

The Power of Faith

By Faith: Pt.3

We're spending all summer looking at one chapter of one book of the New Testament – Hebrews chapter 11. Now, I've had some financial type folks tell me that all this talk of "Chapter 11" is making them nervous. That's the chapter in the Federal Bankruptcy Code that allows business' to reorganize their debts in order to survive. But this is a *positive* chapter 11 because Hebrews Chapter 11 is all about faith. About faith in Jesus Christ and how on the cross he...paid our debts...so yeah, maybe there is some parallel as I think about it!

We've been looking at this chapter for a couple of weeks and we've been looking at the first six verses and what they have to tell us about the nature of faith – what it is, how we get it, etc. But today we're only going to read one *verse* of this one chapter. Hebrews 11:7 and with it we are going to begin the case study portion of the chapter. Over and over you read about different men and women and their experience of faith as an example for everyone who has come after them. It's often called the "Hall of Faith." And today we come to the case study of faith we have in Noah.

So let's start off by reading the text; **Hebrews 11:7**. "*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.*"

Now so far this summer, we've been seeing that faith *starts* with thinking. Faith *begins* with thinking and understanding and reasoning. Faith is *not* at first a blind leap *against* thinking and against reasoning and against understanding. Not at all! We saw in verse 3 of this passage, Christians are people who have come to understand that God created the world, that the visible world came from the invisible, supernatural, eternal world.

And therefore, as we looked at this before, we saw Christians have come to see, through their thinking, the physical universe is not self-explanatory. That if you get rid of the premise that there's a creator God, then our rationality, our humanity, our moral sense, much of history and biology, become inexplicable. Now we're not going to recount all that – we've covered that pretty well for the first two weeks.

But that's very important to understand, because the conventional wisdom is that people of science *think* and people of faith *believe* – but the conventional wisdom is wrong. Some of the most brilliant thinkers in the Western world have been Christians. The reality is that most people who do not come into the Christian faith it is due to a refusal to think. We live in a shallow age – most people can't be bothered to see a *movie* that doesn't have an action scene every 8 and half minutes, much less engage in deep thinking about the meaning of life, the universe and everything.

Now of course that's not true of everybody. But for a large strata of the non-Christian society, that is the case. And I will concede that there are plenty of people in the church who don't engage in thinking about the faith either. That's why the church in America is so unattractive to many people today. A lot of Christians are simply reacting to culture war fears, without really running the issues through the lens of the faith. But to react to those Christians and sniff, "Well, if *that's* what a Christian is...no thanks." That's not thinking either. That's not an intellectual approach, that's an emotional approach. So faith starts with thinking.

But now, today, we get to this case of Noah. And we see that Christian faith is more than thinking because the Christian message, the gospel, is much more than an idea. It is not just an idea; it's a power. Paul says in **Romans 1:16**, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the **power** of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...*" In fact, the gospel, the Christian message, is divine power in the *form* of ideas.

That means on the one hand, it does have a content. It must be consented to. That's the reason why faith starts with understanding. You have to understand it. It has to be coherent. *But* it's a power in the form of ideas. Paul says in **Colossians 1:5-6**, "*The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that **has come to you.***"

*In the same way, the gospel is **bearing fruit and growing...***" The gospel *comes* to you. It bears fruit in you. You see, it's a *living* thing. And therefore, we say if the gospel is going to be the power in your life, you can't just think about it. You have to let it in. You have to trust. You have to live on it.

In other words, many people don't become Christians because they refuse to think, but there are many other people who don't become Christians because they will *only* think. That's all they'll do. They'll think about it. But the gospel is alive. It comes to you. The gospel says, "I am not just ideas. I am divine power in the form of ideas. You can't just think about me. You can't just talk about me. You can't just reason about me. You must let me in. You must start to trust in me."

Of course faith involves trust. All faith. I test drove a Tesla earlier this year and you've heard about how it has that auto-pilot feature? Well I'm out there with it on MoPac going about 70 mph and I switch it on and I've got my hands hovering just above the steering wheel. And it's going fine, but then I see a big curve in the road approaching. And the closer it gets *everything* in me is screaming "grab the wheel you fool!" My head understood but my stomach was not having it.

