

(Hebrews - Part 34): Noah Dared to Believe God

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the active nature of faith as demonstrated by Noah's response to God's warning, highlighting the importance of courage and obedience in the Christian life.

Duration: 30:17

Scripture: Genesis 5:24, Genesis 6:13-14, Genesis 22:9-10, John 3:16, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:6-7

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by discussing how some people are easily moved to tears and love stories. He shares a story about a faithful dog who went out in a storm to bring back a lost lamb, but ultimately sacrificed his life for it. The preacher then transitions to the story of Christ on the cross and questions the priorities of a wealthy preacher compared to a legless newsboy. He emphasizes the importance of faith and references various biblical figures who demonstrated faith in their lives. The preacher concludes by stating his fear of religious theory and the importance of doctrine in action.

Transcript

Now, in the Book of Hebrews, still, the eleventh chapter, verse seven, 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. Now this chapter, which we're a little way into, this chapter might be analyzed. I'm not much of an analyst.

I never like to have anybody tell me, now here's the key to this book. I don't believe there is any such thing in the whole wide world under heaven as the key to any book of the Bible, particularly not one word or sentence. Bible teachers find keys.

You got a love letter from your girlfriend or a letter from your husband in Borneo, and you said, Now let me find a key to this. Kind of silly, wouldn't it? What you would do would be to sit down and read that letter. You wouldn't be looking for keys, looking for what the man had to say.

So in this chapter here, if I analyzed it properly, it would be divided into three sections. The description of faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

And the importance of faith. By it the elders obtained a good report, 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.

And then the demonstration or application of faith, all the way downward, says, By faith Noah, by faith Enoch, by faith Abraham, by faith Abel, by faith Jacob, by faith Joseph, and so on down the line. And I ask you to notice that always doctrine appears best in incarnation. I have always been afraid of theory in religion.

And I had this confirmed the other day in reading a message given by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones of London called, Knowledge True and False. And he pointed out that it is now, I'm not quoting him verbatim, but giving the gist of it, that it is perilously near to being sinful just to learn doctrine for doctrine's sake. I think he is right, and I believe that mere doctrine that has no arms nor legs nor teeth, no purpose nor intention, and carries no moral imperative, I believe we might just as well read Mother Goose.

The only difference being that if you read only Mother Goose, you wouldn't have anything in case you determined to do something about your doctrine later on. But I think that those who merely learn doctrine theoretically, they don't do much about it later on in life anyhow, because they are laboring under the illusion that the learning of doctrine is enough, that that makes them somehow or other better for the having done it, which it certainly does not. Always, I say, doctrine appears best in incarnation.

God himself appeared at his very best in the incarnation when he came to the world and took mortal flesh. And all that he had been trying to say to mortal man about himself, he now could say in the man. He could say it in the flesh of that man's eye, and in the smile of that man's face, and in the hands with which that man healed the sick, and in the feet that carried that man around preaching the word to people.

And in the friendly tone of that voice, he could say it in incarnation in a way that he could not say it in mere theory. And you will find in your Bible that certain great doctrines appear best when they are related to man. For instance, trust and obedience, faith and obedience.

Abraham is a perfect example of the man who had faith and obeyed God. And you will find in reading the life of Abraham that when you are through, you will know more about faith and obedience than if you had taken a course in it from some Bible school. And then take such a doctrine as courage, or such a quality as courage, as found in the scriptures.

You could talk about courage, I suppose, for a lifetime, and when it was all over, you wouldn't know much about courage. But you put a man named Elijah up on a mountaintop surrounded by 450 prophets of Baal, dangerous prophets of Baal, with weapons at their belts, and let him stand up there and challenge those men in the name of Jehovah. There is courage in action, there is courage incarnated.

You can read nice mottos about courage, and I suppose it's better than nothing at all. But if you want to see what courage is, look at a man named Daniel quietly going down into the den of lions. Let's not get wrong about this.

