

2.18.2024 Sermon

Faith for the Unthinkable | Hebrews 11:7

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Rev. James Bady

We're in this current sermon series about faith, looking at Hebrews 11. It helps us understand faith by discussing popular characters in the history of faith.

For that person still waiting on their change, or looking to start their change, this talk is for you. You're in this moment of your life, doing the right things, believing, but not seeing the change you're looking for. Or maybe you're in neutral, knowing there's more. If you haven't started your path because you haven't heard where to go yet, how do you start your journey? My talk is geared towards people in that phase of their life. And for those not in those phases, hopefully, there are nuggets here to help in your life. Let's read Hebrews 11, seven: by faith, Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household. By this, he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

It's a short passage, but it has a lot here. Before we even get here, though, the first parts of Hebrews 11 start out with the definition of what faith is: faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It tries to give a definition, but it's a first-century definition. So, it leaves us still wondering, what is faith? And then it moves forward and talks about how, whatever you believe about how the earth initiated, whether it's Creation or Evolution, you do that by faith. There are missing elements in the information you have, that requires faith to get on the other side of that.

Right. So, then it moves to this interesting spot where it names individuals and calls them heroes of faith. But when you look in the Bible, you can't really find much about them. You talk about Abel, you talk about Enoch. Abel was killed by his brother in the story. Right, he gave his ties, his brother got jealous, his brother killed him. That's faith, huh? Okay. Or Enoch, it says

he lived and then he never tasted death. But what did he do to have such an honor of never tasting death? In each example, all it says is some little half phrases about walking with God.

Then we get to verse six, and it talks about how without this thing that you may still be struggling to understand, it is impossible to please God without it. It's impossible to please God without this thing called faith that we all are still struggling to explain to you. And so being the person I am, I started looking at all these other different writings to try to hope I can bring something for you today to help clarify this statement, this word called faith. So, I started reading some of the classic theologians like John Wesley, John Calvin, Matthew Henry, and a few others.

And if you've read any of these authors and theologians throughout history, you realize you don't want to read them because their writing is long, confusing, and the words are all this big. But every now and then they try to demystify these words. And so, after I've done all that reading, I walk into our library where the children's ministry meets, and they're also talking about faith. Right? And on the board, what the children have been reading about is faith. And they say the same thing that John Calvin said, children. What is faith? I trust God. I have confidence in God. So, all that reading was for naught. I could have talked to a six-year-old and got the same answer. But it's so pure. I have confidence that God would do what God said God would do. I have an experience long enough that I've tested and moved forward with God. Faith.

So, if I then take that definition and apply it to the text we've read so far, I understand why verse six says, it is impossible to please God without faith. Because if you have started a new relationship, friendship, and the person that you are with is constantly doubting your integrity, is constantly doubting you will do what you say you will do, is constantly pushing back against your reality, it's impossible to be pleasing in that moment. You get to a point, and I'm seeing that God is doing this with you. But it's kind of a tolerance, versus an embrace. And so, what we're trying to get each and every one of us to is that embrace with God, a comfort and an experience with God. That is beyond tolerance. That is beyond just something that exists, but it's something that brings you joy, happiness, and confidence going forward.

So, faith is from the mouth of a six-year-old, to John Calvin, Wesley, and Matthew Henry. Confidence in God. All right. So, if you ever have a spiritual question in the future, go talk to your kid, they will help you out.

So then how does this apply? Because I want to really dig in and take some time and look at verse seven, as well. And the recap is, so there's this story about this guy named Noah, and Noah, we finally get to a character in this whole stretch of Hebrews 11 that we understand, right? This is traditional Christian thought when we talk about faith, we think about Noah's story. And Noah's story is, there's some big event. Right? There's a miraculous, unthinkable

event that most people could have never done. Right? That's our construction of faith. Somebody did it, but not all can. The elite can do it, but not all can. But then why do we all struggle, if not all can? So that's what I want to challenge. So now they in this story, because he does such a great and a miraculous thing, we talk about how he received or became the heir of righteousness, right? We do. We're great. We receive, that's our Western Christianity construction. You must do something great. Then I can receive it and I'm good. And then people will know me. Versus, there's this little stretch in Genesis six, that is half of a verse that just says, Noah walked with God. And it is that moment that made him honorable to receive everything else you hear. We're going to circle back to that.

So, it builds this ark. Let's dig into it. So, there is this flood. And I'm going to make Noah a normal person, so bear with me for a moment. If you were Noah, and God, you are walking with God. And God said, build this ark, there are some questions in this time of history that you may have.

