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FAITH THAT ESCAPES
THE COMING JUDGMENT

Hebrews 11:7

By

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Hebrews Lesson 35

Faith That Escapes the Coming Judgment
Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:5-14, 22

Earlier this week, hundreds of thousands of people that live along the Gulf Coast abandoned their homes and fled for their lives from Hurricane Ivan as it headed toward the U.S. mainland. I heard on the news Wednesday morning that the State of Alabama had turned all four lanes of Interstate 65 into one-way northbound, to accommodate the thousands that were escaping.

It would be wonderful if people responded to God's warnings about future judgment with that same fervor! The Bible isn't fuzzy about the threat. The apostle Paul told the Athenians, God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The entire last book of the Bible is largely devoted to the theme of future judgment. Millions have read with fascination the "Left Behind" series that portrays the coming judgment. But how many are fleeing from the wrath to come?

Anybody that knows even a little bit about the Bible knows about Noah and the flood. It's part of our popular culture. This summer, Marla and I went into a store in Estes Park, Colorado, called The Estes Ark, that is built to look like Noah's Ark. It contains just about every kind of stuffed animal that you could imagine. Probably thousands of people have visited that store and thought, "How cute!" But how many that know about Noah and the flood take its warning to heart? Our text brings up Noah's faith as an example, teaching us that...

To be saved, we must by faith obediently respond
to God's warnings of future judgment.

Our text reveals the basis, the effects, and the consequences of Noah's faith. The author wants us to be imitators of this man, who through faith and patience inherited the promises (6:13). Of all the examples in Hebrews 11, this is the only one in which the unseen future involves judgment, rather than rewards. It shows us

that faith regards both God's warnings and His promises. God only brings judgment after multiple warnings, but many will be surprised when judgment comes, because they ignored the warnings. But, people of faith heed the warnings.

1. The basis of Noah's faith: He believed God's word regarding the coming judgment.

You can see a hurricane warning on TV. The radar picture shows a huge mass of swirling clouds heading toward where you live. They report the wind speed. It's all quite visible. But,

A. God's word of warning concerns things not yet seen.

God warned Noah "about things not yet seen," and His warning would have seemed incredible. Before Noah's day, there had never been a flood and probably it had never even rained. A vapor canopy may have covered the earth, and a mist used to rise from the earth and water the ground (Gen. 2:5-6). And so the warning about a flood that would kill all life on earth was unprecedented and unseen.

This ties in with 11:1, that faith is "the proof of things not seen." Faith hears the word of the unseen God regarding events that are not yet seen and brings them into present experience. Alexander Maclaren put it, "The far-off flood was more real to him than the shows of life around him. Therefore he could stand all the gibes, and gave himself to a course of life which was sheer folly unless that future was real" (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], on Gen. 6:9-22, p. 54).

Could you say that the course of your life is *sheer folly* unless God's promise of heaven and His warnings about hell are real? Faith in God believes that He is able to guard the deposit that we have entrusted to Him until that day (2 Tim. 1:12). Faith lays up treasures in heaven, where they are eternally secure (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:19). If the resurrection of our bodies and eternity with God in heaven are myths, then we should be of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). The world should be able to look at our lives—how we spend our time and money—and say, as they no doubt said about Noah, "This guy is nuts! He lives as if there *really is* a coming judgment!"

- B. God's word of warning concerned judgment that was delayed, but absolutely certain.

Enoch named his son Methuselah, which means, "when he is dead, it will come." What will come? If you do the math in the genealogies of Genesis, you discover that Methuselah died in the year of the flood! When Methuselah was dead, God's judgment came! Do you know why Methuselah lived the longest of any recorded human life? It is to show God's great patience before He brought judgment on this wicked earth.

In Genesis 6:3, God said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." This probably means that there would be 120 years until the judgment of the flood. The earth was so wicked that, without apology, God could have judged it on the spot (Gen. 6:5). But in His grace and patience, He delayed judgment for over a century, while Noah built the ark (see 1 Pet. 3:20).

Peter tells us that in the end times, mockers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." But, as Peter goes on to explain, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:4, 9).

So the delay of God's judgment is because of His great patience and grace. But don't mistake the delay for uncertainty! Noah could have thought, "One hundred and twenty years is a long ways off," and procrastinated on building the ark. But he didn't do that. As soon as he heard God's warning about the coming judgment, he went to work building the ark. It took him over a century to complete, but he kept at it. It seemed crazy to the world, but it all suddenly made sense when the sky began to pour rain and the fountains of the deep opened up. But then it was too late!

Jesus said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-39). The people of Noah's day went on

with the normal activities of life, oblivious to the repeated warnings of judgment, until it was too late. The Book of Revelation shows that this evil world will be going on full steam ahead, doing business, pursuing pleasure, and scoffing at the idea of a coming judgment. But in one hour, judgment will fall. It will be thorough and completely devastating (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17).

The basis of Noah's faith was God's word of warning about things not yet seen. These things were delayed, but certain.

