 : 26] Everything that is on the earth shall die, but I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds, according to their kinds, and of the animals, according to their kinds.

Of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come into you to keep them alive. Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up.

It shall serve as food for you and for them. And Noah did this. He did all that God commanded him. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 7. By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. This is God's holy word. By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

[3 : 46] By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Well, tonight in our journey through Hebrews 11, we move from Genesis 5, the story of Enoch, to Genesis 6 and the story of Noah.

Two men, really, who are said to have walked with God, both examples of individuals who lived their lives by faith. And the account of Noah's life of faith is to be found in Genesis chapter 6 through 9, the backdrop to it being that famous flood that dominates Genesis 6, 7 and 8.

And in the Genesis story, the story of the flood is not presented to us as a kind of myth or a legend. It is presented as history. And we know that similar stories of a universal global flood are found in a whole host of different ancient cultures and a lot of different forms.

I believe there are certainly maybe over 250 different accounts from all over the world. And in the ancient Near East, there are references in the epics of Gilgamesh and Atrahasis.

And I suppose one of the difficulties that some of us have when we approach the figure of Noah is we tend to associate his story as being a story really for children rather than adults.

[5 : 23] After all, no self-respecting children's Bible would dare to admit the story of Noah and the ark. And as a consequence, many see it as a kind of childish tale conjuring up images of cute little elephants and kangaroos or whatever, bears all going into the ark.

But when one actually reads the text of Genesis, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that this is no warm, cozy story of kind of cute animals and happy times.

It's a story about a world of irredeemable wickedness. A world spiraling out of moral control. A world that has placed itself under the wrath and judgment of a holy God.

And indeed, these verses of Genesis tell of a great act of divine decreation as God returns the earth to a situation of primeval watery chaos.

Genesis 6 through 8 is an unsettling account of where sin ultimately takes us as human beings and the judgment that inevitably ensues.

[6 : 38] Here we read of God judging human wickedness while at the same time preserving a remnant of faith. In our text tonight, Hebrews 11, 7, selects and highlights four things about Noah and his faith.

There's a lot more in Genesis 6 through 9. We're not going to expound that. We're simply going to look at that text through the lens of Hebrews 11, 7.

And I want to mention four things this evening. The first is this. Noah in faith received revelation from God.

By faith, Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen. So the story of Noah begins with God.

It begins with divine revelation. God speaks and reveals to Noah what will come to pass. And it's a revelation of divine judgment. This is not, you know, some Noah having some vague intuition.

[7 : 46] It's not his human speculation. It's divine revelation, clear and unambiguous. God speaks. Noah listens. Faith begins with revelation. Faith begins with revelation.

With a word from God. It is not a leap in the dark, as some would have us believe. But really a step into the light of God's revealed truth.

And in fact, that is where the letter of Hebrews itself begins. The very first verses of the book. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Apart from God's word, Noah had no evidence of a coming flood.

He didn't have a meteorologist's report. He didn't have, he didn't see rising rivers. There wasn't, he didn't have a flood warning system. There were no storm clouds on the horizon.

[8 : 47] These events were as yet unseen. And yet for Noah, God's revelatory word was enough. And we read about the content of that revelation in Genesis 6 from verse 11.

The earth was corrupt in God's sight, filled with violence. God saw the earth. Behold, it was corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh. For the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch. God looks on his creation and he sees a landscape dominated by violence and corruption.

The world of Noah's day had become rotten to the core. Sin had worked its way into the lifeblood of humanity with devastating results.

[9 : 56] Catastrophic moral and spiritual decline has ensued. And the divine response to this is stated bluntly and categorically.

Genesis 6-7. The Lord said, I will wipe mankind whom I have created from the face of the earth. And then in verse 13 of Genesis 6, God said to Noah, I am going to put an end to all people.

God will erase humanity. Universal wickedness results in universal judgment. After all, the wages of sin is death.

And so this message, this revelation is one of bad news. It's a message of impending judgment. And that, of course, makes many people today somewhat embarrassed.

It's often as if judgment is a sort of some dark skeleton in God's cupboard that's best forgotten and not spoken about. But, of course, friends, the only God the Bible knows and speaks of is a God of justice and holiness and judgment.

