

FAITH IS A LABOUR OF PREPARATION STUDY GUIDE

So far, we have heard that faith is an excellent sacrifice (Abel) and that faith is walking with God and a translation (Enoch), today we will look at Noah and find out that faith is a labour of preparation.

Read Hebrews 11.7. The world at the time of Noah was getting more and more wicked, and God warns Noah that a flood is coming. And in godly fear – that’s just another name for faith – Noah built an ark to save his family. It took him a hundred years of building and working, but he just kept building and just kept working.

There is a lot we could say about Noah, but this study is going to look at Noah in regard to faith. If we went back in time to meet Noah, he might have said something like:

I knew the world was very wicked, I knew sin was abounding, and I kept myself living pure. I don’t want to live like everyone else, I wanted to live for God.

Then one day, while I was praying, God spoke to me and said “Noah, I have a secret for you!”

“Lord, you can tell me anything!”

“The earth is going to be destroyed – there will come rainwater and it will rain”

Now, we need to understand something, and grasping this will help you have faith: it was not God who flooded the earth. That may not match what you learned at Sunday School. And this is important because natural disasters still happen today, and we need to know where they come from. The tragedies that happen in the earth are a result of sin and the work of the enemy, who comes to steal, kill and destroy (Jn. 10:10). Earthquakes, famines, hurricanes and other disasters are not the work of God, but rather the results of sin and its effects on a planet that is “groaning and travailing in pain” under the “bondage of corruption” (read Rom. 8:21-22). The lack of immediate consequences for murder when Cain killed Abel did nothing more than cause men to descend into greater violence (read Gen. 6:11-13).

This is what happened – Cain murdered Abel, just 9 generations previous. Noah is born in the year 1056, Adam is dead, Enoch is raptured, Seth has died, but everyone else in the genealogies is still alive. They all knew Cain murdered and was shown grace, and they used this grace as a licence to sin. Man became so depraved that God began to regret having ever created them (read Gen. 6:5-7). Even in the midst of such depravity God gave mankind 120 years to change. He sent Noah to preach to them and warn them of imminent destruction, and God had no choice but to let the flood happen and the only people who survived were Noah and his immediate family. Noah preached for one hundred years and not one person changed, not one. No-one even got in the ark for the night just in case.

But realize this, sin caused the flood, not God. There was violence everywhere, London today is violent, other cities are worse – Manchester in the UK has a higher murder rate per population – Tijuana Mexico is the most violent city in the world, over 2500 murders a year, it’s the size of Leeds, smaller than the big cities in the UK, and it is the murder capital of the world. But that was nothing compared with the violence immediately before the flood – you could not get on with life.

Failure to honour life in this way contaminates the very land itself:

Do not pollute the land where you live by allowing blood guilt to go unpunished.

Once the land has been subjected to such violence, it must be purified, so the blood of the one who caused bloodshed must be shed. (Num. 35:33; The VOICE)

Note that sin, especially the sin of violence, contaminates the environment and is the catalyst for natural disasters and other catastrophic events. Sin, not God, brought the flood. Apart from the land being cleansed, which can only happen by the death of the offender, the innocent would suffer along with the guilty one.

They lived at a time when the world had become vile and corrupt. Violence was everywhere. God saw that the earth was in ruins, and He knew why: all people on earth except Noah had lived corrupt lives and ruined God's plans for them. He had to do something. (Genesis 6.11-12, The Voice)

Sins affect the planet – our authority over the planet is exerted when we sin – especially bloodshed and violence. You can see this all over the law of Moses.

Now we read in Genesis 8.2 says before the flood that the rain from heaven was restrained. There was a problem with all this rain, but God was holding it back – the power of God was preventing the flood for a long time. That's the grace of God!

But the people rejected God. So 2 Peter 2.5 says that God let loose the waters, He never caused the flood, He just backed off and let people live with their choices. Man's sin, and not any malicious act on God's part, brought the earth to ruin which in turn brought a flood. God, who restrained this flood, simply stopped restraining it (letting it loose) when men refused to repent. Such catastrophes can only be avoided by keeping the land cleansed. This cleansing can only take place – at this stage – by the death of the sinful humans. The planet has been subjected to corruption. At the flood in the days of Noah, the planet was shaken to its core as the depths were broken up and the continents divided. Tremendous change took place that left the earth unstable and dramatically different from its original state. Now there are earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, droughts, floods and fires that bring death and destruction to millions.