It's never rained. Do they even have big lakes? They don't answer that question. We just know it never rained yet. Has there ever been you seen a tide yet? No, you haven't seen a tide, even the water rise or go down? So how difficult is it for God to even explain to you an ark? Are there boats? If there's no big lakes, and you've never seen a tide, and it's no rain? How would you describe this to someone that I have a catastrophe coming? And it's called a flood. And you've never even seen big water. I want you to build an ark. And you've never seen a boat. How do you put these things together?

And then say you're Noah and you got to explain this to your wife. See, No, I'm not gonna get myself. I was going to share with you my process of explaining new things that I want to do to my wife. Oh, I got permission. All right. All right. It usually goes like this, Hey, Bae. Got this idea. And so, I usually try two methods. First, I try to come in hard. We do an X. And she goes, Yeah, that's it, right there. There's this laughter and pushback.

Then I go, Hey, I think I'm, you know, get all spiritual and stuff. And explain. To try to move this over, then I get these questions, and questions, and questions and questions. And I'm like, "yo, I brought us this far right." This is Noah. This is what Noah has to go through just like we would have to go through questions from his family.

And so, imagine, you're just explaining water and flood. But then the second part of this, you got to explain this thing called an arc. And so, to put this in context, and the ark, as is described in the Bible, I'll compare it this way. As of 2024, the largest cruise ship today is about 1200 feet long. Right? Prior to the 1980s, the largest ships were about the size of the Titanic, right? So, the Titanic in about the 1910s 1912 is commissioned and its size was 800 and about 80 feet long, right. And it was launched as a technological marvel for its luxury size and capability. To build the Titanic, it took over two years, and 15,000 people to build that thing.

And so, here's Noah, and his three sons that are going to build the ark that is half the size of the Titanic. So, it's a football field and a half long and equally wide and four stories high. And you're going to build it by hand. Could I have convinced you to do that? What about the rest of you? Can I convince you that we're going to go and get some trees or some woods somewhere and we're going to build an unimaginable structure to defend against an unseen danger in an amazing charisma because there is no way my wife loves me, but we're not doing this. So, it's not a surprise that theologians say it took about 120 years to build this structure. So, after you get over convincing your family about this thing, and all of that, now you're going to have the criticism of the people around you that know what you've lost your mind. You are crazy.

And then they have 120 years to do that to you. In your ear. Every day, every time they see you at the grocery store, where are you going down to pick up your wood? Every house that are coming I got a second story on that now. All right. And now you're talking about putting animals in there? Oh, wow, good luck with that lion.

Let's, let's make let's make no real for a moment. And what Noah has to go through, because I think we make him majestic. Just like we do the word that he heard something, I have faith. And everything went smoothly. There was no doubt. There was no concern. There was no ridicule. There was 120 years of ridicule. How do you make it through that moment? How do you get to a point to be calling one of the heroes of faith to do this unimaginable thing?

I'll go to this. Remember, we talked about the scale of how do you get to knowing like a couple of weeks back, we say that any new topic that you come in contact with you first start gathering new information. And you don't immediately jump on it. You just kind of learn more start questioning gathering. And then there's this moment where there's nothing more to gather. It's time to take a step. It's time to leap. It's time to do. And somehow Noah's able to do that.

So, I don't think the first time Noah heard from God was about the ark. I don't believe the first assignment was 420 years, I don't believe the first engagement is about to gather some animals and put them in a box. Maybe, the first one would be, hey, Noah, you probably want to take this woman versus that woman as your wife. Oh, okay. And things worked out. You probably want to live here versus there. And things worked out. You probably want to, you know, take this profession versus that profession. It worked out. Meaning it's the little thing that we all take for granted. And we all just kind of say and do.

That is how we build up our ear and familiarity with the voice of God. That then allows us more experience and more growth and more experience with God to do bigger and bigger and bigger things. And so that's how you get to the point where Genesis six says, No walked with God. It's nothing exciting. It's simple. It's not big, but it's important. And that little thing is what

pleases God and kind of shows to us all that God wants relationships, just like the relationships you have on this earth.

There are certain people you walk with or you talk to and you just laugh and have a good time. And then there are certain people that call you see them on caller ID you'll say well, I talked to them later. Right there's these basic pieces of your walk. That is true. Now, I hate using some of these analogies because you're gonna say God puts me on hold. No, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying there is a difference. In the embrace, dependent on how we hear, and how we respond to God's call, that's all. And that is not so far away from you that you haven't seen it before. But our problem is we're going through the analogy is no a did these things and heard these things I also believe others heard. But because they didn't have this experience of trial little work it out, it works out and I do it would God again.