- C. God's word of warning required faith in the face of the world's condemnation.

The bottom line for Noah was either to believe the evil people around him, who seemed to be having a great time sinning, or to believe what God said about the coming judgment. As far as Scripture records, he had no others to stand with him, except for his immediate family. Although Scripture does not record it, there can be no doubt that the world would have ridiculed a man who spent a fortune over a century building a huge ship on dry ground, miles from any ocean! It must have been the best entertainment for miles around, to go over and watch old Noah work on his ship! There are some pretty crazy men in this world, but Noah had to be near the top of the list!

But in spite of having no friends to support him in his labors, and in spite of over a century of being thought of as the world's greatest nut case, *Noah believed the word of God*. That is the kind of faith that escapes the judgment that is yet coming on this evil world. You must stand alone, if need be, against the mockery of the world, and believe that God's Word is true! The basis for Noah's faith and for ours is the word of God. Count it as true!

- 2. The effects of Noah's faith: Out of reverential fear, he steadfastly obeyed God's directive about salvation.

Verse 7 continues, "in reverence [Noah] prepared an ark." Noah's faith changed his affections; and, it changed his actions.

- A. Noah's faith changed his affections (emotions).

Noah's faith in God's warning moved him to reverential fear of God. Noah did not just fear the impending judgment; he also feared the God who threatened such judgment, knowing that He is

fully capable of bringing it about. The God who spoke the universe into existence out of nothing (11:3) is quite capable of commanding a flood to destroy all human life on earth. He is able to bring the terrible judgments described in the Book of Revelation. Faith in this omnipotent God should move our hearts to reverential fear.

Jonathan Edwards, in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, develops the thesis, "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections" (in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], 1:236). He means that genuine religion is not just a matter of the head, but also of the heart. If we have genuine faith in God, we will not only be moved by love in response to His great love; we also will be moved by reverential fear in response to His holiness and His warnings of the judgment to come.

Sometimes we who are not Pentecostals are uncomfortable with any show of emotion in spiritual things. We've encountered people who gush with emotion, but their understanding of biblical truth is shallow, at best. But, it is a mistake to swing to the other extreme of denying the validity of emotions in response to the truth. God's truth should not only fill our heads; it should grip our hearts. Alexander Maclaren said, "Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it" (*ibid.*, on Heb. 11:7, p. 117). But, Noah didn't stop with his affections.

B. Noah's faith changed his actions (behavior).

"In reverence [he] prepared an ark for the salvation of his household." There is a whole lot of obedience packed into that short phrase, "he prepared an ark"! Sometimes you hear about a guy who builds a fishing boat in his back yard, but Noah built an ocean liner! It was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high! Can you imagine what Mrs. Noah must have thought when her husband told her what he planned to do? This wasn't a weekend hobby; it was all-consuming for 120 years!

Think of the excuses that Noah (not to mention Mrs. Noah) could have used to argue with God: "It will cost too much!" "It's not feasible!" "It will take too long!" "How will I support my family while I'm building this thing?" "A boat that size will never

float." But Noah set aside all excuses and persevered in obedience until it was done. Twice Genesis reports that Noah *did according to all that the Lord had commanded him* (Gen. 6:22; 7:5).

Some may think of faith as an ethereal, impractical sort of thing. But Noah's faith took up axe, hammer, and saw and built a ship in his back yard! His faith cost him a lot of time, money, and ridicule for over a century. Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Perhaps he stopped his work at times to preach to the mockers who gathered to watch this incredible sight. But he didn't allow the jeers to stop him. His *faith* caused him *to do* all that God had commanded him.

There are those who argue that you can believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, but that it is not necessary for salvation to receive Him as your Lord. They are sincerely trying to hold to the biblical teaching that salvation is through faith alone, apart from any works.

But they are badly mistaken about the nature of saving faith. We are saved by faith alone, but genuine saving faith by its very nature always results in a radical change of heart and habits. Faith that does not result in good works is dead (James 2:14-26). Many Christians have memorized Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." But we should also learn Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them."

Noah could have said, "I believe that God is going to judge the whole world with a terrible flood." But if he had not built the ark and climbed on board, he would have perished in the flood. To save himself and his household from the flood, Noah had to translate his faith into what Eugene Peterson called, "a long obedience in the same direction" (the phrase comes from Nietzsche; see, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* [IVP], p. 13). In the same way, a faith that saves us from the wrath to come, out of reverential fear, persists in obedience to Jesus Christ.

The basis of Noah's faith was that he believed God's word about the coming judgment. The effects of his faith were a change in his affections and in his actions.

3. The consequences of Noah's faith: He saved his family, he condemned the world, and he became an heir of the righteousness according to faith.

