

Title: The Promise Kept
Text: Hebrews 11.7
Theme: Saved by the ark
Series: Hebrews #38
Aim: To convince my people to believe in Christ – no matter what
Prop Stmnt Christ is the ultimate ark who must be entered by faith alone

This year, our celebration of advent is focusing, not only on the fact that the Word of God came to different people in preparation for the entrance of the true light into the world (symbolized by the lighting of the candles), but we are also focusing upon the content of what was revealed. When the word of the Lord came to the prophets and when the word of the Lord came to Mary and when the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, what did God reveal? God revealed his promise to the prophets that he was going to send to us a Savior. And when God revealed his word to Mary, Joseph and Zechariah and eventually to the shepherds and the Wise Men, God was revealing that he was delivering on what he had (in times past) promised. This theme is very familiar to us because of our study this year in the book of Hebrews and particularly because of these last several weeks in chapter 11.

What distinguishes the people of God from the majority of the people in this world is that we have not only had the promises of God revealed to us (an amazing grace in and of itself) but we have received those promises by faith. That is, we have heard and believed God's promises and we live on the basis of those. We live now, banking on the yet to be fulfilled promises of God recognizing that we are part of the people of God who live with this tension. We live as if we can see the unseen, because we know that since God said it, you can bank your soul on it. In fact, if God said it, you have to bank your soul on it! That is exactly what Noah did. Noah banked everything on a promise of God that was not fulfilled for many years but in the gap between promise and fulfillment, Noah lived as if he was seeing what was yet unseen.

Read Text: Genesis 6.5 – 22; Hebrews 11.7

The contrast between Noah and his world is clearly put forth in the Genesis account. This is obviously something that the Spirit of God wants us to understand. The world was corrupt, but Noah was righteous. The world was violent but Noah was blameless in his generation. And that contrast continues in Genesis 7.18-24, where the text (4x) says that the "waters prevailed". And in contrast to that, "Only Noah was left and those who were with him in the ark." Now, let's stop here for a second and consider the Genesis account of the flood.

Several months ago, a group of archaeologists claimed to have found the remains of Noah's ark (info). Let's say that every news outlet ran with this story and that eminent authorities all verified that the evidence was overwhelming and consistent with the biblical record. How do you think that would be received? Would India renounce Hinduism? Would China and Japan renounce Buddhism? Would Europe and the United States renounce atheism, post-modernism, liberalism, and evolution? Of course not. The

flood event is not based on a legend. The flood event is a historical reality that has serious implications & the easiest way to avoid dealing with the serious implications is to deny the historicity of the event itself. But, if the event cannot be denied, then those who refuse to face the implications of the event, are then forced to re-interpret the significance of the facts. I would not be surprised at all if the remains of the ark were found. But, this will not change the heart of anyone. And yet, that does not mean that the flood event is unimportant. It is very important. Jesus spoke about Noah and the ark and the flood (Luke 17.26-27). Christ referred to Noah as a historical and literal person. If it were a legend or an allegorical myth designed by Old Testament writers to teach a moral (like Aesop's fables), then Jesus lied. In both of his epistles, Peter refers to Noah and the flood and ties that event with some of the events surrounding the death of Christ. Since the Scriptures present this as factual and Christ and Peter clearly embrace it, we do as well. But, then again, we see that the story line of the Bible presents one big story supported by one consistent system of truth. Let me explain it this way. The entire Bible on one level could be organized on the theme of "Promises Made" (OT) and "Promises Kept" (NT). But, even though the Old Testament emphasized God making promises, there were many promises that God made back then that he also fulfilled in order to give evidence that he would fulfill all of the promises that he made. In the same way, even though the New Testament emphasizes God keeping his promises, there are, in the New Testament more promises that God makes that point to a future time when all of God's promises are fulfilled. So, God made promises in the Old Testament and fulfilled some of them. In the New Testament God fulfilled many of the ones that were left unfulfilled in the Old Testament and he made some more. In the future, God will fulfill every unfulfilled promise from the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is the foundation of the Christmas event. God is keeping his word. He always has and always will, but the people who actually believe it are few, just like they were at the birth of Christ. And the people who believe are people who will always experience life in the gap (the time between promise and fulfillment). In Hebrews 11 we are treated to a look at the people of faith. From this text we have come to realize that "*Faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of the promise of God that has not yet been seen because it has not yet been fulfilled.*"

Faith is living as if the unseen (or yet to be fulfilled) promise of God is as certain as if it has already happened (and thus seen). Notice how this idea is evident in the beginning of v.7. "*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events yet unseen...constructed an ark*". Hebrews 11 is describing the people of God in such a way that we are being provided with a living definition of what it means to be a genuine follower of Christ. The people of God then, banked on the promises of God, and we, the people of God now, are those who bank on the promises of God. In fact...