And I was talking to the lady at the dealership about it when we got back and she said, “Yeah, the autopilot feature is a lot like marriage. The longer you’re in it, the more trust you develop.” And I thought that was a pretty brilliant analogy. You have to first make a *decision* to trust – it starts with the rational mind – but before you truly develop trust, you have to commit.

It’s the same thing with Christian faith. How does the gospel move from being an idea to being a power? You stop just believing *in* God and you start believing *God*. You stop just thinking and reasoning about it and you actually begin to live upon it. You take your hands off the wheel as it were. You say, “*If* Jesus is the *King*, I can’t continue to live as if I’m my *own* king.” It’s to say, “If *he is* the Savior, I can’t live as if I’m my own savior.” In other words, you work it out into your life. You let the *reasons* of faith become the *power* of faith.

Now how does that happen? How can faith become not just an idea but a power? How can you move from just thinking and a kind of intellectual belief into *trust*? Noah shows us the way. Now there will be other cases we’ll look at as we move on through the summer, but Noah is the case study today. He does three things; and these three things, if *you* do them, will also bring the power of faith into your life. The three things he does are **he believes God, he condemns the world, and he hides in the ark**. He *believes*, he *condemns*, and he *hides* in the ark. And so must you. Here, let me show you.

Number one, first of all we’re told, Noah believed God. Do you see what it says? It says, (v.7) “*By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark ...*” Now here’s a definition of faith for us today – I’ve ready alluded to it - Christian faith is not just believing *in* God; it’s believing God. Do you remember in verse 6 where it said if you want to come to God, you must believe He exists? In other words, you do have to believe *in* God obviously, because the gospel is ideas, but it’s more.

So you have to believe in God, but at a certain point, you have to believe God. What does that mean? It means you have to begin to let what *God* says about reality define reality instead of what you *see*, what you *feel*, what your peer group says. You let what *God says*, what He *tells* you, be your definition. You stop just believing *in* God and you begin to believe what He says. You believe God. Now here’s the example.

God comes to Noah, and says, “Noah, there’s a wave coming, a dark wave, a wave deeper than despair, an omnipotent wave, and it will sweep everything away before it. *Nothing* will be able to stop it. *Nothing* will be able to stand before it. I want you to get ready.” And so on the basis of that, *for years* Noah, in the middle of nowhere, built an ark.

Noah, while the birds were chirping, while the sun was shining, and while the people of the world were frolicking and laughing without a thought of God...Noah built an ocean liner in the middle of Kansas. Why? Do you know why? It says, "...*in holy fear.*"

Thomas Manton was a 17th century Puritan minister who preached 65 sermons *just* on Hebrews 11 – don't worry, I'm not aiming for his record! But 5 of them covered just v.7 and Noah. And Manton said the difference was the people of the world did not tremble with fear until the water reached the rooftops. Here's his actual quote: Wicked men do not consider the threatening, till, by all circumstances of providence, it is ready to be accomplished. The wicked tremble in hell, or at the hour of death; but the godly tremble in the church at the word of God. So did those in Noah's time, when they ran from the bottom of houses to the top, from thence to trees, from trees to mountains, but Noah trembled when God did but speak of these things. (Manton, Hebrews Sermon XXXVI, 510)

Noah trembled in fear when God did but speak. Now the word "fear" here doesn't mean fright. It's awe, respect, reverence. You see? Focus. It means focus. What does this word "fear" tell us about faith?

Noah said, "I am not going to be defined by what I see. The sun shining...it won't last. The birds chirping...won't last. The people laughing...won't last. I will not be defined by this. I will be defined by what God *says*. I don't just believe *in* God in a general way. I believe *God*." That's faith.

Now let me apply it for a minute before we move on to the next part. Christian friends, let me appeal to you here. What defines you? It's up to you. Look, let's say you're struggling with anger. You're struggling with resentment. You don't want to call yourself bitter, but you are. You're angry because of what somebody has done to you or what some people have done to you. You feel wounded. Okay. You want freedom? You can either be moved by things not seen or you can be moved by things which are seen.