[11 : 09] And, in fact, I would suggest to you that it's only that kind of God who makes any sense in a world like ours. Those who promote the idea that God is some sort of kindly old geriatric who wouldn't hurt a fly do nothing but disservice to Christ and to the gospel.

Because those sentimental kind of cuddly notions of God are utterly discredited in the face of the evil and the suffering and the injustice of this world.

How can you believe in a God of love in the midst of all the suffering and injustice? That's what people say, isn't it? But the Bible doesn't ask us to believe in that kind of God.

He's a fantasy thing. We don't admire people who smile benignly in the face of all kinds of misery and evil and injustice.

We consider such people to be, in some way, morally handicapped. Because we know there are times when we should be angry.

[12 : 21] There are things that happen and go on in our world that it's right and good that we're angry about. We call it righteous anger. There's much on our TV screens that's beamed into or on our phones and we read about these news reports and we see things that are terrible, horrendous.

And we feel angry. We get a sense of injustice about these things. And if we, who are imperfect, fallen creatures, have a sense of that, then what must that be like for a God who is morally perfect and holy and utterly righteous?

It's in the sense that the flood is used in the New Testament as a model of what will happen at the end of the world. To Peter, chapter 3, from verse 5.

Christ will return as judge of the earth, Peter writes. Long ago, by God's word, the heavens existed. And the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment.

[13 : 42] And destruction. It's a biblical pattern. The soul that sins shall die. And this is where the world of Noah's time found itself, under God's righteous judgment.

And actually, that's where our world finds itself. Even today, we live in a world that is on the wrong side of God. And one day, God's judgment will fall on all human sin and rebellion.

Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. Hebrews 9.27. And according to Scripture, God's judgment is an inescapable truth and an undeniable reality.

Many years ago, when I was a young minister in my first charge, and I had a lady come to me. Maybe after a few months preaching in the church.

And she asked me, she said to me, David, you know, you talk about salvation and you talk about being saved. She was a lovely lady. And her question was this, well, what on earth do I, a very moral, respectable, church-going lady, she said, what on earth do I need to be saved from?

[15 : 04] A lot of people think like that. This is what we need to be saved from. It's from God's judgment. That's our great need, if we could but see it.

And so, friends, we too have received the revelation from God. But how are we responding to that? We ignore it at our peril.

Noah's faith rested on God's revealed word. Noah, in faith, received revelation from God.

Brings me to the second thing here. Noah, in faith and holy fear, constructed an ark of salvation. In reverent fear, he constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

So Noah received not just this revelation of coming judgment. He also receives a revelation of salvation. He is instructed to build an ark of salvation for himself and his family.

[16 : 13] God tells Noah, Genesis 6, 17, Behold, I will bring a flood of waters on the earth to destroy all flesh, in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.

But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, your sons' wives, with you. So the writer of Hebrews tells us that Noah constructed this ark in reverent fear.

He responds, Noah responds to God's word with both faith and godly fear. Those two are not mutually exclusive. This reverent fear is not a sort of craven terror.

However, we might describe it as a kind of holy awe, a deep respect for the God who speaks. Noah knew that God was not to be trifled with.

And he knew that the one who created the heavens and earth could unmake them with a word. And so there's nothing shallow, nothing glib about Noah's response.

[17 : 20] He's gripped with a sense of awe and wonder. Here is a trembling trust, if I can put it that way, that acknowledges God's holiness and power.

Here is the posture of a man or a woman of God who knows that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In reverent fear, he constructed an ark. It's actually, again, one of the features of the letter to the Hebrews, how it combines these two things, this great confidence and assurance about being accepted by a holy God and being able to draw near to the throne of grace with a sense of awe and reverence in worshipping the God who is a consuming fire.

There's intimacy and awe. There's resting faith and reverent fear. And you'll notice that Noah's faith wasn't a kind of private feeling tucked away, hidden away in his heart.

It actually issued in public work that took decades of sweat and toil. Here he was constructing this enormous boat, hundreds of miles from the sea, no water in sight.

He must have looked an absolute idiot to his contemporaries, an utter fool, wasting his time, his talents, his energies on a ludicrous project. For friends, faith is not merely believing that God exists.

