

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## The Gallery of Faith - Hebrews 11: Enoch and Noah

This morning's talk is the second in the series entitled 'The Gallery of Faith'. The word 'gallery' always suggests to me a room where the public can view displays of any kind of fine art, but especially pictures. I work part-time in a fine art auction house that, over time, has sold a considerable number of quite valuable paintings. Through the years, I have seen pictures by many different artists, some of which have had to be explained to me by the art specialist. As he took me through the various aspects of the artist's work, I began to appreciate what the artist had seen and what he was trying to depict. Often my eyes were opened to moods and aspects of a scene I had not comprehended in my initial, cursory glance. I believe that that experience is similar to the subject of Enoch and Noah's faith we have before us today, because we need our eyes to be opened by the Spirit of God to appreciate the secrets of the life of faith.

As we can't see faith, it is, therefore, easy for us to say that it does not exist. When I was younger, a man at work used to say to me, 'Show me your God and I'll show you mine', meaning that he would take me to his local pub. He was only speaking in jest though I think that there was more than a germ of intent in his jocularly. What can't be experienced by our senses does not exist is a common attitude. Before we go any further I would like to suggest that the Bible has an answer to the criticism that we can't see the world of faith. As believers in God, we are instructed in the epistle of James to demonstrate our faith by our actions. James 2:18 states: "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

Our actions must always declare the validity of our faith, for though people can argue that there is no God, they can't deny that an individual believes, if the belief system is put into practice.

### Enoch

We live in an increasingly materialistic world that only seems to value what can be bought and sold. Faith does not fall into this category and, therefore, is not widely esteemed. The Bible, in Hebrews 11:6, states: "But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

This verse has at least two important things to say about faith that we need to note. The first one is that we cannot work ourselves into God's favour. Despite my emphasis, or rather James' emphasis, upon the need for works to demonstrate our faith, works can never take the place of faith. Faith must be present. I want to illustrate this by reference to two Bible characters. The primacy of faith is present throughout Scripture, but no where more so than in Hebrews 11, where we can locate Enoch and Noah, the two persons who are central to our study this morning. It also has to be stated that the Scriptures demand, not faith in any god, but rather, faith in **the** God. The God that Paul describes as, 'the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God', a God who, as the Scriptures make clear, demands moral and ethical standards of His followers.

I want now to refer to Enoch, the first example from the Gallery of Faith, for our study today. We can find the New Testament reference to him in Hebrews 11:5: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." The other reference is in Genesis 5:24. "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

We believe that man was created to walk with God, to have fellowship and communion with Him, as the prophet Micah states in Micah 6:8: 'and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Enoch presents to us a challenge in our days, because we can't say that it is more difficult to have a relationship with the living God now than it was for Enoch. If we are happy with the use of types, or pictures, to interpret and illustrate biblical concepts, then I suggest to you that Enoch, being the seventh in line of genealogy, or descendant of Seth, can be compared with Lamech, who was a peer of Enoch, and the seventh in his line, or a descendant of Cain. The Bible tells us that Lamech was a murderer and a polygamist, whereas Enoch walked with God. Even if you reject typical teaching, the point remains that Enoch's world was ridden with lust and violence, as is ours. My point is that it is not easy to be a believer in any age.

I was talking to some people, just before Christmas, about the events that our festivities celebrate. When the divinity of the Lord Jesus was mentioned, along with His miraculous birth, it was greeted with snorts of derision. 'Surely you don't believe that', it was suggested, with the implication that intelligent, educated people must dismiss the revelation of God in Christ as beyond acceptance. People, today, only want to believe things that are rational. Christianity, as demanded by Scripture, asks us to believe that Jesus is divine. He is the true Emmanuel, God with us. This is not rational, but it is a thought that, if we have faith, takes us soaring to the wondrous love of a living God who reveals Himself. Christians believe that the revelation of God, in and through Jesus, is the greatest secret that can be gained by man. 'Great is the mystery of Godliness', writes the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy. God manifest in flesh, is indeed a thought that is beyond the reach of rational investigation, but not beyond the grasp of faith to the man, or woman, touched by grace.

