

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE HUMAN RACE

"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" (Hebrews 11:7).

It is a fact that we learn far more easily and rapidly from example than we do in any other way. In two previous messages I have dealt with the facts of faith as illustrated by Abel and Enoch. From these messages we learned that Abel stands for the truth salvation, and that Enoch stands for the truth of fellowship. In this message, we shall discover that Noah stands for the truth of testimony.

These three truths, of salvation by blood, fellowship with God and testimony for God, constitute the test and standard of spiritual life. The life of a true Christian originates in salvation, develops in fellowship, and issues in testimony. If these three things are not present, there is no true Christian experience.

For an hundred and twenty years both by words and works Noah bore witness for God, warning men of certain judgment, and pointing them to the only way of escape. He was as salt in the surrounding corruption, and as light in the prevailing darkness. The feat of Noah has a scriptural history of great importance and tremendous interest.

I. The Story. Genesis 6:5 ff.

Little is told us of the parentage of Noah, yet sufficient is revealed to indicate that he was the descendant of believing ancestors and the child of a God-fearing father. He began life at a time when it was growing harder and harder to live right. The world was very corrupt. Wickedness was in vogue; such wickedness as constantly burst into violence. God saw that the wickedness of man was very great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Violence is always the accompaniment of, or sequel to, moral corruption and spiritual decline. The crimes of violence which at present amaze and shock us, and give us a criminal record beyond that of any nation on the face of the earth, undoubtedly have a definite connection with the lack of faith and the forgetting of God by so many thousands of people.

Noah lived when it was growing more and more difficult to be a good man and to live a godly life. Yet, Noah was unblemished, uncontaminated and even unattracted by the wickedness and corruption of his day. There was not any spot or stain on his character. It is never easy to live such a life in this world. It is far more difficult to live a godly life where wickedness is rampant. It certainly does not require a prophet to see that wickedness is becoming far more prevalent and rampant in our day. Corruption and violence certainly prevail today. These are the two great forms of human wickedness -- the inward and the outward; and they are related to each other as cause and effect.

God watches unceasingly and cares deeply how man behaves. Observing the people in Noah's day, God saw that their wickedness was great. That is the only thing about man that God has ever said was great. Man's sin is truly great, and it grieves God. Not only does man grieve God by what he thinks, says and does, but

his sin deprives him of happiness, impoverishes his life and destroys his usefulness.

Because of the prevailing wickedness, God said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." To create means to bring into being, and to destroy means to put out of being. And we read, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." This is the first thing we are told about him. Grace is the fountain of every life that is well pleasing to God. Grace is the source from which issues every blessing.

II. The Significance.

The significance of Noah's experience is revealed in our text. It was an experience of faith. Through faith Noah was justified, and thereafter he was recognized as a just man. By faith Noah walked with God. By faith Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet. Having revealed to Noah His purpose to destroy all of the wicked people on the earth, God commanded him to build an ark in preparation for an oncoming flood. Noah believed the warning of God concerning this forthcoming, devastating flood. Accepting God's warning by faith, Noah promptly set himself to the task of preparing an ark for the safety of himself and his family. When Noah communicated to others the information about the warning which he had received, they did not believe him. Nevertheless, Noah promptly and faithfully followed the instructions which God had given to him. He did so without making any suggestions to God as to how to improve the ark or how people might be saved in some other manner. He simply did as God commanded him. The Bible says: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he."

It was his faith in God that moved Noah to immediate action, and kept him steadily at his task until the ark was finished. In his prompt and persistent obedience Noah gave us one of the greatest examples of faith in all the Bible. While evil men waxed worse and worse and were having their day, Noah kept in step with God. It is both encouraging and inspiring to observe Noah's stable and meticulous obedience to every command of God in the construction of the ark, in spite of all the sarcasm and ridicule which were heaped upon him.

We can only imagine how the people scoffed at him as Noah toiled on his gigantic barge. They scanned the heavens, which were cloudless, and then asked Noah where he could see the slightest sign of rain. Where was there any sign of a flood? With ridicule, reproach, scorn, argument and pity, friends joined with foes to turn Noah from his purpose. The thoughtless said he had gone crazy. The practical said they were sure of his good intentions and perfect sincerity, but really he was entirely mistaken, and wasting both time and money which could be put to a much better use. Noah listened politely, but continued building. When he refused to reply or to stoop to the level of his critics, many, no doubt, wondered about his mental condition. To Noah, however, only one thing mattered, and that was to obey God. He proved to the world beyond a peradventure of a doubt that, regardless of what others may think, say or do, one can live right and obey God in a day of great wickedness. To obey is not always an easy thing, but in the long run obedience to God always pays.

