

Faith is the Conviction of Things Not Seen:

1. Build Your Ark

Hebrews 11:1-7

I'm really glad I had the opportunity to attend the worship service last Sunday. For a couple of reasons: First, it was a great worship service. It felt good to just sit back and enjoy a good worship service. Second, I really appreciated Leslie's sermon on Noah and the Flood. I want to piggy-back on Leslie and Shannon's two-part sermon series on Noah.

Leslie made the excellent point that the flood comes to all of us sooner or later. She talked about preparing for the flood. In the 8:30 service last Sunday E.P. Bullock was sitting with me, and he leaned over and said, "The message of that story is that Noah built the ark before the flood came."

Yes, the flood does come to each of us sooner or later. Sooner or later life throws something at us which is so devastating that it can wipe us out. Many people do drown in the flood emotionally and spiritually. Others, like Noah, are lifted to new heights by the rising waters. The difference is simply this: Did we build our ark before the flood came?

Personally, I believe that God didn't just tell Noah to prepare for the coming flood. I believe God told everyone who was listening to build an ark. The problem is that Noah was the only one who was listening.

And I believe that God is telling everyone to build their ark before the flood comes. Some are listening, and some aren't. Those who don't listen will be swept away when their flood comes. Those who listen and obey will be safe and dry as they float on top of the water.

So, how do we build this ark? Hebrews tells us. The ark which saves us from the flood is faith. If we have faith, when the flood comes, we know that God will not allow the flood to sweep us away. God will use the floods of life to lift us to a higher level of living. When you know that, you are safe, as you float above whatever trials may have come into your life.

The author of the words of the greatly loved hymn, "It is Well with My Soul," Horatio Spafford, endured great tragedies in his life: the death of a child, the loss of all his wealth in the Great Chicago Fire, and, finally, the drowning of the rest of his children when their ship sank.

In spite of tragedies which would have destroyed most people, he was able to write, "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." He spent the last years of his life as a missionary telling people how good God is. He could do so, because God lifted him up when the floods came.

Spafford was able to survive the floods because he had built an ark, the ark of faith.

His story is extraordinary, but not unusual. Think about the people you have known who have gone through times of great difficulty full of joy and thanksgiving.

There was a man who had had some financial setbacks. He was discouraged and tempted to just throw up his hands and quit. However he just kept struggling. He was pretty proud of himself for not giving up. One day he met a friend, and his friend said, "Al, how are you doing?" Al said, "Well, under the circumstances, all right I guess." His friend said, "Al, you are a Christian. Christians are not under the circumstances. We are under Christ. Christ lifts us above the circumstances."

Al knew that his friend was speaking from experience. He had watched as he went through cancer treatment as if it were nothing more than a minor inconvenience. That day Al made a decision to quit living as if life were a struggle to keep your head above water and start living joyfully and thankfully, trusting God to bless him. He never again lived under the circumstances.

Al built an ark of faith, and that ark lifted him above the floods of life.

Leslie and E.P. are right. The message is, don't wait until the rain starts falling to build your ark. That's probably too late.

We need to practice living in faith every day.

The great thing is God has shaped life in such a way that there is never a day in which we don't encounter at least small obstacles and problems and frustrations. Isn't God good? God gives us numerous opportunities every day to practice rising above the circumstances. God is getting us ready for the big game.

When I played sports in school, the coach would always say, "You play the way you practice." If you worked hard in practice at doing things the right way, it just became second nature. In the game, you didn't have to think about doing it right. It just comes naturally.

So, we need to be intentional about practicing living in faith every day.

Paul is a great example of a man who was able to rise above his circumstances through his faith. When the floods came, they just lifted him higher.

And the floods did come. He faced opposition from his fellow Jews. He faced opposition for other Christians. He was arrested on several occasions. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. But Paul was like a cork—the further down you pushed him, the faster he popped back up.

Paul wrote, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..." 2 Corinthians 3:8-9.

How was he able to keep afloat when the floods came? He practiced his faith daily. He lived his own advice:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Paul could rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances because, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God..." Romans 8:28.

The flood didn't last. They never do. We have God's promise on that. The sun will return. The waters will recede. Life will be good again.

Even when we can't see the end of it, we know by faith that it will come. And faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. If you keep looking ahead for the good that God will bring out of every situation, you can raise above the waters.

So, practice every day looking for the good God is bringing to you. Every day practice rejoicing. Every day give thanks in every circumstance. You will build an ark of faith which will be unsinkable.

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