Daniel was not put in the lion den. Daniel was put in the den of lions. That's something else altogether.

You can have a garage and have no car in it, and you can have a lion's den and have no lions in it. But Daniel went down into the den of lions. They were there, brother, they were there.

And yet Daniel went down into that den and courageously waited on his guard all night. And if the artists are right, he went to sleep with his head on one of the manes of the big lions. That's courage, and Daniel had it.

We learn more from Daniel sleeping on the big paw of the lion there in the den of lions than we could ever learn by reading about it merely as a philosophy. Then there is faithfulness which Moses had, and forgiveness which Joseph had to his brethren, and so on. Now, Noah demonstrates faith of a particular kind here.

I suppose Noah had all the kinds of faith there were. But Noah demonstrates here faith of a particular kind. He had faith in the soundness of a warning.

God had said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast and creeping thing. This word came to Noah from God, and Noah believed the warning and admitted the peril and did something about it. Now, I should say that all warnings are to be taken seriously.

To get perturbed over a groundless alarm is to exercise not faith but a kind of timid credulity. But when God blows the loud alarm and says, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, build thee an ark and take thee, thy family, into that ark, that I may preserve a seed on the earth, that's to be taken seriously. And when God warns a nation or a city or a church or a man, to ignore that warning is to commit a grievous sin, to commit a kind of sacrilege against our own soul.

And let me tell you this, that the Christian message contains an element of alarm. We have been taught to believe, I think falsely taught to believe, that the gospel is only good news. That's all it is.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Have you ever noticed this, that you cannot state one thing without having its opposite in the back of your mind? I say, there is a large man, and I would not say he is a large man if I didn't have a little shrink in my mind at the other end of the spectrum. If there wasn't such a thing as a little man, I could not say there is a big man.

If I said that is an expensive suit, if I didn't know that you could get a \$7.50 suit in a second-hand store down here somewhere, if I didn't know you could get that kind, I'd never bother mentioning it. So when the Scripture says, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, there is in the back of our minds instantly the fact of lostness. Why should I have to be saved? Because I'm lost.

Why should I have to believe on Christ unto salvation? Because I have believed on the devil and all of his works unto near damnation. And in the book of John, in chapter 3:16, that most celebrated of all the verses of the Bible probably in evangelical circles, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It's amazing, isn't it, how much people know.

I'm just reading a book now called *The Elements of Style* by a man named Strunk, and it's got a lot of good things in it. But he says, Never use soul as an intensifier. I thought when I heard I read that.

Never use soul as an intensifier. And then I read, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. I wonder where John was.

Probably he hadn't read that book. I bet he hadn't. But here it is, God so loved.

Then it says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Right in John 3:16, that most beautiful and rose-covered verse that is used everywhere has an element of alarm in it, for the word perish is there. They say the church steeples stand to point to God, but the church steeples also stand to tell the people that pass by that there are a few in the ark.

And the very fact that there was an ark there at all indicated danger. And the brave and unbelief of this generation of people, this generation of men and women, they're not afraid of God. The scripture says there's no fear of God before their eyes.

And we ignore the sound of the trumpet. We've heard wolf, wolf, and we don't believe it anymore. But Noah demonstrated faith of this particular kind that when God spoke to him and he heard the note of the alarm in God's voice, he immediately responded.

As a boy brought up on a farm, I well remember the language of the farm and the language of the chickens. I spoke in chicken coops. I mean the language of those creatures themselves.

Why, they're crows that used to fly about. A few of them up at the sea limits where I live, the good, nice fellows will come around there cawing, and they roll 40 years off me when I hear them, because it takes me back to the days when I used to see them. Well, you know, those who've gone to the trouble of looking into it find out that they have at least a half a dozen, if not more, kinds of cries.

And one of them is the alarm cry. And when they cry, a whole bunch of crows will be on the tree somewhere, or down on the ground picking on the corn. And an old crow out here on the stub pine, long though struck by lightning and now standing there, a sentinel of crows on there, and he just sounds one note and they're off instantly.

