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Sermon Brief
Text: Gen 6:1-8
Title: A Challenging Example
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today is general election day in our church. And it is also a snowy, cold day in Germany. What a combination! But we move forward today, no matter what the weather is outside.

First, I want to thank each of you who took time to fill out and return the Ministry Survey form. A significant number of folks did so and it has been very helpful as we have prepared for today. Second, I want to thank the members of the Church Leadership Team who braved the snow and ice yesterday evening to meet at our apartment so that the list of nominations for the ministry positions could be prepared for presentation to the church today. Not all were able to be present, but several were. The faithfulness of many in our church is what encourages me as your pastor to keep trying to help lead the church. God can bless a congregation -- and will bless -- only to the degree that it is faithful to serve Him and to walk the path He has laid out before us.

As we stand on the eve of the beginning of a new church year, I want to briefly speak to you today about faithfulness to God. The text is Genesis 6:1-8. Turn with me in your Bible to this passage:

1 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. 5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

The text focuses on Noah and his challenging example of faithfulness to serve God in the midst of difficult circumstances. This word has something important to say to each of us today.

To be sure, the text is full of interpretive difficulties. Who were these 'sons of God' who found the daughters of men beautiful? Were they angels, sons of people of royalty, descendants of Seth (Sethites)? The first view has been around the longest, and is the most popular even today. But in truth no one really knows with certainty whom the text is speaking of. How did they 'take' the women? By proper marriage? Or by force? The Hebrew text is not clear. What is the significance of the 120 years? Did God limit the life space of humans to that after Noah? Clearly not, from the rest of Genesis where most lived much longer than that. Does it signify how long God gave the generation of Noah to repent before the flood? Perhaps, but the text isn't clear. Who were the Nephilim? Children of this strange union of male angels and female humans? The fact is that we don't know who these people were, other than what the text here indicates -- that they were hugely larger than most other people of that day and were very warlike. All of these uncertainties about the details of the text lead some to despair about making any sense of the passage.

But the picture here is not hard to figure out when one sticks to the broad strokes painted by the ancient writer. The world was in a terrible mess, especially morally. And it was so bad that God came to the end of His ropes in dealing with humanity. He made the decision to wipe humanity off the face of the earth, except for one man, Noah, whose faithfulness to God stood in dramatic contrast to the rest of the people. The last verse is perhaps the most significant verse of the text: "But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord." Over against an immoral, wicked generation of people stood Noah as a man of righteousness and devotion to God.¹

The rest of the story of Noah in chapters six through eight lay out how God moved to save Noah and his family while the rest of humanity perished in the flood.

From this larger story, Noah becomes a Challenging Example to us today at least in four areas of his life. I want to very briefly touch on these today.

¹Note also verse 9: "These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God."

BODY

By Noah's life we are:

I. Challenged to trust in God, 6:22, 7:5, Heb. 11:7

Three scripture texts develop this insight from Genesis and Hebrews. They merit our attention.

Gen. 6:22 (NRSV): "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him."

Gen. 7:5 (NRSV): "And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him."

Heb. 11:7 (NRSV): "By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith."

What we see here is an obedience to God based upon unwavering confidence and trust in God. When God approached Noah with instructions to build the ark (6:13-21), the scripture in 6:22 indicates that Noah immediately set about doing what God told him. He didn't waver; he didn't hesitate; he didn't argue with God about the reasonableness of God's commands. He didn't worry about what his neighbors would think, or whether he would lose status in the community. He just obeyed God.

Why? Because he had deep confidence in God. His devotion to God over the years had given him the ability to trust God and God's will no matter what. This is one of the major points made by the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament in the so-called 'roll call of faith' text in chapter eleven. Faith in God is trusting God to lead us through life. If we don't trust God's leadership, we don't have biblical based faith in God!

The Bible illustrates this model over and over in its pages.

The ancient Israelites re-built the wall around the destroyed city of Jerusalem against heavy odds because they trusted God's leadership and instruction and thus were willing to work. Neh. 4:6 (NRSV): "So we rebuilt the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work." Their faith in God motivated them to go to work serving God.

Paul and Barnabas launched out on the first missionary journey because they, along with the church at Antioch, deeply trusted God's leadership to begin a mission to evangelize Jews and non-Jews in their day (Acts 13:1-4, NRSV):

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

The German monk Martin Luther in the early 1500s launched the Protestant Reformation because he deeply trusted God to lead him through all the opposition he was facing from church and governmental leaders. Out of this came the wonderful hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

My question to you today is simply, Do you trust God? I mean really trust Him! Your actions will show whether or not you actually trust Him. Not your words. Whether or not you are willing to commit to serve God in one of the ministries of our church is a clear reflection of the level of your trust in God. Noah did all that God commanded him because he deeply trusted God. I challenge you today, to follow this example and commit yourselves to ministry through our church.

II. Challenged to be faithful to God, 6:8, 7:1, 5.

Noah's life was a life of faithfulness to God. From several texts we see this clearly.

Gen. 6:5-8 (NRSV): "5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' 8 But Noah found favor in the sight

of the Lord.”

Gen. 7:1, 5 (NRSV): “1 Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.” “5 And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.”