[18 : 50] It means and involves acting on what God says. James reminds us. In James 2.26, faith without works is dead. Noah's faith was alive.

Pounding nails into wood, shaping beams, sealing the ark with pitch. You can picture him. Hammer in hand, building this massive vessel vessel in the middle of dry land, the neighbors around, jeering, the cynics scoffing, the children laughing.

Noah, you old fool. Where is this flood? Where is this rain? And yet all the time, Noah keeps building, his hammer keeps swinging because his faith was anchored in God's word of promise.

And of course, this is exactly what the recipients of this letter were being called to do. They were being called to endure the shame, the mockery of the world around, to keep on in the way of faith.

They were struggling. They were suffering. Finding things hard. And like Noah of old, they needed to stand firm and hold on to the promises of God's word. And that may well be true of us today, if you're a believer.

[20 : 03] It can be hard to march, march to the beat of a different drum. It can be hard to live in a way that seeks to honor God above all else. Living for God in this fallen world sometimes looks ridiculous, looks ludicrous.

And it can feel very lonely. Perhaps in a family where no one else believes. Or in a place of work or study where different values and standards pertain.

In company where Christianity is routinely ridiculed and dismissed. It can be difficult. And yet we're called to stand on the promises of God because they alone are solid ground, as we were thinking this morning.

They are our firm place to stand. Faith lives knowing there is nothing as solid as God's word. Faith builds. Faith perseveres. Faith endures. It doesn't shrink back.

There's an old story, I think, from 19th century Canada. I know we have some Canadians amongst us tonight, so they'll no doubt correct me if I'm wrong. But the story tells of a man who got lost in the woods during the winter and surrounded by snow and ice and extreme temperatures.

[21 : 21] It was a treacherous situation. He had to make his way home. He had to get home or he would die. And as he stumbled through the snow, he came to the banks of what he recognized to be the St. Lawrence River.

He knew that his home lay on the other side, but also that there was no bridge or crossing for many miles. What was he to do? Well, the river was frozen.

And he realized that his only hope was to try and make his way across the ice. Seemed dangerous route to take, but he had no option. Would the ice be thick enough to carry his weight or would it crack and he'd be drowned in the freezing waters?

And so he resolved to make his way slowly, tentatively across the river. He decided to spread out his weight as best he could and crawl in a sort of spread eagle fashion, inching his way across, fearful and afraid, all the time listening out for that terrible sound of cracking ice that would have spelt his certain death.

And he moved so slowly and deliberately, hardly daring to breathe, lest he sink through the ice and into the dark waters of the river.

[22 : 40] When he was about halfway across, lying, spread-eagled on the ice, he heard a strange sound. He thought, I can hear the sound of bells ringing.

And they got closer and closer. And as he looked around, as he heard these bells getting louder and louder, he saw what was to his eyes a most surprising sight.

Two horses pulling a man on a sled, careering across the ice. And the horses and sled shot past him towards the far bank of the river, disappeared into the distance.

And it transpired that the ice on the river was thick enough, strong enough to bear the weight of horses and a sled. What a fool the man felt.

He said to himself, if only I'd known how thick the ice was, I needn't have been so afraid. I could have walked, I could have run, I could have jumped across the river and been quite safe and secure.

[23 : 46] And friends, there are many Christians who live their lives rather like that man, inching his way across the ice towards his destination.

They're fearful, they're anxious, they're uncertain because they don't appreciate their true position. They think the foundation on which they live is something frail and fragile and thin and ready to break.

And in truth, it's quite the reverse. It's something immeasurably strong and powerful and robust. And friends, the gospel of God and the word of God and the promises of God can bear all your weight.

It can bear the weight of your joys and your sorrows, the weight of your fears and anxieties, the weight of your sins and your failures. Indeed, the weight of your whole existence.

So where are you building your life? Are you building on the solid rock of the gospel? Are you constructing an ark of obedience in a world that mocks and disdains?

[24 : 55] Noah in faith received revelation from God. Noah in faith and holy fear constructed an ark of salvation. Thirdly, Noah in faith bore testimony to the world.