It would be a very foolish crow indeed that would say, I don't believe in being stampeded. I'm going to stay right here till I'm full. Of course, all that would happen would be the farmer would blow his poor little bird brain out, and that'd be the end of him.

But he has sense enough in his little mind that when he hears a certain note, he takes off immediately. He doesn't stop to wait around. He goes.

We used to see the hawks floating in air overhead long, long before I'd see them or notice them at all. Some other chick would hear them. A high-piercing cry.

I don't know why hawks. I think that if I could talk to a hawk, I could teach him something. Because I would say to him, now, when you want to get a chicken, don't whistle and tell them you're coming.

Keep still. They won't notice you. But he whistles.

And up there he is circling and banking and turning and gliding without a motor and without a jet. He just takes care, just takes advantage of the air currents, floating about with a high whistle that is too high. But the old hen hears it, and she makes a certain noise.

Here were the little chickles, little speckled ones and brown ones and black ones and dappled ones, all around pecking away. And she makes one or two notes, and instantly they're under her feathers. And because the eye of a bird is over on the side, and he can't see straight ahead, the hen turns her head and

looks up with her one eye, trying to get that hawk in focus.

But they're safe because they're under the hen. Now, a chicken, a chick, a peep that would not have sense enough to recognize the cry of the mother, would be fair game for any hawk that wanted him. There is such a thing as a faith that has biddies in the soundness of a warning, of a note of alarm.

I know this isn't popular preaching. I know it. You're not supposed to talk about anything at all like that.

This is Father's Day anyhow, and you're supposed to talk about nice, pleasant things. But there's another side to it. The gospel is not only a gospel of honey, it's a gospel of alarm.

And it warns, either believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or thou shalt perish. Believe not, and you shall be damned. That's there.

Noah had faith in that kind of thing. When he was told by God, he did something about it. Now, there's a difference between, of course, fear and courage.

There's a fear that is a weak-willed cowardice. I have said that kind of fear finds no approbation in the Bible. The fearful shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brings stone.

So the people that are too timid to stand for God and too timid to testify and too timid to give themselves to God's work, that kind of fear is another matter altogether. But there is a courage also that is brazen folly. It's simply the empty courage of a moral fool.

They tell me the Second World War brought out a great many things that we didn't know before, or if we knew them, at least they pointed it up and accented it for us so that it remained in our memories. One of the things that I remember was learning that a soldier could be too brave. You know, we're always talking about brave soldiers, and this fearless champion of this country's liberty did so-and-so, forgetting altogether that the fellow did it, but probabilities are he was scared stiff while he was doing it.

All of them admit they were scared while they were doing it. But there was such a thing as a soldier who lacked a sense of alarm. He couldn't understand danger, he had a blind spot.

So he would go carelessly out and expose himself to enemy fire, and he was bad for the rest of the soldiers. If they found a man like that, they sent him back to the lines or gave him a job pushing a pen or something to get rid of him. They didn't want a reckless man up among the rest of the soldiers, because they said, it's the business of a soldier to stay alive.

He said, now you learn this to stay alive, stay alive. A dead soldier is no good to his country, stay alive. But this fellow, he wanted to stay alive.

He'd thought about it, I suppose, but he just never thought about it. He had an empty-headed, reckless courage that was not courage at all, but carelessness, and he infected everybody else. So when he stuck his empty head up for somebody to shoot at, a dozen other fellows stuck theirs up.

So they said, get that fellow out of here, because he's a trouble to our army. He's making our men reckless. The great soldier, the good soldier, is not the one who has no sense of fear, but he's the one who wisely knows how to balance fear and courage against each other, and take what they call a calculated risk.

And when the chips are down and when it's necessary, then pour his own life out if he need be. Like Roger Young. Was he a Canadian soldier? I forgot.

