

By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark

Hebrews 11:7

Andy Lanning, 9/20/20

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, last Sunday evening in a sermon on Matthew 10:20—which text is this: “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”—I made the comment that Noah did not build the ark, that God *did* build the ark. That comment in the sermon generated some discussion in the congregation, and as a result of that discussion the consistory took a decision this week: “Motion made to have Rev. Lanning clarify his statement made in the sermon, that Noah did not build the ark.” And that motion carried. This sermon this evening is the clarification that the consistory requires. The consistory’s requirement is made with a desire that the congregation be helped and encouraged in the truth of the building of the ark and the salvation that God gives to his people through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The clarification of the statement “Noah did not build the ark; God built the ark”—the clarification is *not* a retraction of that statement. It is *not* a retreat from that statement and may not be a retraction or a retreat. It is true: Noah did not build the ark. It is true that Jehovah God built the ark. In fact, that is the gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Noah built an ark to the saving of his house. But Noah did not save his house. God saved Noah’s house. Jehovah God has given salvation to us through faith in Jesus Christ, but we do not save ourselves through faith in Jesus Christ. God saves us through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no retracting and no retreating from the statement “Noah did not build the ark; God built the ark.”

The clarification that is needed is not to change the statement or to go back on the theology. The clarification that is needed is to see what it means that Noah prepared the ark by faith. And that’s our text tonight. Oh yes, Noah prepared an ark. That word “prepared” is the word “built.” Noah built an ark. Hebrews 11:7 says so. But Noah prepared an ark *by faith*. By faith. That takes us to the theology of ark-building, and the theology of ark-building is that it occurs by faith. The theology of salvation of Noah’s house by ark-building is that Noah built that ark by faith, so that it was *God* who saved Noah and God who saved Noah’s family. And by that faith Noah became heir of the righteousness in Jesus Christ which is by faith. And there’s the importance of understanding this truth of who built the ark. If Noah saved his family by his building of the ark, then Noah’s righteousness is his own righteousness, wrought by his own hands. But if *God* saved Noah by building the ark, then Noah’s righteousness and yours and mine is a righteousness provided by God himself without our cooperation, without our input.

And so tonight we consider that word of God in Hebrews 11:7, “By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark.” In the first place, consider who. In the second place, consider what. And in the third place, consider why. By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark. Who, what, and why.

BY FAITH NOAH PREPARED AN ARK

- I. Who
- II. What
- III. Why

Genesis 6 records the building of the ark. Genesis 6 opens with the wickedness of mankind in the earth, the violence of mankind that filled the earth, the doing by mankind of everything that God had forbidden; so that the whole earth was corrupt, and every imagination of

the thought of every heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6 paints the picture for us of the total depravity of man. *Every* imagination of the thought of *every* heart was only evil continually. In the hearts of all of the men on earth, save for eight, there was no thought of good; there was no love for God; there was no regard for his law. But in the heart of every man on the earth there was only evil continually. Man was corrupt, and the whole earth was corrupt.

There were eight souls upon the earth in whom God had worked, giving to them new life, so that although they also had that old man of sin, every imagination of which was only evil continually, they also had the new man in the Lord Jesus Christ. Noah and his family were found upon the earth, and Noah and his family found grace in the eyes of God. That Noah and his family found grace in the eyes of God means that God sovereignly, according to his own sovereign decree, in his own sovereign grace, looked upon them in mercy and love. Jehovah God had chosen them. Jehovah God had redeemed them by the blood of Jesus Christ, who would be born in the fullness of time for their salvation. Jehovah God established his covenant with Noah and with his seed after him. Jehovah God loved Noah and loved his family.

God came to Noah, then, and announced, "I will destroy the earth with a flood. All flesh has corrupted its way before me; all flesh shall be destroyed." God gave Noah instructions for what he was to do. And what Noah was to do was to prepare an ark. He was to build a three-story structure, with a door in the side and a window in the top, made of shittim wood, covered with pitch within and without. He was to prepare food for himself, for his family, and for all of the animals who would be brought to him. And then he was to enter into that ark with the animals that God would bring two by two, or by sevens in the case of clean animals. And Noah and his family were to abide in that ark until God had destroyed all flesh from the face of the earth and poured out his awful judgment upon the wicked world of sin and death and destruction.