While building the ark according to God's plan and for His purpose, Noah fearlessly and faithfully preached the righteousness and the judgment of God. As a preacher of righteousness he spoke of sin, but the people were not convinced. As a prophet he spoke of judgment, but they did not believe. As a faithful witness he spoke of a remedy, but the people would not heed. For one hundred and twenty years Noah preached, but he was what people would call an unsuccessful preacher. The only people who responded were the members of his immediate family. Even though he never had another convert, Noah kept right on preaching. He had God's Word to deliver, and he refused to be discouraged. After all, he was not responsible for what they people did with the message, but it was his duty and obligation to deliver it. We must do what God tells us to do and leave the results with Him.

Eventually the ark was completed. At the appointed time, although we do not know how long thereafter, God said unto Noah: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." This was both a divine invitation and command. God's interventions in behalf of His people are always timely; never too early, and never too late. This call from God was personal and specific. Noah was commanded to enter the ark, not just come near it or walk around it.

III. The Sequel.

Noah was not compelled to enter the ark, but he went in of his own free will in obedient faith, fully convinced of the goodness of God's purpose for him. Only faith could cause one to obey the command to leave a world, which was going on as usual, and face confinement in the ark. Noah and his family were not invited to a scene of luxury and comfort. They had to leave behind their homes and property and face a situation in which only the necessities would be provided. The ark and its occupants would require all of Noah's attention so long as he was in it.

Noah and the members of his immediate family entered the ark "because of the waters of the flood." They did so not because the waters had already appeared, but because they were coming. Likewise, the believer flees to Christ for refuge because he believes the Word of God, which warns him of the judgment to come.

After Noah entered the ark, "The Lord shut him in." Noah's work was not enough. It was necessary for God to shut the door, if Noah was to be saved from drowning in the flood. Noah entered the ark and allowed God to fasten the door from the outside. During his long life Noah must have heard many doors shut, but there was never a slam before nor since that meant so much as that one did. It made all the difference between the saints inside and the sinners outside, between safety and destruction, and between life and death. Noah was not dependent upon himself for safety, but upon the Lord. He was safe because he had entered the ark and "the Lord shut him in." It was a divine and not a human fastening that guaranteed his perfect safety. There was nothing but death and destruction outside, but Noah was saved and safe on the inside because God shut the door.

No man was ever more helpless and dependent. The ark did not have any engine, or sail, or rudder, or power to make it go, to stop it, or guide it. Yet without fear, but with perfect confidence, Noah committed his life and the lives of his entire family to the keeping of God. His faith kept him anchored to God.

When God shut Noah in the ark, He shut the others out. It was just as impossible for them to get in as it was for Noah to get out. That is the sad part. After Noah was shut in, nobody else got into the ark.

No Christian should entertain the idea that he is not eternally safe in Christ. Once born from above, he cannot contrive to be unborn, nor can he change his Father any more than he could in the natural sphere. Shut in by the Father to security and assurance, he cannot pass out again through a door which has been barred by God Himself, and indeed no more than Noah did does he wish to leave his refuge for the raging seas of sin and destruction outside.

It rained for forty days and nights. The waters increased and prevailed exceedingly. This great judgment did not cease until it had accomplished the whole purpose of God in sending it.

In God's own good time the flood waters subsided and the ark rested upon the mountain. God, Who had so clearly told him to come forth with his family, and to bring with him every living thing which he had taken into the ark with him. As Noah promptly and accurately obeyed God before the flood, so he did after the flood also. He went forth at once at the command of God. In order for obedience to be real it must be prompt and full.

Upon landing on the earth, Noah's first act was to build an altar and to offer sacrifices. Thereby he testified to his gratitude to God for delivering him, to his need of sacrifice in approaching God, and to the dedication of his life to the service of God as symbolized by the burnt offering. When he offered his burnt offerings on the altar, God accepted the sacrifice. Following the acceptance of the sacrifice was the divine assurance with reference to the future of the earth. There was the assurance that there never would be another curse in the form of a flood. There was to be an absolute guarantee of the permanence of the seasons, year by year, as long as the earth remained.

By faith Noah became the heir of righteousness. His was not a man-made righteousness, but a God-imputed righteousness. He took God at His Word and his faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness. The feat of Noah brings a needed message to this matter-of-fact world. It tells us that by faith Noah found God and walked with God, that he believed what God said and that he did what God commanded.

Noah took God's warning of things not seen. He believed God's promise of things hoped for. He lived and worked in the light of God's Word and not in the light of the world's word. He lived, worked and wrought in the light of the unseen and not in the light of the seen.

Noah believed God in worldly circumstances, and yet apart from worldly circumstances. He accepted what God said when he could not see it. He believed what God promised before it came to pass.

Noah walked with God, was warned by God and worked with God because he believed in God.

If this is faith --- in functioning and feat --- how much faith have you?

Noah's faith warmed his heart and moved his hands. How much faith have you?

God help us to have the faith that overcomes the world.