You'll notice that in these words, by this, says the writer to the Hebrews, he condemned the world. Now, what is the writer driving at when he includes this statement?

How did Noah condemn the world? Was he a kind of horrible, judgmental man who went around condemning everyone and pointing out their sins? No, I don't think that's what's being said here.

And that's certainly not what we as Christians are called to do. The point, I think, that is being made here is that Noah left the world without excuse.

He bore testimony to God's judgment and salvation in both word and deed. In one sense, Noah's obedience was a kind of silent sermon, a living rebuke to that generation that had rejected God.

[26 : 03] Every plank he laid, every nail he hammered, declared to the world around him that God's word is true, judgment is coming. The very construction of the ark proclaimed that there was a way of escape.

Peter, for example, in his first epistle speaks of how God's patience waited in the days of Noah when the ark was being prepared. 1 Peter 3.20.

There was life preached, so too with us. When we live by faith, when we trust God's word over the world's wisdom, we bear witness to the truth.

We live for him, not for ourselves. When we love him and seek to love our neighbor as ourselves, when we turn the other cheek, when we go the extra mile, it's then that our lives commend the good news, the gospel to others.

But if there's the testimony of Noah's life and obedience to God's word, so there is also the testimony of his words. It stands to reason, I think, that Noah's conduct and behavior at least must have attracted some questions.

[27 : 09] What are you doing, Noah? Why are you building this ark? What on earth are you playing at? Peter, in his second epistle, 2 Peter 2.5, describes Noah as a herald, some translations, a preacher of righteousness.

He made known to others how they could be rightly related to God by faith. He was a preacher of good news, warning others of the judgment to come, bearing witness to the salvation that God had provided.

His words and deeds urged others to prepare for a new world. And in many ways, that is our calling as Christians too. Our lives should prompt questions from others.

Why are you living like that? Why do you do that? I wonder if our lives are preaching.

We're to be heralds of righteousness in a world that hasn't seen or heard God's weather forecast. We're to live on the basis of God's revelation in Scripture.

[28 : 15] We're to live pointing to others to Jesus, the Savior. I wonder, are you doing that? Or will people be left with an excuse?

I didn't know. I've never heard that. No one told me. Friends, God has called you to speak of Jesus Christ even amid a world that demands our silence.

Because the door of the ark is open still. And final judgment has not yet arrived. And Christ is still welcoming sinners. Part of our calling as individuals, indeed as a congregation, our lives bear testimony to God's grace, pointing people to Jesus.

The missiologist Leslie Newbig wrote, how is it possible that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross?

The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.

[29 : 30] Noah, in faith, received revelation from God. Noah, in faith, and holy fear constructed an ark of salvation. Noah, in faith, bore testimony to the world around.

And finally here, Noah, in faith, became an heir of righteousness and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Genesis, chapter 6, verse 9, tells us this. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

And it would be easy to conclude that as God looked upon the world, saw that everyone was corrupt and evil, they were all a bunch of wasters, except this guy Noah.

Noah was a good guy. He was the best of a bad bunch and so God chose him and favoured him. And indeed, that's how many people read that text. But it is to seriously misread it and seriously misunderstand it.

[30 : 31] because in this reading of the text, Noah's deliverance becomes a kind of reward for a righteous and good life. And by this way of thinking, salvation is by good works, something that we contribute towards.

But the key verse here is verse 8 of chapter 6. Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. And to find favour or grace is a formal expression.

It's used many times in the Old Testament, I think around 40 times. And it refers either to the request of an inferior to a superior or when someone in authority helps someone without status or position.

It relates then to someone being shown favour, grace. Lord showed grace and favour to Noah. And the clear pattern here is that righteousness and good works follow grace.

They don't precede it. The Old Testament and New Testament are not different on this point. They both sing from the same hymn sheet. It's simply not the case.

[31 : 43] Some people, you know, want to think in the Old Testament people were saved by their good works. In the New Testament people are saved by faith. Many people think like that. Somehow our good works, righteous lives will commend us to God.

You'll notice in these verses there's a little phrase actually in the Genesis account that comes between Noah finding grace and favour, Genesis 6-8, and the statement that he was a righteous man who walked with God, Genesis 6-9.