The task that God gave to Noah was a huge task. It was a task that would take him not months, not even years, but many decades to complete. Now, whether that was 120 years, which is when God first announced that there would be destruction through a flood; or whether that was a bit later, so that it took him 70 or 80 years to build the ark, makes no difference now, though it may be an interesting detail. But the point is that God gave Noah a huge task for him and his sons to do, so that he would be decades in the project of preparing an ark, of building an ark.

We read about this project in Genesis 6:22, "Thus did Noah." Noah did it. Noah worked at it. Noah took a saw in his hand and a mallet in his hand, and Noah did what God said in building an ark according to the specifications that God had given Noah: three stories high, with a door in the side and a window in the top. Genesis 6:22 drives that home: "Thus did Noah: according to *all* that God commanded him, so *did he*." Noah prepared the food, growing that food or gathering what grew in the wild; drying that food, perhaps, for the many days and months in the ark; making sure that there was enough for two by two or by sevens of all of the animals upon the earth. All that God commanded, Noah did. Noah sweated in this work, undoubtedly. He labored in it. This took up his nights and his weekends, as well as his days; for in addition to growing the food and taking care of the family that was his regular calling, he also built the ark. Noah was diligent in this calling, not leaving off the calling, but day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, building the ark, swinging his hammer, and sawing the logs. Noah diligently, faithfully, actively built the ark.

Noah did all of this, knowing what he was doing. Noah knew when he swung his hammer what would happen when that hammer hit the nail or the peg or the dowel. It would drive it into the wood and join the timbers of the ark. Noah willed to take a jar or a bucket of pitch, of tar, to dip into that tar some kind of device to apply that tar to the sides of the ark and pitch the whole

ark within and without. Genesis 6 is full of the activity of Noah, who *did* according to all of the commandment of God.

What we are describing here is the historical fact. Noah did what God said. Noah prepared an ark. Noah built an ark. That's a historical fact. That does *not* describe the theological reality. The theological reality, the doctrinal truth of the building of the ark, is explained in Hebrews 11:7. The theological reality of building the ark is this: *by faith* Noah prepared an ark. *By faith* Noah built an ark. By faith he sweated. By faith he swung his hammer. By faith he sawed the timbers. By faith Noah prepared or built an ark.

The theological reality described by that phrase "by faith" is that everything Noah did was the work of God. All of his sweating, his building, his hammer-swinging, his sawing, his gathering food—all of that was the work of God. That work did not proceed out of Noah as the source of that work. That work did not come from Noah with regard to the strength of Noah to accomplish the work. That work of Noah did not depend upon *him* but depended upon the sovereign good pleasure and work of Jehovah God. And the splendor, or the glory, of that work did not redound to Noah but to Jehovah God, who alone gets the credit for the building of the ark. When Hebrews 11:7 informs us "By faith Noah built the ark," it is pointing us away from Noah to Jehovah God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom Noah was united. That's what faith is! Faith is the union to the Lord Jesus Christ and in him to Jehovah God. Faith is not the product of the will or the work or the heart of man but is the gift of God, entirely the gift of God. That faith unites us to God and makes us one creature and one plant and one organism with the Lord Jesus Christ, so that his life is our life and so that all of our salvation, which is in him, becomes ours through that faith.

When we read, "By faith Noah built the ark," that is not telling us about the historical fact, but it is telling us about the theological reality. And therefore when we say, "Noah did not build the ark, but God built the ark," we are not describing the historical fact but the theological truth that lies behind the historical fact. *God* built the ark.

Now, we can say more about that. How is it that God built the ark? Well, as we saw last week, with regard to four things, "It is not ye that speak," says Jesus, "but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

With regard to the source of all of our activity, that source is not our own will or our own humanity or our own heart. The source is Jehovah God alone.

Secondly, with regard to the strength, the strength for raising the hammer and bringing it down again does not come from Noah or from us. That strength comes from God. Every twitch of every muscle fiber came from God as Noah built the ark. Every desire in Noah's heart to get up in the morning and get back to work on the ark came from God. The source and the strength is all of God.