Canadian or English? Soldier who fell over the grenade, and of course it killed him, but it saved everybody in his bunker. Now he did that, that was not recklessness, that was a noble act. So there's such a thing as a courage, it's ridiculous, because it's empty.

Then there's such a thing as a courage that knows exactly why it's doing what it's doing, and weighs the chances of staying alive against the chances of certain death, and for country's sake or for Christ's sake, decides to put itself in peril. Then there is a fear that has a high moral wisdom. It is a fear of moral consequences, and a fear of irrecoverable spiritual loss, and a fear of permanent separation from God, the source of all good.

Noah's fear moved him to prepare. Notice here, Noah's fear moved him. You know what we have in our day? We have developed the old Greek idea that drama was a moral catharsis.

That was their idea. They said, old Sophocles and the rest of them who wrote Aeschylus, who wrote these famous terrible dramas that's still alive, they said the purpose of all this is to let the onlooker, the one who sees the play, to let him live through fear and terror and anguish and disappointment and sorrow and all that. Let him live through it in himself, looking at somebody else.

We carried that thing to ridiculous extremes. I never did believe it was sound reasoning. But we've carried it to such ridiculous extremes now that people who haven't shed a tear for any known person, any known person, will weep over characters on the TV.

There used to be a fellow out in California who ran a kind of a religious show, and he was supposed to ride in on a horse. He was an old country preacher. Of course, he was sitting by a microphone back of the desk with his shirt sleeved and all this was going on.

But the people who were listening on the radio visualized it, some of the dear Saints. They thought he was a real man, and he had a horse, I forgot what he called, old Dobbin. But he used to take two bathroom plungers, plop, plop, plop, plop.

Then I think it was the horse got sick, or maybe it was the man, I've forgotten which. But they rode in, and letters came flooding in offering to pray for him. Pray for two bathroom plungers, plop, plop, plop, plop, plop.

And that is supposed to purify us. That's a moral catharsis, the Greeks said. That is, if I get so identified with some imaginary character, I can live out all the emotions, and it will purify me.

It will do nothing of the sort. What it will do will be to make an artificial zombie out of me, so that I am interested in only that which is unreal and artificial, and I can't get concerned over anybody that's real. I remember one time being at a church, a great big church, must have cost a million dollars.

And I was there one snowy day to a full church to hear this man preach. I'll try not to mention the denomination, even. But this was in a United States city, and this preacher told a story.

He said that there was an armless, or legless, I think it was, a legless newsboy selling paper just outside down on the street beside their church. He said one day he went out there, and here was this legless

newsboy, poor fellow with very little at all of what he could make selling papers. He said it was raining a cold, ugly rain, and there was slashing, dirty snow all around, and everybody was going with their coats turned up, their gloves and rubbers on.

Everybody was hurrying along, and he said he'd had his service, and he was on his way home. And as he walked to his car, he said, You know what? This newsboy was singing, he said, singing in the rain, singing. And he told that as evidence of something.

I've never been able quite to figure out what that was supposed to prove. But what it proved to me was that here stood a million-dollar church used two or three times a week, and under its shadow was a legless newsboy who hadn't had a decent breakfast, and who managed nevertheless to sing while he sold his papers. But the preacher had legs, and he didn't need them because he had a big car and a chauffeur.

But the newsboy had no legs. Don't you think it would have been acting more in the spirit of the New Testament if that fellow had taken off his overcoat and given it to the legless boy, or reached in his well-filled wallet and taken out a ten-dollar bill and given it to the boy? But he was more concerned about his million-dollar church than he was about a legless newsboy who managed to sing in the rain. You see, Noah was moved with fear, and he prepared.

Noah's faith led him to do something about this. I have no faith in the pastoral prayer that says, Bless all the poor and the needy and those for whom we should pray. All right, reverend, how about making a gift to them? Our Father, bless the homeless children of Europe and Asia.

