

Christ: The Ark of Salvation

1 Peter 3:18-22; Hebrews 11:6-7

Most of us are familiar with the story of Noah and the Ark. But far from being a fable, myth, or fairy tale, Noah was a real person who built a real boat that survived a real global Flood. In the Scripture that Pastor Mike just read, the apostle Peter points to God's preservation of Noah and his family in the ark as a picture of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Those who were baptized today have testified to this truth. But we want you to know it's true not because *they* said so but because *God* says so. The Scriptures teach that *God saves from his wrath those who trust in Christ.*

***God saves from his wrath
those who trust in Christ.***

The historical account of the flood illustrates this truth. God tells Noah that he's going to wipe out the world because of humanity's pervasive wickedness. The first sin is recorded in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobey God. In the next chapter their son Cain murders his brother Abel. "By the time we arrive at Genesis 6, human wickedness has reached fever pitch, and God's heart has reached breaking point":¹

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."

- Genesis 6:5-7

Talk about a tragic state of affairs! But then the text takes a delightfully unexpected turn:

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

- Genesis 6:8-10

The word "favor" is the Hebrew word *hen*, which means "grace." So, there are two ways this text can be understood. Either Noah was righteous in his own strength and therefore attracted God's attention and earned God's favor, *or* Noah was given grace on God's initiative, and as a result of receiving such grace, Noah was righteous and blameless.²

The overwhelming testimony of Scripture supports the latter interpretation. The writer of Hebrews, reflecting on Noah's experience, states:

¹ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), p. 184.

² *Ibid.*

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.

- Hebrews 11:7

The words “by faith” punctuate the beginning and end of Scripture’s testimony concerning Noah. “Noah is righteous not because of what he does but because of whom he trusts.”³ God. Now, many people today say they trust in God. In fact, “In God We Trust” is the official motto of the U.S. and appears on all our currency. Yet most Americans – like the majority of people in other nations – do not trust in God, not as he has revealed himself through Scripture. For if they did believe in God, their lives would be radically changed.

The Bible sets before us three proofs that Noah’s faith was for real. They are the same distinguishing marks of genuine faith in God today.

1. He responded to God’s word.

Look again at the first half of Hebrews 11:7:

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

- Hebrews 11:7a

The author of Hebrews is simply recounting the historical record as recorded in Genesis.

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; make rooms in it.... This is how you are to build it.... You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.... You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

- Genesis 6:13-14, 19, 21

Scripture says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Even though Noah had never seen a flood, he believed God and obeyed. Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah built the ark out of “reverent fear.” He took God’s warning of judgment seriously and did exactly what God said to save himself and his family.

Years ago before Super Bowl when a sportscaster asked a player what he thought of his team’s chances, he replied, “We believe that if we do what the coach tells us, we’ll win.”⁴ The players would show their confidence in the coach by doing what he said. The same is true of believers in the matter of salvation, which is far more important than the Super Bowl. Jesus isn’t our coach, he’s our King and the only one who can rescue us!

³ Ibid., 185.

⁴ John MacArthur, *Hebrews*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1983), p. 318.

When the apostle Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem during Pentecost, warning them of God's judgment that would come upon them because of their sin, they cried out,

"What shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call." With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, "Be saved from this corrupt generation!" So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

- Acts 2:37b-41

Just like Noah responded to God's word by believing it and obeying it, so did the people who heard Peter preach God's word at Pentecost. They repented of their sin, trusted in the Lord to save them and went public with their faith by being baptized – just like the six believers you have seen and heard today. Have *you* responded to God's word this way?

2. He rebuked the world.

Hebrews 11:7 says that by building the ark, Noah "condemned the world." His obedience stood as a witness against everyone else's disobedience. Noah heeded God's warning whereas the rest of the world disregarded it. And they all perished as a result.

In 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is called "a preacher of righteousness." Noah rebuked the world not only by what he did but also by what he said. John MacArthur wrote, "The preaching was probably more difficult than the building. Hard jobs are always easier to deal with than hard people."⁵ I'm inclined to agree. But you know what? Noah didn't want these people perish in their sins, to suffer God's righteous wrath, even though they deserved it.

And what can we say about God's patience? God had Noah build the ark and preach to the people for 120 years, warning them of God's judgment and calling them to repentance. In the text that Pastor Mike read, the apostle Peter points back to the time "when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, when the ark was being prepared" (1 Peter 3:20). God is far more patient than any of us. But eventually God runs out of patience. Because he is holy, he will not let sin go unpunished. Those who refuse to turn from their sin and trust in Christ to save them will receive the eternal punishment they deserve.

Christ alone is the ark of salvation. By trusting in Christ, the believer "gets into the boat." By being baptized in Jesus' name, the believer publicly commits him/herself to Christ and his people, thereby marking him/herself off from the world.⁶ Scripture says, "anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17 NLT). The other day my son sent me a quote by John Newton, the author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Newton said,

⁵ Ibid., 322.

⁶ Robert Bruce Jamieson and 9Marks, *Understanding Baptism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), p. 6.

“I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world. But still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

- John Newton

That’s the testimony of every believer. By grace a true believer responds to God’s word, rebukes the world, and *receives God’s righteousness*. That’s what Noah did.

3. He received God’s righteousness.

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.*

- Hebrews 11:7

This righteousness is not earned. It is received by faith. That’s what makes it *good news*. That’s why the apostle Paul wrote,

I am not ashamed of the gospel [good news], because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

- Romans 1:16-17

Likewise, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This is known as the Great Exchange. God credits Jesus with our sin and credits us with his righteousness. This is God’s gift for all who believe, and that’s why the ark is such a beautiful picture of our salvation in Christ. Christopher Watkin writes,

Noah is saved not because he flees from God’s anger but because, in the midst of that anger, he trusts God’s word. ... It is God who saves Noah from God. In the midst of the torrent of his own raging justice God places a floating ship of mercy.⁷

Have you come aboard God’s ship of mercy through faith in Christ? The good news we proclaim to you today is embedded in the message of Genesis 6:8: “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” – and so can you.

⁷ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), p. 202.