And that phrase is this is the account of Noah. That is again another formula used right throughout the book of Genesis. I think it's 11 or 12 times.

It's a major internal division of the book. Maybe a bit like a chapter heading. I think in the AV it's translated this is the generation of.

That word conveys the sense of being generated, reflects the reality that this has come out of that, refers to an ensuing event or events. And so when we read this phrase between the statement that Noah found grace and the statement that he was a righteous man who walked with God, what is being highlighted for us, is that Noah's righteousness was not the reason for him finding grace but a result of him finding grace.

[33 : 02] He was chosen by grace alone. What happened to him was because of God's grace and unmerited favor towards him. That is the biblical pattern. What the Lord does precedes what the Lord demands.

God does something for us before he asks something of us. Really important to understand that. I often, you know, hear people or meet people who think and they say this, I'm not good enough to be a Christian.

I'm not moral enough. I'm not righteous enough. I'm not religious enough. And, you know, in one sense, they're right. But the mistake is to think that we can ever be good enough.

We can ever be righteous enough. We can ever be moral enough. There's only one way into the Christian life and that is by grace and through faith.

Through what God does for us, not what we do or think we do for him. That righteous and blameless life of Noah's flowed out of God's grace towards him.

[34 : 07] That life of fellowship with God, walking with God, was the result of God breaking into Noah's life. That really is at the heart of the gospel message.

Noah was not righteous because he built an ark. He built an ark because he was counted righteous by faith. Like Abraham and indeed like all the saints in this chapter, Noah's righteousness was not his own.

It was a gift of God received through faith. And friends, that is the righteousness that Jesus Christ secured for us at the cross of Calvary where he took our sin and gave us his perfect obedience.

Noah looked forward to the Savior. We look back. But the principle is the same. We are justified and made right with God, not by our works, but by trusting in his promise.

many of you will know of the film Schindler's List, the Spielberg film, Oscar-winning film, harrowing story of how some Jews were saved from the Holocaust by the actions of one Oscar Schindler.

[35 : 27] But of course, Schindler's List wasn't the original, wasn't the title of Thomas Keneally's book. They changed it for the film. Originally, Keneally's book was called Schindler's Ark because the Ark is a biblical symbol of salvation, deliverance, rescue.

And just as Noah's Ark was the place of safety and refuge from the flood of God's judgment, just as Oscar Schindler in a sense was an ark for those he saved from the gas chambers.

So Jesus Christ is God's Ark for a fallen, sinful humanity. He's the Ark of our salvation. He's big enough for the world, strong enough to withstand the winds of adversity and the rising waters of death and judgment.

There is safety in the Son of God. He's the shelter. He's the Savior. We all need. He is our Ark and safe passage into the new world that God has planned.

For from that Ark his people will emerge to inherit a new heavens and earth because the end of God's plan and purpose is not destruction but renewal.

[36 : 52] Our only hope is in the grace of God and in the Ark of deliverance that he has provided for us. Our only hope is in Jesus who alone saves us from the coming wrath.

For on the cross Jesus experienced the flood of God's wrath and anger against sin. The fury of God's wrath was unleashed upon him. He was submerged in all our sin and guilt, engulfed in the cascading waters of God's wrath.

God's wrath and the cross is where we see that his death was for us, for sinners like us. It's where we see that his love is towards us, his mercy is towards us.

It's at the cross that we're delivered and saved and rescued from all that we rightly deserve which is God's judgment. that's what this table spread with bread and wine proclaims to us.

It proclaims Jesus Christ as our place of safety and our ark of deliverance. It's only in him that any of us can become an heir of the righteousness that is by faith.

[38 : 10] Let's pray together. Amen. Lord, we thank you for your provision of a great saviour in Jesus Christ.

We recognise that we by nature stand under your just judgement and yet by grace by your mercy you call us to yourself to trust in Jesus Christ and to know forgiveness and to know righteousness and to know a new life and indeed an eternal life.

Lord, help us tonight whoever we are whatever our situation and circumstance to rest our faith not in ourselves or our good works or whatever it might be but in Jesus Christ and him crucified.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.