These are not the will of God; He does not send them. The will of God is found in 1 Tim 2.4, that He wants all men to be saved. It would make no sense for God to send us into all the world to preach the gospel to all men while He is destroying them through tragedies and disasters. Our gospel is good news, and God's mercy and grace have given us this time in which He's not imputing our sins unto us (2 Cor. 5:19). He has reconciled Himself to us and pleads with us through the gospel to be reconciled to Him! (2 Cor. 5:20)

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. —2 Peter 3:9

Jesus made it clear that God is not judging the earth:

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. —John 5:22

And Jesus revealed how judgment would come:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.... —John 12:48

We will be judged by the Word of God in the "last day" (Rom. 2:5). Therefore, natural disasters are not God's judgment for sin. They are simply a part of fallen nature.

But God could see this was happening, God could see the wickedness in people's hearts and God knew where this was headed. He warned Noah. He warned Noah things were going to get wet,

because He knew the sin that was filling and destroying the earth. We do not appreciate that God is not behind the flood and natural disasters often because we do not realize how sinful sin actually is!

So the flood is coming, and God would have said to Noah "The rain is coming", and Noah would have said "Er, God what is rain?"

You see until that point the ground was made wet through a mist that came up through the earth – no one knew what a storm cloud was, no one knew about rains, about falling rain, fast rain, snow, sleet, pouring rain, the sound of the rain. God told Noah rain is coming, and it has never rained. It takes faith to believe that.

God says "Right Noah, what I mean is water will fall out the sky. You have to build a BOAT – you have to put a pair of every kind of animal, and 7 pairs of the clean ones, bring them in the ark, and bring your family in – your sons, their wives. Anyone NOT IN YOUR BOAT when the rain starts will be destroyed. I will preserve you and you are going to end up like Adam – starting a new race, a new thing"

That's what God said, and Noah had a choice: believe it or not. I mean that is a huge thing to say to anyone at any time of history! You need faith to believe that – you need to rest your mind on things not seen – never seen rain, never seen water fall from the sky, never seen the world change, just see it get worse and worse and worse. There was no change.

Some of you think it will never rain, that your life will stay dry forever. Noah could have said "I cannot accept this, it has never happened before", but he did not say this, Noah believed God. Noah lived in a world without rain, but he believed in the coming rain.

One of the elements of faith that makes it amazing is believing for things that you have never seen before. Some of you are going to see some miracles you have never seen before. Some of you live in a world without rain, you are going to see rain. Not the rain that destroys, but the rain of God – the rain of healing, the rain of prosperity, the rain of deliverance, the rain of victory. But you need to believe before you see! And one of the ways that faith manifests is through hard work, through labour!

Noah believed that the rain was coming, with no evidence other than God's Word, and that faith led him to build an ark. Noah could have said:

God, God, God, I am a farmer. I am really good at ploughing a field, I know the weather, I know this and that, but WHAT IS AN ARK? I have never seen water fall from the sky, I can't build a boat in the middle of a field, that's dumb, I am not your man, I am not qualified"

But he did not – HE JUST BELIEVED GOD!

God tells us to do things we don't know how to do, we can't do, we don't have the money to do, the skills to do, the power to do – HE LOVES TELLING US TO DO IMPOSSIBLE THINGS. He loves to get us out of the rely-on-me zone and into the rely-on-Him zone.

"Right Noah, I am going to give you a plan to build the boat, listen up" –

"But God, but God, I am not a carpenter, speak to one of the carpenters in town, speak to an actual boat expert. No, that isn't your plan... Ok Lord, whatever you ask I WILL DO"

That is faith. ALL FAITH INVOLVES THINGS YOU DO NOT KNOW!

If you cannot step into things you do not know, then you are not walking in faith! I am doing things I don't have a clue to do, when we did the six services, one video service last weekend I did not know how to do it, but we did it. Faith always has an ELEMENT of the UNKNOWN – be bold, be a risk taker, be adventurous – let your faith rise up and be LIVING and VITAL AND POWERFUL. I reckon his boys helped build it, I don't know that, but I know family.

