

## Genesis 6:9-22

### Introduction

Who would you list as your heroes of faith?

Perhaps you might think of figures from a few centuries ago; maybe one of the great Reformers like John Calvin.

Or you might think of one of the big evangelists like George Whitfield or the hymn-writer, Charles Wesley.

Perhaps in the less-distant past, you might think of missionaries like Jim and Elizabeth Elliot, or great preachers like Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott.

There are so many great heroes to choose from, whose stories encourage us and spur us on.

In the Bible, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews had his own list of heroes. We've already met one of them; it was Enoch. And, of course, as we read the story of the Flood, we're reading about another: it's Noah. He's been mentioned already but in our passage today, we finally get to meet him.

And there is a great deal that we can learn from his example as a godly man in a godless world - which is our first heading.

### A godly man in a godless world

So let's look at our passage. Please look down with me at verses 9 and 10.

**This is the account of Noah and his family.**

**Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.**

Noah is the first man in the Bible who is said to be righteous. Whilst it's used for the first time here, it's a word that's used often in the Bible.

In legal contexts, it refers to someone's status. Someone who is declared to be righteous in legal terms is 'innocent' or 'in the right'. We might imagine a judge in a court of law banging his gavel and shouting, "Not guilty!". And that legal sense is probably in the background here: Noah is righteous in the eyes of God. It's a remarkable thing to be said of anyone when we take into account the fact that we are all corrupt and sinful from birth, and that wickedness pervades every aspect of our being. How can wicked and sinful human beings like us be said to be right with God? As we read through the Bible, we discover the consistent message that this remarkable status is received by faith alone.

A little further on in Genesis, we're introduced to Abraham. God makes wonderful promises to Abraham, including the promise that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. It's an amazing promise when we consider that Abraham and his wife Sarah were well beyond the age of child-bearing. Yet we're told that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

This is how sinners are declared to be right with God; it's through faith. It's exactly the same today. The apostle Paul writes: **The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.** (Romans 4:23-24). Righteousness is received through faith. Noah was righteous in the sight of God, and he received his righteousness through faith.

But more generally, the word 'righteous' refers to someone who does what is good and right, and that seems to be the main idea here. We're told that Noah was **blameless among the people of his time**. There wasn't a hint of hypocrisy in him; his faith and his conduct were in perfect alignment. There was no one else like him; he stood out from all around him. That's not to say that he was sinless. But his faith in God was evident in the goodness of his life. Perhaps you've known people like that; people whose faith in God shines out from them in the goodness of their words and actions; people who stand out because they are so kind and compassionate and just plain good.

That's how all Christians should be. In the New Testament, Paul warns his friend Titus against those who **claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him** (Titus 1:16). The lives we live should match the faith we proclaim. There should be a goodness to our lives which flows out of our faith, and which marks us out from those around us. Like Noah, Christians in the world today should be known for doing what is right. As we read these verses we should ask ourselves how well our lives match up to the faith we profess, and whether there's anything we need to do to bring our faith and our conduct into closer alignment. And here's how we can pray for each other: that our lives would increasingly be characterised by the integrity of Noah.

Noah was righteous. He was blameless among the people of his time. And, we're told, **he walked faithfully with God.**

Those words should ring a bell. Exactly the same thing was said of Enoch, Noah's great-grandfather, in chapter 5. Enoch had walked faithfully with God, before God took him away. What an impression Enoch's close relationship with God must have made on his son, Methuselah. And presumably, Methuselah passed his father's faith on to Noah's father Lamech, who in turn passed it on to Noah. It's a great encouragement to those of us with families to see the life of faith being passed down from generation to generation. It should fuel our prayers for God to work in the same way in the different generations of our

families. And it should also fuel our determination to pass on our faith through our own words and example.

Noah walked faithfully with God. He continually and habitually lived each day in close and personal relationship with God, enjoying his presence. It's a lovely picture. But the contrast with those around him couldn't be greater.

