

Sermon for June 21, 2015 – Father’s Day

Hebrews 11:7 (NIV84)

Theme: A Father’s Faith Can Save His Family.

⁷ *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

What do you visualize when you think of an “ideal” father? Do you see a hardworking man doing all he can to build a safe and comfortable home for his family? Do you picture a wise man passing on various skills and life-lessons to his sons? Do you envision a loving man: one who is sensitive to his wife’s needs and always ready to comfort his crying daughters? Do you imagine a courageous man: one who is ready to protect his family at all costs?

These are all praiseworthy virtues for a father to have; but, in God’s eyes, there is one virtue that surpasses and governs them all. What is it? A faith that fears, loves and trusts in the LORD above all things.

Blessed is the family whose father has such a faith! Why do I say that? Because, as we will see in the example of Noah, the LORD uses such a man to protect his family from the great spiritual dangers many fathers fail to perceive. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **A Father’s Faith Can Save His Family.**

Part One

Noah lived during a dark time in human history – in an age described as *when the sons of God* [believers] *went to the daughters of men* [unbelievers] *and had children by them.*ⁱ Because faith in the LORD was unimportant to the people of that time, everything became relative: there was no right or wrong. Without faith in the LORD to keep people in check, humanity’s selfishness ran so rampant that the earth became corrupt and full of violence.

Now, I don’t think we should imagine Noah’s world to be like some post-apocalyptic movie such as “Mad Max,” where everybody is out to kill everyone else. No, as our Gospel lesson indicated, the days before the flood were much like today: People went about their daily lives – working hard to make money, get married and enjoy life. The problem is that the life they wanted to enjoy was a life without God. They redefined morality and allowed their selfishness to excuse horrible sins.

Does this sound familiar? I see it all the time: sons and daughters of God (believers) becoming more and more enamored with this unbelieving world. The promise of wealth, luxury, leisure and moral freedom are enticing them away from their faith at an alarming rate – just as Jesus said would happen at the end of time. Our society is becoming increasingly godless. Lovelessness and violence is on the increase.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are living in the last days! Understanding the danger our godless society poses to both our own and our children’s souls, let us ask the LORD for the wisdom and help we need to endure in our faith.

Part Two

The world was certainly corrupt before the flood, “*But,*” the Bible says, “*Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.*”ⁱⁱ

Now, don’t misunderstand this description to mean that Noah was spiritually perfect. No, like the rest of humanity, he was a sinner who needed forgiveness. The thing that set Noah apart from the people of his time was that he looked forward to the forgiveness that the Savior whom the LORD promised to Adam and Eve would provide for him in the future.

Noah didn’t try to earn God’s favor, he *found* it. In other words, the LORD was merciful to Noah – creating a strong faith in his heart by means of His Gospel promises. Noah responded to God’s saving love by living a life of childlike obedience to God’s commands – knowing that they were for his protection and good. Noah wasn’t perfect, but He was righteous - righteous by faith! This faith led him to walk with God through constant prayer and meditation on His Word.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: you also have found favor with the LORD. God loved you so much that He sent His one and only Son to suffer the punishment you deserve for your sins. He declared you to be His dearly loved child at your baptism – creating and sustaining saving faith in your heart by means of His Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

So how are you going to respond? Are you going to be like all those tragic unbelievers before the flood who gave up the special relationship they had with their LORD so that they could enjoy the pleasures of this wicked world? The Scriptures tell us that they and their children all ended up in hell because of their unbelief.ⁱⁱⁱ

Or are you going to be like Noah: rejoicing in the grace your loving God has shown you and responding to it by living a life of childlike faith, love and obedience to the LORD? I pray that this is how you respond to the forgiveness and favor God has shown you in Christ. Why? Because as we will see in the case of Noah, such a faith can save both you and your family.

Part Three

The world’s wickedness and unbelief had reached a tipping point - unless hearts changed, the LORD would destroy mankind by means of a flood.

God warned Noah of what was going to happen and gave him a two-fold task: 1) He was to call this evil world to repentance and faith – warning them of God’s judgment if they didn’t. 2) He was to build an ark that would save himself, his family and every species of creatures on this earth from the flood that was about to come. This seemed like a scary, crazy, impossible thing to do, but Noah believed God, and set about His work.