Did you know – that it wasn't until 1850 that anyone had built a boat as big as the ark. Today, people who build boat will tell you that the dimensions of the ark are the best dimensions for FLOATING BOAT WITH A LOT OF WEIGHT ON IT. GOD TOLD NOAH build it, and GOD TOLD NOAH HOW TO BUILD IT. God won't leave you alone, one of the biggest problems we have in the charismatic church is we build things God told us to build our way. STOP, PAUSE, find out HIS PLAN.

Go plant a church – OK, Lord, how? Where? When? What kind of church? How do you want it built? What design? What materials? Press pause and spend time with the Lord until you find out His way to do things.

NOAH was not just prepared to DO IT, HE WAS PREPARED TO DO IT GOD'S WAY

If God gives you a word in the service, when to share it, how, what is the most loving way to do this.

That Noah was prepared to work hard for God touches me deeply. According to the taxman I work for myself, but the truth is I work for God. I love doing what I do, but I assure you it is a labour. Building a giant boat and building it God's way with no shortcuts took Noah 100 years. That was not just a simple YES LORD, it was work. LOTS AND LOTS AND LOTS OF WORK.

I think this is what A LOT OF PEOPLE DO NOT REALIZE ABOUT FAITH – it takes WORK, it TAKES LOADS OF WORK. If you are going to walk by faith, it takes labour. God, save us from lazy Christians, especially lazy pastors. I have always just done what God said, and it has always involved WORK. Faith is the answer to change the world, only faith can change the UK, but faith takes WORK. It takes labour. And for us to change the world, we need to labour. I have just come back from Texas, this week I am off to Bulgaria and Serbia, I will be back Sunday and preaching next Sunday. Last night, I was in Trimley. I love my job – but it is labour! Do not believe otherwise!

Lester Sumrall built a church in Indiana, and then at some point, God told him to go back to the mission field and be an evangelist again. I read he interviewed 6 pastors for the job. They came to the church, they saw what he did each weekend, they saw the radio ministry, they saw his printing shop, they saw the Bible College, he had a nursery, they had a school in the church, they had a school for blind people in the church.

None of them wanted the job. Three of them, their first question was where is the nearest golf course and can you play every morning, will you definitely get two days off a week? He told them all FAITH IS A LABOUR – you have to LABOUR AT THE KINGDOM!

Faith involves LABOUR and NOAH proves it. God said NOAH BUILD AN ARK, and by FAITH HE built the ark. I didn't call building a giant boat FAITH, GOD DID. Noah did not know how to do it, but he did it anyway. That is faith, and he obeyed the Holy Spirit and did the job. You don't need great wisdom or worldly education or strength to change the world. You just need faith, and sometimes that faith is hard work.

FAITH HAS ACTION, FAITH HAS WORK, FAITH HAS ENERGY

Faith is not like witchcraft – you know with witchcraft what most people want is something for nothing. They go to the witchdoctor and get a love potion, curse a rival, get promotion, wealth without effort.

Now, faith is through grace, but it manifests through labour. Build things, work at them, craft them, do this do that. Get your hands dirty.

Witchcraft says drink this potion and the girl will magically fall in love with you. Faith says do you want a wife then to stop being so grumpy, tidy your house up a bit, go to church every week, put a smile on your face.

Witchcraft if you want promotion, use this juju. Faith says turn up at work on time, put the work in, work as if you are working for the Lord, sow seed, walk in love, believe, declare.

Witchcraft says cast this spell to get power with God, to get a great ministry

Faith says be faithful with your money, be faithful in little things, be faithful in another man's ministry

It's HARD WORK – but you have to do it! Faith can cause blisters!

Martin Luther said this about faith "Faith leads to busy, faith leads to living. While most Christians are sitting around discussing what to do, faith is already up and doing it"

David had the job of killing a giant – he was a boy and the giant was a warrior. There was no contest physically, but David had to work with what HE HAD. God never asks for what you don't have!