If only we could be content to accept, by faith, what God offers to us in Christ, we would be blessed indeed. This is part of the meaning of the verse we have read that states that we must have faith to please God. Out of His eternal love He has shown Himself in His beloved Son. It might be breath-taking in scope, yet the Christian Gospel asserts this in simple, direct language. John 3:16 states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Apostle's Creed declares the same truth when it records the fundamental beliefs of the early church: "I believe in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried".

It is essential that we believe because there is no other road we can travel down, if we are to know God, other than the avenue of faith. Certain Old Testament writers stated the same truth in Psalm 111:10, and Proverbs 1:7, when they declared the fear of the Lord to be the beginning of wisdom, or knowledge. Fear, in this context, denoted reverence for God, rather than timidity. There is nothing that can be inserted that could ever take away the primacy of faith, because the writer of Hebrews does not say that without faith it is difficult to please God, but that without faith it is **impossible** to please Him. I emphasise again that I am convinced that Enoch pleased God because he had faith in Him. I also emphasise, on the authority of Scripture, that if we want to please God then there is no other way open to us than the way of faith.

My second point regarding the life of Enoch is that he walked with God. This means that he had an on-going relationship with God. Again, this might, to an unbeliever, seem an irrational statement. How can we, in a material world, know God? The Scriptures teem with examples of men and women who did, and to illustrate my point I shall quote from two of Paul's letters. The first is Philippians 3:8: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

The other verse I want to read is found in 2 Timothy 1:12: "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

From these verses we can see that the great apostle knew, in a very real way, the presence of the Lord in his life in this world. Like Enoch before him, he walked with God, and though such an experience is not an automatic response in the life of every believer, it is a possibility for all who are Christians. I believe that Paul's experience can, in measure, be ours. We, like Enoch and Paul, can walk with God and demonstrate that experience by our behaviour and demeanour.

## Noah

The other person, whose portrait hangs before us this morning, is Noah. We can read about him in Hebrews 11:7: "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; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

The major aspect of Noah's life that I wish to concentrate upon is that by faith he was enrolled into God's service. Before doing so, it is important for us to note the features of the life of a man of faith, such as Noah. According to Genesis 6:9, he was just and perfect, and like Enoch he walked with God, while in 7:1 he is said to be righteous. The New Testament references shed further light upon the character of this man for, in 2 Peter, he is described as a preacher of righteousness, and finally, in Hebrews, we have read that he was moved with fear, meaning he feared God and that he had faith.

I wish to highlight just three of these virtues in order for us to grasp some of the qualities that should mark men and women that have faith in the living God. The three are characterised by the words, 'righteousness', 'fear' and 'perfect'. We should beware of thinking that the latter of these is mere hyperbole and has no significance for us today. The New International Version translates 'perfect' as, 'blameless among the people of his time,' which is a characteristic that should mark the lives of the followers of the Lord Jesus. That, at least, is what Paul tells the Christians at Philippi in

Philippians 2:15: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;"

This would seem to me to be reminiscent of the behaviour of Noah before his generation, and reminds us that we, in our time, ought to be people of moral integrity.

Another of the qualities that marked Noah, as we have seen, was that he was righteous. This means that he was upright, or virtuous, when compared with his fellow men, who are described in Genesis 6:5 as wicked and evil. So, in the midst of the corruption and violence, Noah was living the kind of life that commended his faith in God. This must challenge us today, as we seek to live out our faith in an unbelieving world, where violence is only too visible. It is unthinkable that we should ever divest ourselves of the teachings of the Lord so that we could embrace evil, even in a petty way. Noah resisted it and so should we if we want to remain true to the traditional teachings of Scripture.

The last feature that I want to discuss is that of Noah being 'moved by fear', as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it. We are apt to equate fear with fright, yet that would be incorrect in this context. I would judge that when the Scripture speaks of Noah being moved with fear it refers more to godly fear, reverence or respect. It was not that Noah was terrified of God, rather that Noah was obedient to the commands of God, due to his respect for, and faith in, God. We are in a far more favoured position than Noah, because we have had the great revelation of the love of God in Christ. The immensity of the work of the Lord in His redemptive death should leave us resting in peace and serenity of soul. Fear, in the sense of terror, should never arise; awe, respect and reverence should always be present.