1. **Noah is an example of Faith-Driven Salvation.** (building an ark)

"By faith Noah, ... in reverent fear constructed an ark"

Now, here is something that is very interesting to consider. The Hebrew word for "ark", (teba) that is used in the flood account is the same word that is used for the "basket" that

the baby Moses was placed in by his mother in an attempt to hide him from Pharaoh's slaughter squad. One is a big ark and one is a little ark. Both Moses and Noah are saviors (little "s") used by God to rescue the people of God who could not save themselves, but these little saviors themselves have to be saved. The means by which these two saviors are saved points to the great and ultimate Savior, who would come to this earth in the person of Christ. But here is the difference and it is enormous. Noah was delivered from certain death by means of the ark. Moses too was rescued from certain death by means of the ark. Christ was not delivered from death. Christ voluntarily handed himself over to death, but in his dying he became the ark of salvation and provided the only means by which we can be rescued from certain death and eternal judgment.

Noah was not only building an ark for deliverance, he was building the case for Christ. The flood-judgment was catastrophic and universal and overwhelming which meant that the rescue was awe-some and breath-taking and humbling. Can you imagine floating in an ark for 150 days and trying to come to grips with the fact, that you and the seven other people in that ark are the only human beings that have been rescued out of the entire world? Recognizing that God is in a sense starting the story over and is wiping the slate clean and this time is doing it with you would be staggering. But as great as that was, it all points to an even greater judgment and an even greater rescue that is even more staggering and humbling and overwhelming. And this next time he is not going to give the earth a bath, he is going to re-create it the whole thing. But, before he recreates the earth, he is recreating humans, by rescuing them one at a time by means of Christ the Ark of Salvation, who alone will keep you dry and land you safely on the shore. (More on that in a bit.)

Noah is an example of faith-driven salvation. God revealed his Word to Noah. Noah responded by faith which was evident by his obedience to God's Word. What God said was unseen at the moment of revelation. God promised a flood, but there was no flood for many years and with good reason because Noah had to have time to build the ark. But, between the time of promise and the time of fulfillment, Noah lived every day, banking on that promise. Every piece of wood that he measured and cut and formed and assembled was an act of faith. Every blow of a mallet echoed a message of coming judgment, which was a message that he believed, but was ignored by everyone else outside of his own family.

Hebrews 11.7 says that he constructed the ark "in reverent fear." "Reverent fear"¹ does not have the idea of a panic sort of fear, but more of awe. Noah built this ark as an act of worship. True Worship is a response of my heart, intellect and body driven by what God has revealed (said or done). The way Noah's life is described in Genesis makes it obvious that Noah lived (in contrast to his world) considering the promises and commands of God to be more important than anything else, which put him in a very, very small minority. God revealed to Noah, his plan of salvation and Noah believed God. "By faith Noah...constructed an ark" which became the means by which his family was rescued.

"By faith Noah, ...constructed an ark for the saving of his household."

¹ Eulabntheis – (Greek) that appears here for the only time in the NT.

I believe that the author of Hebrews includes this little phrase because this is part of the message of this book. You may think that your faithfulness does not matter, that you are a little island in life that is not affected by others and does not affect others. Therefore, if you give up and punt, no one will really care and no one will be affected by it. That is a lie! You are part of something that is bigger than yourself and greater than you. Noah's big act of faith was consistent with his daily expressions of believing God. Up until the day that God appeared to him and told him what was going to happen, Noah was already faithful and had no idea of how his faithful, daily belief was going to be used by God. Noah had no church, no small group or ABF to encourage him to press on and the language of Genesis really makes it clear how lonely and isolated Noah was. He was a stranger in his world because he dared to believe God. But, it was that rebellion against rebellion, that stand-alone faith that set him apart from the futile, empty, self-indulgent norm. And God saw this man's faith, in the face of such odds and said – "that's my boy." I'll save the earth through him. And one day, I will save the world through One who will come from him.

2. **Faith-Driven Salvation condemns the world.**

"By this he condemned the world."

The big idea of the book of Hebrews is that faith in Christ is the only means by which we can become a follower of God and faith in Christ is the means by which we grow as a follower of Christ. The Christian life is from faith to faith. But, when you live this way, you, like Noah are going to be in conflict with your world.

For example, I think we can assume that Noah was part of a community of people, who would naturally want to know what he was building and why. If he told them, which I think that he did (based on 2 Peter 2.5 which describes Noah as a "herald of righteousness") then, every time he worked on the ark, he was making a statement that he not only believed that God was going to judge the earth with a flood, but what was implied was that God was going to judge the earth because of the sins of the people around him. In preparing himself for the judgment that was coming, Noah's actions condemned the world around him. Noah was living based on what was unseen, while everyone was living for what was seen.

