

Unbelievable!  
Genesis 6:5-22

It was a huge boat. And by huge, I mean a boat 450 feet long. That's three times as long as our steeple is tall, over 6 times as long as this room is, half again as long as a football field. It was 75 feet wide and 45 feet high – about half again as high and as wide as this room is. It had 1.4 million cubic feet of cargo space, with over 95,000 square feet of deck. To say it was immense would be a gross understatement.

What would you say if God told you to build such a thing, and without any power tools? Oh, and you were to build it, not near the ocean, but on dry land. And why would you need such a boat? Because a flood was coming, a flood that was bigger even than the flood we experienced this spring, a flood big enough to float a boat that big. And why would this boat need to be of such tremendous size? So that you could save breeding pairs of all the land-dwelling animals on earth. And why would you need to do that? Because this flood would be extensive enough to destroy all the land-dwelling animals and people on earth that weren't in the ark.

So, what if God told you to do something like that, something so outlandish, so unbelievable, so foreign to your experience that it didn't even fit into any of the categories you use to think about things? What if God told you to do something that just didn't make any sense at all?

Well, what did it take for Noah? At root, it took a tremendous amount of faith in God's Word, in what God was telling him. It thus took a tremendous amount of faith in God, that God was telling him the truth and that God would actually do what God had said He would do.

And isn't that the same thing God asks of us? No, I don't mean that God has told any of us to build a big boat. But doesn't God ask all of us to do things that are equally hard for us to believe, things that are just as far outside the range of common sense, things that are completely beyond our experience and even our abilities?

There are a lot of things the Bible says that are hard for us to believe, aren't there? Think, for example, of what the Bible says about marriage. Wait for intimacy until you are married, and stay married for a lifetime. Wives, respect the leadership of your husbands. Husbands, give yourselves self-sacrificially to your wives, putting their need for holiness about your need for happiness. All of you, consider yourselves as belonging to your spouse, and not to yourself anymore. It's no wonder that the culture has pretty much abandoned all of these ideas. How easy are any of those things to do?

And is it easy for any of us to love our enemies, and to do good to those who hate us and to pray for those who spitefully use us? Do any of us really understand what it means to avoid loving the things that are in the world because all those material things we like so much are passing away? How many of us think it's a good idea to take a whole day off every week to spend time in fellowship with God? How many of us consider that the first 10% of our income belongs to God, let alone believe that everything we have is really His and not ours?

And if we Christians have a hard time believing that God really wants us to do these things, how much more strange must these ideas seem to the world around us? This if-it-feels-good-do-it world, this dog-eat-dog world, this go-for-the-gusto world is bound to think we Bible-believing Christians are a little bit crazy, right?

And what if we were actually to do some of the things God's Word says? What if we were to do something nice for someone who had really hurt us? What if we were to give in to our spouse even when we don't agree with him or her? What if we were to give our tithes to support the work of the Lord, even if we weren't sure how we could make ends meet otherwise? What if we were to spend time in prayer and Scripture reading especially on those days when we really don't have a minute to spare? If we were to step out on faith like that, truly trusting God with our time, our money, and our relationships, wouldn't people in the world around us tend to think we were a bit crazy?

As that ark got bigger and bigger, Noah's neighbors probably thought he was crazy too, at least until the waters started rising. Noah just didn't make sense to them, and it wasn't just because he was building that big boat. No, in a world that was corrupt, in a world that was filled with violence, a just and perfect man like Noah, a man of integrity, a man who sought to do God's will just didn't make sense.

In the same way, in our responsive reading, Peter tells us that this world continues to be filled with people who are doing everything wrong, people who are walking according to their own lusts. To such people, living according to God's word doesn't make sense. To increasing numbers of people in the culture around us, what makes sense is violence and corruption, not love and generosity.

And that means that another one of Noah's challenges faces us. It's not enough for us to resist our own reason and experience and live by faith. It's not enough to insist to ourselves that we are going to do what God says, no matter what. We are also called to stand up to an

increasingly hostile culture around us. We are called to hold to God's standards and to do God's will in spite of what may be culturally or politically popular.