You can look at your wounds, the wounds that have been inflicted on you – they're real. Or you can look at *Jesus'* wounds, dying on the cross for you. Which is it? Are you going to be moved by the wounds that are unseen or the wounds that are seen? In other words, if you look at the cross, do you believe Jesus died for you? To look at the cross is to be *moved* by that and to say, "Lord Jesus, I hurt you, and you forgave me. It cost you a lot. Now if I forgive this person here, it's going to cost me something, but *nothing* like what it cost you."

And what happens? Freedom comes. Why does the freedom come? You're moved by the things that aren't seen. You tremble before the wonderful things God has said to you. Here are the things that are seen: bills, sicknesses, criticism. And then here is the Word of God. In Jesus Christ, the great bill has been paid. As the Holy Spirit has come into you, the great disease has been healed. As God's love has come to you in Christ, it means the only critic you have to fear...why, you're in His arms!

So are you going to look at the bills, are you going to look at the diseases, are you going to look at the criticism and be moved by that...or are you going to tremble at the wonderful words, "I love you. I care for you. I have given my life to you"? What will move you? Do you want freedom? Do you want to be able to say, like Noah, who looked around and said, "I am not controlled by anything, no matter how appetizing it looks, no matter how ugly and frightening it looks. I am free"? Do you want to be free? Do you want to have that power of faith? You stop just believing *in* God, and you start believing God.

Let me put it to you one other way. This is always a poignant example in a place like Austin. Are you controlled by what God says? Let's just go with the things there's consensus on. You know, virtually every single religion shares moral standards in some form or another. Honesty. Purity.

Let me give you one. The Bible says you must never sever the relationship between physical sex and total relational commitment. The exclusivity of sex. You want consensus? All of Judaism *and* Christianity and all of Islam and most all the Eastern religions have *always* said for centuries, "You must not have any sex outside of marriage." Okay. That's what? The unseen word. And then there's all the seen stuff. Just turn on the TV in America and you will *see* it! Sex as commodity, not commitment.

Now my question to you is...What moves you? Do you *really* think there's no flood coming? Do you really think there are no consequences to breaking that Word of God? Do you? What *moves* you? When are you going to start trembling? Parents, you ever say something to your kids like, "You can believe me now or you can believe me later."? They've got a paper coming due at school and they are procrastinating. You say, you can sweat over the paper now, or you will *really* sweat over it on due day. That's what Thomas Manton was saying. You can tremble when God "does but speak", or you will tremble later when the storm comes.

You can tremble now at what God's Word says about sexuality or...Listen, if there is a God, it's not good enough just to believe *in* God. If you believe in God, then He created you. If He designed you then He knows how you're meant to operate. He knows how your heart works. He knows how sexuality works. Are you saying there are no consequences to violating what God says? You can tremble now, or you'll tremble later. Don't just believe *in* God. Believe *God*, and you'll be free. Now that's the first thing Noah did. What's the second thing?

The second thing Noah did is, Noah condemned the world. *“By faith he condemned the world...”* Now this word “condemned”, at first it might look like it meant Noah went around scolding everybody, but of course if you read the passage, you realize we're not talking about Noah just denouncing people. One commentator says: “The writer's statement that Noah ‘condemned humanity’ need imply no more than that the life of a person of firm faith and faithfulness to God constitutes a sharp rebuke to a godless generation. So Josephus implies that Noah shamed his contemporaries by the quality of his faith, which threw their skepticism into high relief.” (Lane, Word, 340))

So look, there are two aspects to this word “condemn”. By his *faith*, by what he *did*, by what he *believed*, he condemned the world. To condemn the world means to prove it wrong and to stand against it. To condemn the world means you have to have **proving** power and **standing** power. Proving power and standing power. It is *impossible* to stand against oppressive values, to stand against an abusive world - a world that gobbles up the poor and the defenseless - without faith. And here's why.