Think of the example Noah gave his children during that time: a simple warning and promise from the LORD directed His whole life. There was no indication that a “world-wide flood” was going to destroy this earth – and yet Noah acted in faith as if it was going to happen.

The people of that world mocked the ark he labored at so tirelessly. They didn’t like the message it was sending them about their sin, unbelief and the LORD’s wrath. I can imagine his neighbors telling both him and his children: “You are the only people left on this earth who still believe in that ancient religion. Get with the times and embrace the diversity and freedom we have in giving up that stupid faith.” But Noah

would not give up. His faith compelled him to continue working and preaching in spite of the whole world being against him – and his children took notice.

Think of the lessons Noah's words and actions taught his children. When they looked at their father, they saw a man who cared more about what God says than what the world thinks. They learned that a person's faith is more important than a good career and lots of money. Noah's children learned that loving your neighbor does not mean you stop warning them about their sin and unbelief, but that you continue speaking the hard truth in love in the hope that the LORD will lead your unbelieving neighbors to repentance and faith. Noah's children saw an example of godly courage and perseverance in the face of worldly disappointment. They saw the hope and strength God's promises gave their father throughout His life and, when the flood waters came, they found a refuge in the ark their father's faith had built, as our sermon text states:

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Fathers, I know the big dreams you have for your children – how you want to give them every opportunity you can to excel in sports and academics. You want your children to have a good career and comfortable life.

But are these the things we should be most concerned about? Look around you: don't you see how many Christians are falling away from their faith? Don't you feel the world's tug on your own heart as well? Don't you remember what Jesus told you in His Word: that in the last days, the wickedness of this earth will increase, because of which the LORD is coming to judge this world with fire? These are dangerous days for both our and our children's faith.

Brothers in Christ, your children need you to be like Noah: a father who fears, loves and trusts in the LORD above all things! Nothing matters more than this. Think of the lengths to which the LORD went to save both you and your children from sin: He gave up his one and only Son so that, whoever believes in Him, might have eternal life. Don't let the deceptiveness of this world steal this salvation from you with its empty promises. Build a spiritual ark into which your family can run for refuge from this world.

“But how can I do this?” you might ask. “I am not very knowledgeable when it comes to religion. Truth be told, I don't read the Bible that often because I don't understand it. How can I even begin to be a “Noah” for my children?”

Well, truth be told, without God's grace and blessings we can't. It's impossible. But the LORD promises to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us as we meditate on His Word – graciously strengthening our love and faith in Him so that it might become the light and refuge our families need.

But understand that this all takes time and effort. Noah didn't build the ark in one day, but over a course of 120 years. I don't imagine Noah was a ship builder by profession, but his faith in God's promises gave him the determination to persevere – trusting that the LORD would bless his labor.

In the same way, building a spiritual ark for our children doesn't happen over night. If we have not been actively reading and studying the Bible in the past, we can't expect to understand it the first time we pick it up. But as we prayerfully struggle to understand God's Word, trusting that the LORD will keep His promise to pour out His Spirit upon us, we will grow in faith. And as we persevere in studying the Bible for ourselves and leading our families in daily devotions, we will soon see the frame work of a spiritual ark taking shape in our homes – and people will begin to notice.

If your friends laugh at you, remember that Noah's friends laughed at him too. They did not like the ark he built because it made them feel guilty of their sins. But, just as Noah persevered in building his ark, keep on building your faith – for both you and your family's sake. In doing so, you will direct your children's attention to their Savior's love – giving them a solid foundation for life, and a refuge in every trouble.

I wonder what it was like for Noah the day the flood waters came. I am sure that He was saddened how the world's refusal to repent sped on God's just judgment; but I also imagine the joy he had when his children entered the ark. The Holy Spirit worked faith in their hearts. They were safe.

Brothers in Christ: I can tell you for certain that nothing brings a Christian father greater joy than seeing His children continue in Christ. Why? Because He knows that his children are safe - under God's protective care. He knows that, no matter what hardship or difficulty they face in life, nothing can separate them from the love God has for them in Christ. Their salvation is secure and he will see them in heaven!

A Father's faith can save his family. May the LORD grant all Christian fathers the grace we need to be Noahs for our families. Then, no matter what path our children take in life, they will always see a spiritual ark of faith standing in our homes – calling them to find refuge in Christ. Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 6:4 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱ Genesis 6:8,9b (NIV84)

ⁱⁱⁱ cf. 1 Peter 3:19-20