Third, with regard to the sovereignty of the work—that is, upon whom the work depends—God is the one who built the ark. God did not tell Noah 120 years or 70 years, whatever it was, before the flood, "Noah, you must build an ark," and from that time on it depended upon Noah to do that work, so that the salvation of Noah and his family throughout all of those decades depended upon what Noah would do. Not at all! When God told Noah, "Build the ark," the building of that ark depended upon Jehovah God, who alone is sovereign and who alone accomplishes all of his good pleasure.

And in the fourth place, with regard to the splendor of the work—that is, the glory of the work and who gets the credit for the work—the credit does not go to Noah for the building of the ark; but the splendor, the glory, the credit goes to Jehovah God alone.

That's what it means that Noah did not build the ark. That's what it means that Jehovah God built the ark. That's what it means, as Jesus says, that it is not ye that speak but the Holy Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you. The source, the strength, the sovereignty, and the splendor is all God's and not in any sense Noah's.

This is the theology of our working. The theology of our working is that *God* is the author of those works. The theology of our working is that God does them. Now, we are active in those works. We desire to do those good works. We are conscious of the law of God as we do those works and consciously do them to his glory. The issue that we are facing here is not whether man is human. It's not whether man is an active creature. The issue is not whether man has a mind that understands things and knows things, and a will that desires things and decides things, and a body that performs things. The issue is not whether man is a man or whether man is active. The issue is, from whence do those good works proceed? From whence do they come? How does it happen that we do them? And then the answer is, by faith! By faith we do those works. They proceed from God through Jesus Christ. We are enabled to do them by his grace and strength. Good works depend not upon our willing or our desiring but upon Jehovah God, and the glory for them goes to Jehovah God.

This is the theology of ark-building, this is the theology of working, from eternity to eternity. This is not a truth hidden in a corner of the scriptures. This is a truth that is on all of the pages of the word of God. From eternity God prepared these good works that we should walk in them. Ephesians chapter 2:10. Ephesians 2:10 follows hard on the heels of verses 8 and 9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." And then sometimes someone will quote verse 10 as if verse 10 is a counterbalance to verses 8 and 9. Verses 8 and 9 say, "You're saved by grace, not by works." And sometimes it is thought, "That needs a counterbalance, so that that doctrine of salvation by works doesn't make us careless and profane." The doctrine of Ephesians 2:8-9 will not make the child of God careless and profane. It will not make him a stock and a block. It will not make him licentious. The doctrine of verses 8 and 9 will make a child of God zealous to perform good works. How does it go with you, beloved? You're saved by grace, not by works! When you hear that doctrine in faith, you and I *desire to work*, knowing that our salvation doesn't depend on it but that this is our thanksgiving to God.

Verse 10 is no counterbalance to 8 and 9 but explains where our good works then come from. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Regarding those good works, their credit, their source, the strength for them, and what depends upon them does not come from us in any sense. From before the foundation of the world, when we weren't even around, we weren't even born—God prepared all our good works even then, that we should walk in them in our daily life, believing in Jesus Christ and out of that faith performing these good works, which God prepared and decreed for us to walk in.

You can go that way in eternity and find this theology of working and ark-building. And you can go that way in eternity as well and find the same theology of ark-building and working. Go to the final judgment. At the final judgment, when all men appear before the judgment seat of Christ already glorified in our resurrected bodies, on the right hand of Jesus Christ as his sheep, with all of the goats gathered on his left hand, and the Lord Jesus Christ says to us about our works, "You gave me a cup of cold water to drink. You visited me when I was in prison." And the child of God at the final judgment will not stand before God and say, "You know, Jesus, you're right. I *did* quite a bit, didn't I?" The child of God will say, "When? When did I do those

things that you say I did?” The child of God at the final judgment, when Jesus himself mentions those good works—not as the ground of our justification, not as the ground of our judgment, but shows forth those good works to all as the demonstration of *his grace*—even then, the child of God says, “When?”