Oh God if I had a million pounds, I'd put it all in the offering. You are a liar if you don't tithe on 1000 pounds a month! You see YOU CAN DO WHAT GOD TELLS YOU TO DO – YOU CAN DO IT – but it will be HARD WORK. IT will take what you have, not imaginary stuff. David didn't have a sword; God didn't ask him to have one – he was offered armour, but it didn't fit. HE DID HAVE A SLING THOUGH – and USED IT.

David took a stone out of a river – that stone got past a shield, it hit its target, and it missed all his armour and HIT THE GIANT RIGHT IN THE HEAD – God used some sort of special radar to MAKE THAT THING HIT – and GOD WILL DO IT FOR YOU!

That's what NOAH did – GOD gave HIM A JOB TO DO. He had to cut down trees, to cut up timber, to pick up and lay down timber, get some nails, get some stuff done. HE WOULD HAVE SWEATED. It was hard, he had callouses!

NOT that many people want to WORK HARD. There are many who dream of WORKING HARD – they are basically lazy though. TOO LAZY TO STUDY THE BIBLE, TOO LAZY TO PRAY, TOO LAZY TO WALK IN LOVE. Then they say "I guess I don't have faith" – no they have faith, they just never let it lead them to LABOUR. FAITH MANIFESTS IN LABOUR!

MOST PEOPLE, most Christians, their eye is on TEMPORARY THINGS so much, but ETERNAL THINGS – getting here early, mucking in – that's all faith. A LABOUR motivated by LOVE AND THE LOVE OF GOD. And that is faith. BUILDING A BOAT IS FAITH.

Are you still with me? Don't run out the TREE because of this series.

Don't go home and say "Lord, I was only joking about wanting AMAZING FAITH. I don't want to put a bunch of money in the bucket, I don't want to walk with God all the time, I don't want to WORK FOR JESUS"

FAITH is a sacrifice. Faith is walking with God, not walking with the world. FAITH is a labour – but I WANT MY FREEDOM. We need to live close to GOD, we need to walk by FAITH – WE NEED TO SACRIFICE. AND WE NEED TO LABOUR FOR JESUS!

You need to make a decision - I AM READY TO MAKE SOME SACRIFICES, I AM READY TO WALK WITH GOD and I AM READY TO LABOUR FOR JESUS.

And why did Noah do it? HE WAS WARNED THAT SOMETHING WAS COMING!

Tell you – there are things coming today. We need to be strong.

ONE OF THE THINGS ABOUT TREE OF LIFE – is the multi-ethnic nature of it. I AM TELLING YOU – there are ethnic issues happening – there is a rise of things happening in the city, I have SCRIPTURES FOR IT – and we are building an ark. So it takes hard work.

Some people will never be part of TREE OF LIFE – because it is hard work to fellowship with people who are different to you, it is hard work to deal with your attitudes, to examine your own culture – it is easier to go to a church where everyone looks like you! IT'S LABOUR. But we are building an ark for your children, your grandchildren.

We are building a place to protect people and love people and bless people. If you want to be part of the building team and stop being a spectator, there is always a path. It's hard work but when the waters come out of the sky, you will be glad we built!

You need to ask the Lord what He is telling you about and work out what work you need to do. Faith is a labour.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to say that faith is hard work?
2. What causes natural disasters in the world today?
3. What is the will of God for all people according to 2 Peter 3.9?
4. Noah believed for rain when he had never seen rain. What sort of things should we be believing for that we have never seen?
5. How can faith for things in our life lead to hard work for us?
6. Noah was not a boat builder, but God called him to build a boat. What kind of things might God call us to do that we have never done? What should our response be?
7. Noah had to build the ark, but not according to his blueprints but Gods. Benjamin said that one of the biggest problems in the church is are building God's thing but our way. Have you ever tried to build God's thing your way? How did that work for you?
8. Witchcraft is trying to get blessed without work, faith requires work. How do you feel about that statement?
9. What can you do this week that is laborious but that is also a manifestation of faith?
10. Benjamin says one of the reasons that Tree of Life starts was to be an ark for people from all ethnicities. Do you agree, and why?
11. What about this message inspired, challenged or encouraged you the most?