That contrast is rammed home to us with the threefold repetition of the word 'corrupt' and the twofold description of the world as full of violence.

Look again at verses 11 to 13.

**Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.'**

In Genesis chapter 1, God had told the animals and the first man and woman to multiply and fill the earth. But now, as he looks, he sees the earth is filled with violence. In chapter 1, God had seen that everything he had made was very good. Now he sees how corrupt it has become.

This is the result when we refuse to live within the boundaries which God has set for human life. It's a description of the chaos that ensues when God's ways are discarded and his good ordering of the world is abandoned. It's destruction. We need little convincing of that fact when we consider someone whose marriage has been torn apart by an affair, or who is suffering the ongoing consequences of abuse, or who has alienated their friends and family because of their alcoholism.

Rather than filling the world and subduing it mankind had reduced it to chaos and disorder.

It's against this backdrop that we can grasp what a big deal it was for Noah to walk faithfully with God. It meant swimming against the tide. How hard it must have been for Noah and his family to walk faithfully with God when those around them had abandoned him. In a godless world, there will always be a cost to walking faithfully with God. We shouldn't be surprised when it's difficult and we come across opposition. But we can do so because God walks closely with us.

And it's a mark of the closeness between God and Noah that God confides in him and tells him what he's about to do.

Verse 13:

**So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.'**

God looked and saw that humans had corrupted themselves and filled the world with violence. Humankind was destroying itself. So God hands over his creatures to the path they had chosen.

The word 'corrupt' and the word 'destroy' both come from the same root in the original Hebrew language, emphasising the fact that God's judgement is just and fitting. Humankind had ruined itself, so God would now complete its ruin.

In Ezekiel 33, verse 11, God says: **'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked...'** As we read those words we get a sense of the grief God must have felt because of the wickedness on earth. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but he cannot turn a blind eye to sin. If we reject God's ways in rebellion against him, we can have no complaint when he allows us to experience fully the consequences of the path we've chosen. If we push him away now, we can have no complaint when he pushes us away eternally.

But Noah had lived differently. He had walked faithfully with God. And God had made his plans known to him. That's what friends do; they confide in one another.

When Jesus was speaking with his disciples he said, **'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.'** (John 15:15)

And then Jesus went on: **'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.'** (John 15:16)

God's plans for this world are no secret. He has made his plans known to us, through his word, the Bible. He has forewarned us of the judgement that's coming and he has revealed his plan of salvation.

His purpose is that we might align ourselves with him and be instruments in his hands to accomplish his purposes. And that's what Noah does.

As we read on Noah is an example to us of a man who responds to God's words by trusting and obeying all that God says. We need to pay attention to Noah's example - our second heading.

### **Noah's example**

Please look down at verse 14.

God says to Noah:

**'So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: the ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and**

**upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark - you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.'**

**Noah did everything just as God commanded him.**

What a spectacle it must have been!

The design is basically just a big box. If we look down at the footnote in the NIV, it tells us that it was about 135 metres long, 23 metres wide and 14 metres high. It had three decks divided into rooms, one door and an opening for light and air just below the roof. It was made for one purpose only, and that was to float. Noah didn't need to be able to steer it. It didn't need oars or sails. It just needed to float and stay dry. What strange plans they must have seemed to be. Noah's neighbours must surely have laughed their socks off as he set about building a boat in the middle of the desert, miles from the sea. If there ever was a time when obeying God seemed foolhardy, this was it.

But Noah had good reason for doing so. God had forewarned him of the flood which he was about to unleash on the world and the destruction that would follow. And in addition to that, God promised Noah that he would establish his covenant with him.

We won't discover the details of that covenant until chapter 9, when the flood is over. But what is most important is what it represents. It tells Noah and his family that they've got a future.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties which concerns their future relationship. Noah may not know the details yet but, nonetheless, it tells him that he and his family have a future. It's the promise of a new life and a fresh start beyond the flood.