First of all, you have to have proving power and here's what I mean by that. You *can't* simply say to the world, “You just need to be nicer.” You can't say to the world, “Let's nurture. Let's love. Let's tolerate diversity.” Do you know why? You have to *prove* to the world that it's wrong. Here's what I mean. People say, “*Why* should I be nurturing? *Why* should I tolerate diverse people? That's not even natural. I mean does the lion tolerate the gazelle?” A real life example of course is the depiction of Germans as cats and Jews as rats in the powerful *Maus* animated novel. How can you tell a cat to tolerate a rat?

You see, if there is no God or if we can't invoke God or if we don't know there's a God, all values are culturally relative, right? All values are relative. Now, you see, many people today say, "Since all values are relative therefore we should be tolerant of each other," but that doesn't work. That doesn't prove anything! Do you know why? If all things are relative, then *tolerance* is relative. It means, therefore, if everything is relative, if there is no God, then everything is relative, and *you* might want to hug instead of slug, but that's just because you're part of the wimpy Austin liberal establishment.

And if all things are relative, you can't condemn anything I do. On what basis do you say your liberalism is morally superior to my "redneck-ism"? On what basis do you say your tolerance of diversity is superior to my selfishness and oppressiveness? On what basis? You cut the ground out from under you. Do you know why? You can't prove anything. The question is... Why should I be tolerant? What *reason* do I have to be tolerant other than the naked power you're bringing to bear on the discussion?

And the answer is, you see, without faith, you *cannot* stand against the world. You can't prove a thing. Is there a God? If there is, *then* you can condemn. **(Galatians 3:28)** "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

If there is no God, if there isn't a Judge in heaven, if there's no objective standard, you can't condemn anything. You can't condemn the racism. You can't condemn the authoritarianism. You can't say tolerance is better. Why? Don't you see? You might think Christianity is false, but at least you can admit - I hope - it has resources for condemning the world.

But if you don't believe in God, if you don't believe in some faith, if you don't have any religious faith, you can't condemn. You know the mean, oppressive, dog-eat-dog values? You can't say they're wrong. You can't even *define* what's wrong, but that's not all you need. Oh no. Even if you had intellectual resources for condemning the world, you need personal resources. You don't just need proving power. You need *standing* power.

And the fact is, you need to have some kind of moral energy inside. And the Bible says you get an infusion of moral power when you become a Christian. When you receive Christ, you become "partakers of the divine nature" as Peter says. The law is written on your heart. The Holy Spirit comes in and empowers you. You have to have that. Or you can't condemn the world.

Well, let me put it to you this way. We said it's not enough just to believe *in* God. If you only believe *in* God, you'll only believe *in* forgiveness. But if you believe *God*, you'll *experience* forgiveness. And only when you experience forgiveness will you be able to forgive. Only when you experience the glory of God will it humble you and change the structure of your personality and psychology.

The only way you get standing power, the only way you really become a more humble person, become a bolder person, become a forgiving person is if something from the outside comes inside and gives you that infusion of moral energy. That's what you have in Christianity. Before moving to the last point, let me just ask you...How is it with you? Are you condemning the world? Are you even trying?

Let me put it to you this way. Is anybody making fun of you? Surely you know in a place like Austin if you live an unselfish life and a honest life and a humble life, people are going to laugh at you. You will be every bit as silly as Noah. "Old fool! Building an ocean liner in the middle of Kansas." You will look just as stupid as that. Just the biblical sex ethic alone. But all kinds of areas. Is anybody making fun of you for your moral character?

And if not, why? Is it just because you look like everybody else? Now if you're not condemning the world, it's either because you're not a Christian and you don't have the resources or else you *are* a Christian and you're refusing to draw on them, but you can and you should and you must. So Noah believed God; Noah condemned the world.

Ok, now lastly, third, Noah hid in the ark. We have two pictures here. We're told, (v.7) *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family...and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*" And at this point, we have come in to the heart of Christianity, the heart of the Bible.

Two pictures. Let's look at them. The first picture is an heir. "*He became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*" Now what's an heir? It's a great illustration. An heir is someone who got rich through somebody else. An heir is somebody who receives something they didn't earn.