A. By faith, Noah saved his family.

The story in Genesis does not mention the *spiritual* salvation of Noah's family, but only about the fact that they were saved from drowning in the flood. But at the very least, his wife and sons and their wives, must have believed enough in what Noah told them to join him in the ark. His sons were all born after he began to build the ark (compare Gen. 5:32; 6:3; 7:6). But as they grew up, it would have been easy for them to become embarrassed about their weird father and be swayed by the taunts of the world. They could have moved to a different locale, distanced themselves from their father, and they would have perished in the flood. They believed enough to stay with him and get on board when God gave the command. Noah's faith in God had a powerful effect on his family.

Scripture gives no absolute guarantees that all of our children will be saved. Proverbs 22:6 says that if we train them in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it. But like all of the proverbs, that is *not* a guaranteed promise. It's a general rule. But while we have no guarantees, the Bible is clear that a godly father has a powerful influence on his children (see also, Deut. 7:9; Psalms 112, 127 & 128). The Bible declares that Noah was a righteous man of integrity ("blameless"), who walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Dads, if you will be such a man, it will be a powerful influence toward saving your children from this evil generation.

B. By faith, Noah's life and words condemned the world.

Noah condemned the world in the sense that his righteous life of faith exposed their unrighteous lives of unbelief, thus aggravating their guilt (see Matt. 12:41-42). Noah didn't have a judgmental, holier-than-thou spirit. He knew that he was a sinner saved by God's grace. But his life of obedient faith was like a bright light taken into a dark cave. It exposed all of the bats hanging in there! If it hadn't been for Noah, perhaps someone from that godless generation could have argued, "But I never knew how to live in a godly manner. I never heard about God's impending judgment." But Noah robbed them of all their excuses.

As Christians, we should never display a judgmental spirit towards this sinful world. Except for God's grace, we would still be in our sins. But, as light in the Lord, it is inevitable that we will expose the evil deeds around us. In Ephesians 5:3-12, Paul instructs us that no immorality, impurity, or greed should even be mentioned among us, as is fitting among saints, and no filthiness or coarse jesting. He explains, "Because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." He goes on to tell us to walk as children of Light, not participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead to expose them.

At the very least, his words mean that believers should be *distinct* from this evil world. We should not watch the same movies and TV shows that the world watches. We should not fill our minds with scenes of sensuality and violence. Someone may object, "If I don't stay up on where the world is at, how can I interact intelligently with worldly people?" My answer: you can learn all you need by reading the reviews. When worldly people ask, "Did you see the latest [R-rated] movie?" you should reply, "I don't go to R-rated movies." Watch their jaws drop open, and be ready to tell them about God's holiness and the coming judgment. If you're thinking, "How *out of it* can you get?" the answer is, "*Out of it* enough that you'd build an ark in the desert to avoid God's judgment if you had to!"

- C. By faith, Noah became an heir of the righteousness according to faith.

The word *righteous* is used in two ways in the Bible. It is used of the *righteousness of faith*, or *imputed* righteousness (Rom. 3:21-4:25). When a person trusts in Christ as his sin-bearer, God credits the righteousness of Jesus Christ to his account. This is a judicial action, where God not only declares us "not guilty," but also "positively righteous," because we receive an alien righteousness, that of Jesus Christ. We saw this with regard to Abel (Heb. 11:4). That is how the word is used of Noah in our text.

The word *righteous* is also used of the *right conduct* that stems from being declared righteous by faith. When Genesis 6:9 says that Noah was righteous and blameless, it is referring to his godly life that flowed out of his being justified by faith. He did not find favor

with God (Gen. 6:8) *because of* his righteous life (Gen. 6:9). Rather, because he found favor (grace) with God, he lived a righteous life.

Noah was an *heir* of the righteousness according to faith in the sense that he possessed the title to it, but he didn't receive the reward of the inheritance until he died. As believers in Christ, we are heirs with Him (Rom. 8:17), but we don't actually get the inheritance until we are with Him in heaven.

Conclusion

Just as the ark was the *only* means of salvation from God's judgment for Noah and his family, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the *only way* that God has provided for salvation from His coming judgment on the whole world. Everyone on board the ark was saved. Everyone not on the ark was lost. Everyone who has trusted in Christ's shed blood will be saved. Everyone who has trusted in anything else will be lost. In Noah's day, it wasn't a matter of being an excellent swimmer! As Bill Cosby used to tell the story, God asks Noah, "*How long* can you tread water?" You can't be good enough to merit salvation. The crucial question is, "By faith have you obediently responded to God's warning by 'getting on board' Jesus Christ?"

God has issued a clear warning: A "Category 5" storm of judgment is heading toward everyone who dwells on earth! The door of His ark is still open. Flee to Christ and you will be saved. Scoff at the warning and you will be lost forever. Imitate Noah's faith and obedience. Join him as an heir of the righteousness according to faith.

Discussion Questions

1. Faith believes and obeys God's word. But, how can we know God's word on decisional matters?
2. Where is the balance between accepting God's love and yet fearing Him?
3. Advocates of non-lordship salvation argue that lordship salvation confuses faith and works. How would you refute this?
4. How separate from the world should we be? What constitutes "worldliness"? Where do we cross the line?

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