Or go further. Go all the way into the new heavens and the new earth, with all of the church perfected, gathered around the throne of God as described in Revelation 4:11. And what will the child of God be doing with the crown that he has received but taking it from his head and forever, forever, forever casting that crown before the throne of God as the testimony, “What I have was given me. All of it was given me.” The child of God in that day will say to all eternity, “All that I did was only thy gift. Therefore this crown belongs to thee.”

This is the theology of the Old Testament and the conquering of the land of Canaan, as we sing: “They gained not the land by the edge of the sword, their own arm to them could no safety afford, but *Thy* right hand saved, and the light of *Thy* face.” It was not the arm of the Israelites who gained the land with the sword—though they sweated and bled with the sword in their hand—but Jehovah’s hand, Psalm 40.

This is the testimony of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:10. “But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but *I labored more abundantly than they all.*” Oh yes, think of Paul’s labor, that historical fact. Yes, he did labor, walking hundreds and hundreds of miles as he brought the gospel from town to town, suffering shipwreck, teaching to his own hurt. The apostle Paul labored more abundantly than they all. What does he say about all of that labor? What’s his theology of ark-building and apostle-laboring? It is this: “*Yet not I.*” Who labored? “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

This is the apostle’s testimony also regarding his whole life, all of his work by the grace of God. Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless *I live.*” *I live.* “*Yet not I,* but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” I live, yet not I but Christ in me; and I live by the faith of the Son of God, who gave himself for me.

That theology of ark-building and that theology of working is the theology of our Reformed confessions in the Canons of Dordt, heads 3 and 4, article 14. We do not forget article 12 when we cite article 14. Article 12 acknowledges our humanity. Article 12 acknowledges our activity, our activity of faith even. “Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also, *man is himself rightly said to believe and repent,* by virtue of that grace received.” This theology of ark-building is no stock and block theology. It is no careless and profane theology. It is no antinomian, hyper-Calvinistic theology. The Reformed faith acknowledges, we are rightly said to repent and believe by virtue of the grace given us. But the Canons go on in article 14 to show it is not enough for this theology to say, “God gives us the grace and the strength so that we do it by his grace and his strength.” It’s not far enough to say that—God gives us the strength so that then we do it by his grace and strength. Article 14 says this: “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him.” Our faith is conferred by God into us, infused by God into us, breathed into us. “Or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and do to, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to

believe and the act of believing also.” How is it that we believe? Not only that God gives the strength and then by that strength we take it from there; but this: God gives not only the strength, but he gives the willing, the desiring, the deciding, and he gives the *act* of believing also. He gives the believing. That’s the Reformed confession regarding our faith and therefore also the Reformed confession regarding all of the working and ark-building that flows from that faith.

And all of that, that God is the one who does this, is evident from *what* Noah built. What did he build? What did he build? An ark. An ark. That’s not much. An ark is a box. That’s what the word *ark* means: it means *box*. The ark of the covenant was a box into which the tables of stone and Aaron’s rod were placed—a box. Well, the ark of the covenant is a box; the ark of Noah was a box too, a big box. That ark didn’t stand a chance against the judgment of God, not a chance. There was nothing about that ark that could save Noah and his family from the judgment coming. It was planks of gopher wood smeared with pitch. It wasn’t some beautiful ship with a curved hull and a beautiful prow. It was a box. A box! It could not withstand the stresses and strain of the waters of the flood. The torque on the ark would have rent it to pieces. It has been estimated that there’s no ship in the world ever built that could sustain the waters of the flood. Not even a steel aircraft carrier could sustain the waters of the flood. What was the flood? The fountains of the great deep breaking up, bursting like bombs through the ground. The windows of heaven opening, not just so that it rained hard but so that that ocean of the waters above the firmament that God had created, that ocean fell out of the heavens upon the earth and smashed upon the earth. All flesh choked and was crushed under the waters of the flood. What box of shittim wood smeared with pitch is going to withstand that?