Example: Here is a woman, and she becomes rich because she is a tremendous entrepreneur. She has an idea, she develops it, takes it to market and it succeeds. Why is she rich? Because of her performance. Because of her achievement. She is talented enough to pull it all off. Why has she become rich? She made money the old fashioned way, she earned it. Then she leaves it to her children. Now, why are her children rich? How did *they* get rich? Not because of their abilities but because of their *relationship*.

Now, in every other religion *and* deeply rooted in every single human heart - in this room and everywhere - is the conviction that the purpose of religion is to develop a righteousness, is to weave a righteousness, a record of moral decency, and give it to God. Everybody believes that in their heart, and every religion, *except* Christianity, promotes it. Whether it's Ten Commandments, Five Pillars, Four Noble Truths, or plain old Karma. You see, what's the purpose of religion? It's to live this moral life, a righteous life. Help other people. Be faithful to your family. Tell the truth. Help people in need.

You weave it, and you give it to God. And *if* you do and *when* you do, God loves you and favors you and listens to your prayer and you're saved. But Christianity is *utterly* different. The gospel says first you don't do something; you receive something. The gospel says faith in Christ makes you *an heir*. The gospel says faith in Christ gives you a righteousness you *inherit*, not that you earn. Let me put it this way. There's a righteousness that is not something we give to God but it *comes*.

What did it say, "that comes by faith". It comes! It's from God. It's not ours. This is utterly different than what any other religion says. It's completely different. Don't you see? It comes at us. I'll put it this way. When the children inherit the wealth of the mother, though they did not earn it, they are every bit as wealthy as their mother was.

And when you receive Christ, when you have faith in Christ, that faith is not a way to *merit* the favor of God; it unites you in a relationship so that it *comes*. It comes fully. It comes completely, and you become - though you didn't earn it - *every bit* as beautiful, every bit as loved, every bit as honored, every bit as glorious *in God's sight* as Jesus Christ. An heir! "Joint heirs with Christ", Paul says. You're heirs with Christ. Do you know what that means? This is totally different. It's a righteousness that *comes*, not that you *give*. It's a righteousness you *inherit*, not that you *earn*.

You say, "Well *how*? How could it be possible?" And the answer is the last and the second picture: the ark. There's a flood coming, and no one can possibly survive that flood. We're all going to sink. It's the flood of God's judgment. We've said here before, God is the fairest Judge. When you read what the Bible says about God's judgment, you will see there has never been a fairer version of judgment.

We're told, for example, that God will judge us by the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That means God is simply going to say what everybody knows in their own heart. He is going to say, "The Golden Rule! Meet other people's needs with all of the joy, with all of the eagerness, with all of the strength and all the power with which you meet your own." But nobody does it. There can't be a more fair way to judge people. *Nobody* does it.

In Romans 2, we're told even further God will simply judge you according to what *you* in your conscience know and impose on other people. In other words, it's like there is an invisible tape recorder around your neck, and all through your life it's just picking up what you tell *other people* they ought to do. It only comes on and only records whatever you tell other people they ought to do. It just picks up your moral standards for others.

And we're told on the last day God is going to take that tape recorder off and He is going to play it back. He says, "I'll tell you what. I'll be as fair as a judge possibly can be. I'm going to judge you simply on the basis of what you want *other people* to be." And nobody on the face of the earth will live up to the recording of *your own voice*. Your own words will condemn you!

Don't you see? There's a flood coming, and who in the world will be able to float in that? Let me put it this way. If there is no judge, there's no hope for the world. Remember? We can't even *define* what is evil. And we certainly have no hope. If there's no Judge, if there's no God, we can't even define evil, and there's no hope of any solution for evil. So if there is no Judge, what hope is there for the world?

But if there *is* a Judge...what hope is there for you and me? We're all going to sink. Who can survive? The judgment of God is a flood, and the weight of our sins and our records pulls us to the bottom. And do you know what happens when the weight pulls you a couple of miles deep? Judgment. Who can possibly survive and float in the judgment of God, in the flood of God? I'll tell you who. Only one. Jesus Christ.

Jesus can *walk* on water. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died a perfect death to pay for our sins. And as a result, the Bible tells us the way of salvation is not to imitate Christ but to *hide in Christ*. Christ is the ark. Christ is the rock. Christ calls himself the rock upon which you can build a house – a life - that will withstand the storm. Go to the rock. Go to the ark. Hide yourself in the ark, and you're saved from the flood.

Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee.

You say, "Well, how do you do that?" When you admit you're going to sink in the flood of God's wrath, of any kind of fair judgment of any sort, and say, "I rely *completely* on what Jesus Christ has done for me." Don't you see Jesus as the ark means he *bore* the judgment? Have you ever really been in a hurricane? Have you ever been in a tornado? Have you ever been in a tidal wave? It beats with this deadly power.

What does it mean to say Jesus is our ark? It means the judgment of God beats on him. You're safe if you're a Christian. You are dry because it's beating on him. He is our refuge. He is our shield. It all falls on him. And the most incredible thing is just as the very same water that crushed everyone else, that water raised the people in the ark to heaven. The *same* water.

The Bible tells us - and this is the most astonishing thing of all - that what happened on the cross was Jesus *paid* our penalty. That means God's justice now drives Him to love us. Don't you see what the cross means? It means God doesn't love us in spite of His justice; God loves us because of His justice. God's love and God's justice are no longer at odds.

Jesus died for us. He died to pay for our sins. God could not take two payments for any of our sins. It would be unjust for God to take us and rebuke us and to cast us off - if Jesus was already rebuked and cast off - which means if you are in the ark, the very judgment of God, the justice of God, you *ride* the justice of God into the stars. You ride it past the stars into His heart, where He welcomes you.

Do you know what the rainbow means then? You know the story - I guess I shouldn't have assumed that everyone knows the Noah and the ark story in these days of biblical illiteracy. But once the flood subsides - after 40 days and nights and all - the rainbow comes out, and God says, "I will never again judge the earth like this."

What do you think God is saying? Is He saying, "Oppsies, bit of an overreaction, I suppose. It appears I lost my temper. But don't worry, I will never do that again"? That's not what He's saying. In fact, if you read in **Genesis 8:21**, it says, "*Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.*" No, He knows. What is He saying?

Do you know what it *cost* God to make that promise? Do you know what the rainbow cost God? He is saying, "There won't be any more judgment on you because My Son will take the judgment." Don't you see? He says, "There won't be any more. The rainbow is for you, but it cost Me My Son." Hide in the ark. Get into Christ.

Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee.

Now let's finish this way. If you do the three things Noah has done - if you believe God, if you condemn the world, and if you hide in Jesus Christ - you will be able to what Noah did: smile at the storm. Do you know what Noah is saying when he looks outside through the ark? I like to imagine he's like Forrest Gump riding out the hurricane, "Come on. Go ahead, flood. Come on, rain. Come on, water. The lower you seek to lay me, the higher you simply raise me."

Now, friends, if you do the three things Noah did, you're in the same condition. Do you know why? First of all, you can look at peace at the storms of your sin. Do you know what your record is? Everybody goes into the storms of life with your record. Have you ever noticed when your troubles arise, when people are criticizing you, when everything is falling apart, you say, "But I'm a good person. I take care of my mother. I don't deserve this. I'm better than most people"? Isn't that at the heart of a "why me?" attitude?

Your ark is your *record*, and that ark will *never* handle the storms of life. There are too many holes in it. But if you're like Noah, you can say, "Now there is no condemnation for those who are *in*, inside, Jesus Christ."

Christian friends, if you have suffering and troubles coming, don't you realize it says in **James 1:2**, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...*" And **1 Peter 1:7** clarifies why - it's not masochism, "~~*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*~~"

In other words, if you get in the ark, if you get into Christ, if you obey him and if you trust in him, no matter how bad the storms of life beat on you, no matter how bad your life gets, it will turn you into a great heart. That storm will raise you up. It will make you more compassionate. It will make you more humble. It will make you a great person. The *same* storm, the same troubles, the same things that crush other people - make them bitter and hard - will make you wonderful and holy and loving and compassionate and trusting.

As John Newton said in his great hymn, aptly titled *Be Gone Unbelief, My Savior is Near...*

By prayer I will wrestle,
And he will perform;
With Christ in the vessel
I smile at the storm.

Let's pray...