And we need to do that because the same sort of judgment is coming on our culture that came upon the world in Noah's day. No, I'm not claiming to have any special prophetic insight about an impending outpouring of God's wrath, like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel did. But as we read the words of those prophets the parallels with our own day are increasingly striking. Is our modern world really less corrupt or violent than the world was before the flood? Are we any less deserving of judgment? And dare any of us ignore the clear words of Peter that we read responsively this morning? The day of the Lord is coming unexpectedly, just as we can't anticipate when a thief will show up at night.

But even though we don't know exactly when it will arrive, that Day of Judgment will surely come, just as surely as the flood came in the days of Noah. Just as surely as God created the world in the first place, Peter tells us that the heavens shall pass away and the earth and all its works will perish, not this time in a flood of water, but by fire. God's word clearly says that the earth and all the works that are in it will one day be burned up – and as hot as it has been lately, that's not really so hard to imagine, is it?

Yes, there are scoffers in our day who claim that such a judgment will never happen, who simply assume that everything will just go on the way it always has. There are, after all, lots of people who claim that the Great Flood never happened, either. Nevertheless, we must believe what God's Word says, regardless of how much sense it makes to us. We must be faithful to do what God tells us regardless of what the culture thinks about it. And we must remain faithful to God because there's really no good alternative.

Think about it. Nothing else in which we might be tempted to place our trust will be able to help us in the Day of Judgment. Anything else on which we might choose to spend our time, talents or treasure won't last in the Day of Judgment. And the standard by which we and all our works will be judged on that day will be the very Word of God which so many people choose to reject or ignore. It just makes sense to cast our lot on the winning side, to submit our wills and our lives to the God Who made us. For it is He Who will one day judge us all.

But the good news is that the same Word of God which warns us of the inevitability of judgment also brings us the promise of deliverance. For Genesis 6 is, after all, not just a story of impending doom. It's the story of how God reached out to one man, Noah, and gave that one man a chance to be saved, and a chance to be a blessing to others.

Now, we might be tempted to think that Noah is the hero of this story. After all, we are told that he was a just and perfect man, a man of righteousness and integrity. But no matter how holy Noah was, he couldn't have survived the waters of the flood without building that ark. And he wouldn't have built that ark unless God had let him in on what was getting ready to happen.

In short, God took the initiative to reach out to Noah. As verse 18 says, God established a covenant with Noah. Noah, in turn, responded to God in faith, trusting God's Word and doing what God said. As verse 8 says, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and he responded to that grace in faith and obedience.

In the same way, God continues to reach out to people today. As the Holy Scriptures are proclaimed and as Jesus Christ is revealed through the lives of His people, God continues to call sinners to repentance and faith. God continues to take the initiative in changing the hearts of sinners, enabling us to respond to His gracious invitation. And His people continue to express their trust in God through obedience to His will. Noah is thus a model of how people continue to be saved by God's grace, and how people respond to that grace through faith.

But Noah wasn't the only one to be blessed by the covenant God made with him. As verse 18 makes clear, Noah's wife as well as Noah's sons and their wives were also to be saved in the ark. Now, we have no reason to believe that any of them were especially righteous. We aren't told that any of them were particularly faithful to God. No, they were blessed because God chose to bless Noah.

In the same way, God blessed all the animals that Noah would take into the ark with him. They weren't any more or less innocent than any of the other animals on the earth. But they would survive and would repopulate the earth because of the way that God blessed Noah.

And isn't this another example of God's grace? Doesn't this show us so clearly how God has blessed the world in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ? After all, those who trust in Christ are saved, not because of our own righteousness, but because of His righteousness. It is Christ Who has perfectly kept God's law, and it is Christ Who has perfectly satisfied God's justice by the blood of His cross. Just as Noah's family was saved only because of their relationship to Noah, so we are saved only because of our relationship to Christ.

Yes, the Great Flood and the construction of the immense ark seem to be unbelievable. The prospect of God's coming judgment on the world may seem to be just as unbelievable. But the most unbelievable thing of all is that God would choose to save unworthy sinners like us by His

grace at the cost of His own Son's life. Truly, the salvation of human souls is the most unbelievable story of all.