And the door? The door of the ark? A door built into the side of the ark so that the animals could come in? How in the world is that door going to keep out these oceans of water smashing against it? What seal of tar smeared on with a branch of a tree, perhaps, is going to seal that door against the waters of the flood? How in the world is this ark going to float? There had never been a flood. Apparently there had never even been rain, much less the ocean of the heavens smashing upon the earth. What’s going to keep this ark, as soon as the water rises a bit, from capsizing and turning over, three stories high as it was, with a window in the top? There’s nothing about the ark that could save Noah and his family, nothing about it. The explanation for the salvation of Noah and his family is found in Genesis 7, which we didn’t read, which says, “God shut them in.” God shut them in. There’s the salvation of Noah and his family: God shut them in. The salvation of Noah and his family was entirely a work of Jehovah God. There was nothing that Noah contributed to that work of salvation. Noah did not save his family. God saved Noah’s family.

The evidence of that is the end of the text. “By the which he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” Now we are dealing with the most serious thing in the world. Now we are dealing with the righteousness of God’s people, which means that we are dealing with the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah God sent Jesus Christ for the salvation of his church. Jesus Christ, a righteous man. Jesus Christ, perfectly obedient to the law of God—obedient even unto death, even unto the death of the cross. Jesus Christ, who said yes perfectly to every law of the Lord. Jesus Christ, who took upon himself our curse due to us and suffered the wrath of God in our place. God sent Jesus Christ for our righteousness, that we, standing before the judge of heaven and earth, who crushes wicked men with a flood—we standing before that God are right with him, as right with him as Jesus himself, for our righteousness is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. We receive that righteousness by faith. That’s how Noah did. “By which faith he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” And that doesn’t

mean that Noah had to accomplish something and build something and work something in order to be righteous with God. His righteousness was an alien righteousness from outside of himself. It was the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as is ours.

And now will we say, “But man must do something; but man must work something; but man has his part and his role to have all of this righteousness of Christ”? That righteousness, which is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is by faith, which can only receive, which cannot give—can only receive what *God* gives.

To say that the theology of ark-building is that *Noah* did it, so that Noah had his place and his role upon which some aspect of his salvation depended, is to say that in Christ-giving and Christ-salvation, man has his place and his role to obtain it. It may not be. That may not be.

And all of this building of the ark Noah did because of God’s revelation to him of something. That’s what we read in the passage: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” And here we see what it is that faith takes hold of, what faith looks to for its comfort and for its assurance, and where it is that this strength and this source comes *from*. It comes from the Word of God, who is the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the scriptures. God came to Noah, and God said to Noah, “I will send a flood to destroy all flesh.” There had never been such a thing. Apparently there had never been rain, much less 40 days and 40 nights of it, much less the ocean of heaven and the fountains of the great deep breaking up. God came to Noah and revealed to him, “I will destroy all flesh. But Noah, I establish my covenant with you and with your seed. I will be your God, and you shall be my people. The judgment that falls upon the world will not destroy you—not because you’re going to build an ark! Before you ever build the ark, I declare to you, Noah, my covenant, my love for you in Jesus Christ. I establish my covenant with you. That’s why you will be saved when all the rest of the world perishes.”

And so it is for us, beloved, who ought to perish for our sins under the severe judgment of Jehovah God. What folly we have wrought in our own hearts and lives. What wickedness is found in our old man, who is corrupt through and through and dead in trespasses and sins. What disobedience we have committed against the law of God. But God comes to us and says to us, “I make my covenant with you in Jesus Christ and cover all of your sins in his blood. And therefore, when the rest of the world is perishing, you will not perish for the sake of my love, for the sake of my only begotten Son.”

And the result of that covenant promise of God, covenant grace of God, is that the child of God goes forth *honoring, respecting* Jehovah God, our Father who has saved us, with reverence and love. That was Noah. “Moved with fear.” Moved with awe and honor and respect and faith in Jehovah God and his promise, he prepared an ark.

Who built the ark? Who built the ark? The theology of ark-building is that Noah didn’t do it. Jehovah did. Thanks be to him. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word to us tonight. Apply it to our hearts. We thank thee for thy grace in Jesus Christ, thy eternal love, which thou hast bestowed upon us, saving us from thy wrath through the sacrifice of thine only begotten Son. Wilt thou give us now a firm desire and a will and a diligence and a zeal to work to thy glory in gratitude. And as we do so, we confess it is all thy work in us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.