I can't leave the subject of Noah's qualities without a few comments regarding his faith. He has had etched into his faith portrait the striking fact that he acted upon a divine communication. We have read that Noah, 'being warned of God of things not seen as yet' accepted, and obeyed, the implications of the message. Often, and I speak personally, we are more eager to believe something if it does not interfere with our future plans. This aspect of believing and acting upon a divine command is not mentioned in relation to Enoch, and also Noah seems to suggest a progression in the spiritual and moral life of these men of antiquity. We find it easier to have a passive faith that does not embrace action, though not for a moment am I suggesting that Enoch was deficient in his obedience to God. I only wish to point out that Scripture leads us on to see that if we believe in a God who is living and active, then obedience to the wishes and commands of that God is a moral necessity for His followers.

We must now turn to consider just what the command of God was to Noah, and how it was answered. We have already quoted that command, but to remind ourselves of its importance I shall read again Hebrews 11:7: "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; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

From this it is obvious that Noah was made aware of something that had not yet happened, but which, when it did, would have great implications for mankind generally, and Noah's family specifically. Most of us will be aware, from the stories we heard when we were children, that the event in question was the great flood though, if you wish to, you can refresh your memory by re-reading the details in Genesis 6 and 7.

The message, then, was one of a coming judgement, because of the immorality and wickedness that was present in the world. There is no doubt in my mind that this startling news imparted by Noah had about as much impact upon his generation as the thought of judgement has upon ours today. Indeed it probably had less because Noah was speaking about something that could not be imagined. My point is that he began and continued, to obey, the heavenly summons, despite the unlikely outcome of the prediction, naturally speaking. How do we know that Noah believed God? Only by watching him patiently build an ark over many years, an ark that was to save him and his family when the judgement eventually came, and the waters covered the earth.

What else can we learn from the example of Noah? As an answer to this I return to the point I made a few minutes ago when I stated that Noah's faith enrolled him into God's service. By obeying God's injunctions Noah became, in the words of the Apostle Peter, 'a preacher of righteousness'. Whether by his words or his action in building the ark he was clearly telling the ancient world that something was imminent. The fact that it did not happen for many years did not deter him from continuing with the task. As it was with Noah so it is with us today, as we seek to live the life outlined in the New Testament. We read in 2 Peter 3:3-4: "Knowing this first, that there shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

We, and I speak generally, act as if the world will never alter, and everything will continue as normal. Even when our environmentalists tell us that we will have to change our ways if we do not want to affect the climate balance of the planet, we take very little notice.

In the same chapter of the letter we have just quoted, we read in verse 9 of the reason for what seems like a delay in God's timetable: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Such a verse sets the context for Noah's preaching that also spread over many years. It might have seemed that he was building an ark in vain, yet the moment eventually came when it began to rain and such a safe shelter as the ark became urgently necessary. So Noah's faith in God's promises brought him through the judgement.

In the few minutes that remain this morning, I want to linger with the example of Noah as he leaves the ark. For many, many years he faithfully preached a very unpopular message. We have seen that he honoured the Lord in his life, even to the point where it could be said that he walked with God. According to Genesis 8, when Noah left the safety of the ark, after the flood, his first action was to build an altar and make a burnt offering to his God.

Such actions have lessons for us today. The supremacy of faith is manifest in both Enoch and Noah, and they, along with all the men and women in the Gallery of Faith in Hebrews 11, demonstrate, once for all, that the only way to progress in the knowledge of God is by faith. We have noted that Noah's faith led him to serve and become a faithful preacher of righteousness for many years. We have also seen that when he left the ark he worshipped the Lord and offered a sacrifice.

May our consideration of the lives of Enoch and Noah confirm us in our desire to live the life of faith - faith in the living God revealed to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and fuelled by a desire to serve Him in whatever capacity He so wills. Finally, may we join with all who love Him to offer the sacrifice of praise and worship, as we meditate upon the greatness of His salvation and the wonder and glory of His person!

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