If you are a follower of Christ, you know exactly what I am talking about. This is one of the most challenging and discouraging aspects of following Christ. Some of you have literal brothers and sisters or friends that you have been very close with. They want you to do what they are doing and sometimes what they are doing is fine and other times it is wrong – and you won't do it. What happens then? No matter how nice you may be, your refusal to go along with them often creates a major conflict. Someone tries to pressure you into having sex and you know it isn't right. Or someone wants you to go clubbing with the girls or go to the strip joint with the boys, or watch a raunchy movie, etc. When you don't, sometimes people act like you have offended them – why? Your decision to consider God's promises as being more precious than anything else is making something

very obvious – they don't! They live for themselves instead of God and in doing so are placing themselves under judgment. But, instead of humbling themselves, most of the time they attack you. "Are you saying that I am going to burn in hell?" "What, do you think that you are too good for me?" "You weren't always like this, you used to be the same thing all the time." "I thought we were friends." And on and on it goes. And with some people, no matter how much you try, they refuse to hear your heart and seek to crush you and the result is one of the loneliest feelings in the world. Some of you are married to someone who is not a believer and you are a stranger, even in your own home.

In those moments, it is so easy to question the validity of what you are doing. You wonder if maybe they are right and this whole Jesus, God and Christianity thing is a farce. This is living in the gap between promise and fulfillment. Do you know why this chapter is here? The author of Hebrews is telling you that you do not stand in that gap by yourself. At times it may feel like you are the only one, but you are not. Look, there's Noah, every day building an ark, suffering scorn, bearing the shame heaped upon him by the community, feeling the weight of rejection that his own family members were enduring. And when the desire for vindication came upon him, Noah would only be even more troubled by the colossal nature of what was going to happen. Oh yes, Noah knew that gap as well as, and probably better than you.

3. **Faith-Driven Salvation illustrates the gospel.**

"and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith"

"By faith Noah ...constructed an ark...." His persevering faith links him to Abel before him and Abraham and you after him. He took God at his word. Faith is the conduit that connects us to the righteousness that is available to us in Christ alone. Noah believed God's plan of salvation and was delivered even though the rest of the world was destroyed. Do you get it? This world is heading for destruction. And this coming destruction will be even greater than the one in Noah's day. When you, like Noah take God at his word and believe him and stand on his promises, you will be rescued from this certain judgment.

Notice the connection between faith and righteousness. Noah became an heir (that is one who inherits) the righteousness that comes by faith. Where did that righteousness come from? It comes from Christ whose perfectly righteous life was lived for us and in living for us, he, the infinite God provided for us an infinite ocean of righteousness in which to be overwhelmed. Here is the choice before you. Trust in Christ alone as your Savior and be overwhelmed and submerged in the righteousness of Christ that is then credited to your account and that causes you to be declared justified, or trust in your self, or in good works, or in religious deeds which will never satisfy God's justice and as a result you will be overwhelmed by the coming judgment. And that is why this text is such a great text to preach a Christmas sermon from because here we see that ...

4. **Faith-Driven Salvation points to Christ.**

God's word to Noah (the command to build an ark) provided the only means by which Noah and his family were temporarily and physically rescued. This event, as staggering and cataclysmic as it was pointed to the day when God's Incarnate Word (Christ) came to this earth and became the only means by which we can be permanently and spiritually rescued. In order to be saved from the judgment-flood that wiped out the earth, you had to be in the ark. In order to be saved from the judgment that will wipe out the earth, you have to be in Christ. There was no hope outside of the ark and there is no hope outside of Christ. Listen, I know that outside of Christ people are partying their brains out like there is no tomorrow, because – there is no tomorrow for them. It's all they have. And of course they have to hype it up and make it look so attractive, because if they don't then they are faced with the agonizing reality of how empty and shallow it really is. Your only hope is the ark and this ark will hold together in the coming storm and will get you safely to the mountain. There were eight people in the ark. Eight people who believed. Eight people who took God at his Word and acted upon his offer of salvation before the judgment came. When the judgment comes it will be too late.

I am going to pray and then read from 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 19. I am going to pray for those of you who need to get into the ark, who need to trust in Christ alone. I am also going to pray for those of who are weary with the battle and like Noah feel like the world is against you, that you will see that God is for you and will not let you go. And then I am going to read 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 19. While I read 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 19, the choir and orchestra are going to gather in place in order to lead us in the Hallelujah Chorus, which is what we customarily conclude our Christmas Sunday service with. But, this time I am hoping that the certainty of the return of our King and Savior will not only cause you to cry out Hallelujah to the King of King and Lord of Lords, but will drive you to press on as pilgrims until that day when we drown out the angels because we get to sing about grace.

2 Peter 3

Revelation 19.11-16