So instead of just Moses hearing many people heard but Moses, I'm sorry, Noah acted. And that is what takes us to the part of Hebrews 11. And in parts of Genesis where when they say Noah's action condemn the world. Here's what that mean in the context of some of these theologians. Yet some people say that's God's judgment on the world. Other theologians say, Well, let's take another look at this in the context of what they are writing, it is just saying, people hear from God. But people make different decisions. And it's all up to you. And at the point of making that decision, there are outcomes. And the difference in those outcomes. These authors are saying the winner of the outcome condemned the other. Do you hear me? So? No, by his action, those actions in comparison to others actions, condemned the actions of others. It's similar to if a person that is physically fit, they're disciplined, and you go at some point in that fit in the future, and you compare them to someone who did nothing. They will say the person that is disciplined condemned the one that was not. That's all we're seeing. That's, that's his story that's developing under Noah regarding faith and hearing the Word of God to move on that faith. So how does that go to us?

Well, we have a problem because we're an instant society. Whatever we want, we want it now. We are microwave on steroids, society. Everything if I pray today, I'm expecting a call tomorrow about resolution. We, this is done. February. So, we January February is in for those of you that work in and corporate society and corporate America, you just went through what evaluations, urine evaluations and goal setting for this year. And the one thing that is extremely consistent in my 30 plus years of corporate America is this, no matter what I did next year's more, faster, faster, anybody working somewhere else, they say go slower, you work too fast last year, because I want to put in my resume, if you have that location. Right? It doesn't exist. So, it's contrary to our society to work slower, and to be patient and to develop with God. Here's the nugget on that.

Some things just take time. But we are encouraged to always go faster. Some things take time through God's development. There are all the secondary benefits that Noah learned by taking

120 years to build an ark. He probably learned a lot about wood and woodworking while he was building the ark. He learned more and more about animals – gathering them, learning what they liked to eat, including which ones like to eat each other. And I want to put them on part. All of these things that take time that our society says no go faster. Noah goes fast and got to know my relationship with you. Takes time. You're going to have to believe and trust and have confidence in me that I have not forgotten you. But what I want from you takes time. What I have for you, is on a long arm. But it's good. What I have for you will blow your mind. But you gotta walk with me. What I have for you is everything you ever desired. But you got to be patient and have confidence in me. Because I see what you don't see. You'll see you now that you imagine, you would think the way you think today 20 years ago. God knew. So, do you want to get to your destination and not be prepared? Do you want to have the resources that you want and not know how to handle them?

Some things take time. And the story of Noah is that time, so that when you get to the other end, you're ready. And even in today's society, as a society, we don't know how to handle this. But I encourage we, the children of God, to learn those things, and to have faith for the things that are not only for us. But the things that Noah was say was for generations to come. You know, this is Black History Month. So, I've been reading a lot of history. And one of the statements inside of Maya Angelou's, "Still I Rise" poem is this. I am the hope and the dream of the slave. That hit me. Because my wife and I have shared with you. We have pictures of my great-great-grandmother who was an infant when slavery ended. She could not have them match me. Let that sink in. She could not have imagined the experiences I've had. But she prayed for them. She hoped for them. She never saw them. But it took time.

What are the things you are willing to do today? And tomorrow? And even if you never see them? You're ready. It's worth it to you to do it. What is your legacy? Are you living just for you? And that's it? Are you doing the selfish thing? I get it, no shame. No shame at all. I'm just saying, Examine yourself. And where you are in this thing called life. And look at the life of Noah and say, Hey, I put together something that I can live with. And when you examine my life, I will be proud.

And you don't even have to just look at Noah. We have examples even here in this church. Right, I think of the Millers in the blood, sweat, and tears they put into the sustaining and creating of this place. Some of the things that Dr. Robert Miller had never seen, but wanted. I think that was in the things that they're doing what work together. And what they are trying to do in terms of gathering organizations together to have people recover the completeness of their life from addictions. They've sacrificed a lot to make that happen. And they do it. They do behind the scenes, don't talk about it much. So, I will talk about it for them today. It's about a legacy of what do you want next? After you've examined your life? What do you want to say about you?

After you've done all the things that make your life comfortable, and I invite you to do that thing that's no shade, no shade at all. But get to this other moment where you're talking about the unimaginable that you have to do every day. Take a task along with God to see it come through. Can you build a legacy? Cornerstone, I hope that you are those people because the world is waiting for you. Amen. Amen.