And that's the significance of the instruction to bring two of all living creatures into the ark with him and his family. The different kinds of creatures are listed in the same order in which they appeared in the account of creation, in chapter 1: birds, animals and creatures that move along the ground.

It's a clear sign of God's intention to re-populate the earth just as he had populated it originally.

And, amazingly, Noah didn't need to go looking for these animals; they would come to him! It's an awesome display of God's power and sovereignty.

This is what gives Noah and his family the confidence to build the ark and then live in it. When we live by the promises of God, then we have no reason to fear, no matter how foolish and bewildering our loyalty to God may appear. Noah trusted God's words and he acted on them.

This is our part in our fellowship with God; it's costly obedience in a world that has turned its back on him.

There may be times when we don't understand God's commands, and they perplex us. Our obedience will certainly perplex those around us. They might snigger when we tell them that we go to church on Sundays and attend Bible studies during the week. They may look down their noses when we refuse to laugh at dirty jokes and join in with office banter. They will certainly lift an eyebrow when we say that we're saving sex for marriage. They may wonder if we're in our right minds when we tell them that we believe in coming judgement and one way of salvation through faith in Jesus. Loyalty to Christ is costly in various ways. But it's the promises of God that give us confidence to bear it. Trusting him, we obey.

Noah's faithful obedience is an example for us to follow. And his faithful obedience preaches a powerful message. So we're going to end by thinking briefly about Noah's message - our final heading.

### Noah's message

Noah is included among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, which says this:

**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 is in keeping with faith.** (Hebrews 11:7)

Noah's faith condemned the world because his obedience in building the ark didn't touch the hearts of those around him. They saw the construction project taking shape. They saw the amazing sight of animals coming to him in pairs. They had every reason to find out what it all signified and to take the coming destruction seriously. We might say that the ark was Noah's faith made visible. And Noah may also have preached to those around him and explained the importance of being right with God. That may be what the apostle Peter means when he calls Noah 'a **preacher of righteousness**' (2 Peter 2:5). Through his actions and possibly also through words, Noah warned his generation of what was to come and urged them to get right with God. Yet they paid no attention. It made no impression on the hearts of those around him. We can easily imagine how they might have mocked him and made him the butt of their jokes. But crucially, and fatally, they ignored the warning of coming judgement and failed to respond.

What a tragedy to think that it was Noah's faith that condemned those around him. And ours will do the same today. As we walk faithfully with God day by day our words and

actions testify to the importance of being right with him. And when those around us scoff and pay no attention, it merely confirms their condemnation.

But it needn't be that way.

By faith Noah **became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.**

This was the evidence of God's grace at work in Noah's life. God's grace found him and held on to him. The life of faith could not have been easy for Noah in a corrupt and hostile world. It's hard to keep walking with God when that means continually going against the flow of the society you live in and resisting the pressure to conform to its ways. Yet grace kept hold of him. Through the doubts and temptations that inevitably came his way, God's grace held him firm and kept him close.

And it's due to God's grace that Noah was counted an heir of righteousness. This righteousness comes from Christ. He gives it to all his people on account of his life of perfect obedience and his atoning death on the cross. It is a gift of grace which we receive through faith. And if you've put your faith in Jesus then God's grace won't let you go...even through the hardest times of doubts and struggle.

God grace is at work in the most unlikely of places as God continues to work out his salvation purposes today. Though by nature our hearts oppose God, his grace can break down even the strongest resistance of the hardest heart. It can overcome the doubts of the most cynical sceptic and the rebellion of the most stubborn of sinners. Grace saved Noah. Grace has saved you and me and every other believer who belongs to Christ. And although, at present, our friends and neighbours may scoff at our faith and our obedience to God, grace can save them too.

That knowledge should encourage us as we walk faithfully with God. And it should fuel our prayers.

Let's pray now.