Noah’s obedience to God came in the midst of a people of great immorality and godlessness. Wick- edness became so great that God regretted having created mankind. It so repulsed Him that He determined to extinguish humanity from His creation. Against this very dark picture Noah stood out as a man of faithful obedience to God.

Jesus compared the time just before His return to the days of Noah (Mt. 24:37-39 NRSV):

37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

The Bible commends the faithfulness of individuals who are obedient to God in many places. Note Paul’s comment about Timothy in 1 Cor. 4:17 (NRSV): “For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and **faithful child in the Lord**, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.”

Here is the challenge before our church today. We desperately need people to be faithful to God. In the twenty year history of this church, lack of faithfulness and unwillingness to step forward in responsible leadership have plagued our congregation and have kept it from becoming anything near what God would have it be. A time or two in our fairly recent history this lack of faithfulness has come close to killing our church. And this could easily happen again!

For years I have become increasingly concerned over the future of the United States because in that culture an attitude of ‘let someone else do it’ have developed and become massive throughout the land. But in this past year, I’m sensing that this same attitude of noncommittal to responsibility is a worse problem in modern Germany than in the US! But it didn’t used to be that way. Post-WWII Germany rebuilt itself out of the ruins of war because the people accepted responsibility and faithfully went about the task of rebuilding the country. Now what I’m noticing mostly is the attitude, “Let someone else to the job.”

And this cultural attitude has invaded our church. Over the past eighteen months this church has moved forward only because a small handful of people have stepped forward in faithful service to the Lord. But the majority of folks have settled into a comfortable ‘pew-warming’ posture of being ‘getters’ rather than ‘givers.’ People, this trend has got to change! If our church is to have a future, it must change. If it doesn’t change, then our church will die! It’s just that simple.

So with your commitment to ministry in our church today, you are voting to either move forward in a growing ministry by the church, or to begin the process of shutting down the church in a slow, painful death. The choice is yours! But let me remind you that you are accountable to God for your decision. One day you will stand before the God of this universe in the “trial by fire” that the apostle Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 3:12-15 (NRSV):

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — 13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the founda- tion survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Every one of us will be called upon to give detailed accounting of our faithfulness to serve God through His church. How will you fare on that day before God in final judgment? You now have opportunity to build a good record to present to God then. Don’t drop the ball and then suffer the humiliating shame of an unfaithful life of service to God on that day!

III. Challenged to witness for God, 6:11-12, 2 Peter 2:5

2 Peter 2:5 (NRSV): “and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, **a herald of righteousness**, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly;”

Peter called Noah “a herald of righteousness” to his generation. That is, Noah was a witness to the wicked people around him of the righteousness of God and of the righteousness that God demands from people. The people of Noah’s day were indeed wicked as Gen. 6:11-12 (NRSV) asserts, “11 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.”

How easy it would have been for Noah to have kept quiet and minded his own business while ignoring the corruption of everyone around him. When God came to him with instructions to build the ark, Noah became a witness to this generation that terrible destruction was coming upon the earth. Noah's actions signaled to his neighbors that time was running out before God's wrath was poured out upon the earth.

People, we must remember this: our actions of service -- or lack of service -- stand as a witness to our faith and to our God. When we obey Him, as did Noah, we give a testimony to friends, family, and neighbors that God matters in our lives. And the opposite is also true: non-service is a testimony that God doesn't matter to us.

Remember what Jesus admonishes us as believers to do (Mt. 5:16, NRSV): "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Our service, rendered out of deep faith and commitment to God, points people to our God and moves them to see the powerful presence of God in human life, that makes big difference in a person's existence. By what they see in us, they can know clearly that God exists and that He changes people for the good.

What are they learning about God through your service to Him today?

IV. Challenged to be grateful to God, 8:20-22.

The final thing that we can learn from Noah's life is gratefulness to God. Gen. 8:18-22 is important here:

18 So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families. 20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. 22 As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

When the days of the flood were over, the first thing that Noah and his family did upon leaving the ark was to express their gratitude to God for preserving their lives during the flood. Faithful service and gratefulness to God go hand in hand. Only out of experiencing God more profoundly in obedience service can we come to true gratitude to God for His blessings.

I hear many people speak of God's blessings but as I look at the lives of many I don't see signs of obedience and faithfulness. And then I hear them speak of being thankful for these blessings. Folks, these people don't know what they're talking about. They haven't experienced divine blessing in a real way at all. God's true blessings only come in the midst of obedience service to God. And only out of obedience service will we be truly grateful to God for His blessings. Noah discovered this out of his life.

What about you? Are you truly grateful to God? Then serve Him! Otherwise, your words are hypocritical and a lie before God! If not, then you're just like the nine lepers that Jesus healed in a small village on His way to Jerusalem (Lk. 17:11-19, NRSV):

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Which one are you? The one who turned back to thank Jesus? Or, the nine who kept on going? Lack of gratitude caused them to miss the greater blessing of God: spiritual healing. But gratitude expressed by the one leper brought him the greater blessing of God.

CONCLUSION

Today, the future of our church lies in the balance. We can make a commitment to serve God through the ministries of the church. Then the church will move forward in ever greater ministry and witness to our community. We can fold our hands and decide to be 'pew-warmers' and then condemn our church to a slow painful death. The choice is yours. I vote to serve and give the church a bright future. What are you going to do?