Why not write to the Canadian Federation for the Care of Homeless Children and send them a couple of hundred dollars to look after some kids over there? Then pray, and then you'll feel better. When you work the way you pray and you're moved to do something, but our trouble is we're moved, but we're not moved to do anything. Some people aren't happy until they've had a good cry.

Nearly killed me to cry. I'm not a crying kind. My tears are very far down in the well, and if anything is powerful enough to get them to the surface, they're really promptful.

Some people, their water in their well is very near the surface and it slops over just on the slightest provocation. They can cry about anything. They love stories.

A fellow went one time to a service and he said, I deliberately worked on my audience. He said, I confess, I deliberately worked on my audience. He was a man of brilliant ability to paint pictures and make an audience see what he was talking about.

He said, first I deliberately told them a story of a faithful old dog who went out and brought in his sheep. You've heard it. The old shepherd went out and brought in the lamb.

There were 11 lambs. He went out looking up pitifully, but he went anyhow, looking at his master wondering if he could make it one time more, but at last he went. And the master said, Rover, or Shepherd or whatever his name was, there's one more lamb out there.

He said the poor old dog looked at his little nest beside the fire, looked up kind of pleasingly at his master, then shook his wet coat and went out into the storm. Pretty soon he came back and man said he opened the door and he heard the sound of a plaintive sound of the bleating of lamb. He said the big old dog tenderly brought him in, laying down by the fire.

Then he said he fell straight down. He went to look at him later, he was dead. Poor old shepherd.

He'd brought in 11 lambs, but the last one was too much for him. He said the people wept all over the building. Said there wasn't a dry eye in the house, nor a dry glove.

And he said, Then I deliberately and intentionally changed the thing, and I told the story of Christ on Calvary's cross, time for men. And he said, I painted that picture as vividly in word colors as I knew how, and I let him hang there for men to see. And he said a look of stoning indifference came over the minds of the people.

They'd heard it and done nothing about it until it no longer meant anything at all to them. But they loved their dog back home. And the idea of a dog would kill himself to take care of a lamb is just too much for them.

Was that a moral catharsis? No, I think it was a ridiculous evidence that we religious people tend to hear things and do nothing about them. But Noah was moved and prepared. Not only his feelings were moved, but he was moved.

You notice that passage in the New Testament that says about Jesus, Jesus looked on the multitude and was moved with compassion and said, Give thee them to eat. He saw them, they moved him, he instructed them to be fed. Always it works that way until we break the continuity by hard conscience.

And Noah faced the consequences before men, knowing people. Do you suppose they let Noah build that ark without a lot of funny cracks? I can just hear Bob Hope working on Noah. I can just hear Bob Newhart working on Noah.

I can just hear these fellows who know how to pick up some local circumstance and make a roaring laugh out of it. Noah building an ark on a hillside? Yes, sir. He'd heard God say, I will destroy a man whom I have created from off the face of the earth.

But he went on and he faced the consequences before men. He followed his feelings to do something about them. He showed his faith by preparing and so condemned the world.

The presence of a prepared man is always a judgment. And he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Now, that's about all I have to say this morning.

I just conclude by saying that when you've heard the truth, any truth anywhere, in a song, in a sermon, or read it, and you're moved by it, you will either go in the direction you're moved, or the next time it won't move you as much. And the next time it won't move you that much. And pretty soon it can't move you at all.

If Noah had refused 20 times to build that ark, each time would have been easier. And he'd never have gotten it built. But he was moved with fear, and he prepared the ark, and became heir of the righteousness which was by faith.

Now, that's the story of Noah, condensed into one verse by the Holy Ghost, through the writer to the Hebrews, and commented on by me this morning. I trust it will do your heart good. And when we think of the man Noah, we think of a great, noble, bold man who dared to believe God.

And when he felt something, he did something about it immediately, instead of letting his feelings die in inertia and un-use. May God give us hearts to obey, as well as ears to hear. Amen.

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