

Faith Illustrated: Abel, Enoch, Noah

Hebrews 11:4-7

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It is a great blessing to be able to be together this morning, and if you are visiting with us today, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can (using the QR code up here or on the front of today's bulletin), or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to honor God, to encourage each other, and to share the good news that God loves us. He sent his only Son to save us. He died in our place, he was buried in a borrowed tomb, but he was raised up on the third day. This is the gospel, or the good news, and we respond to this good news in faith – believing the message, turning away from sin, publicly confessing our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from Marion Rutherford who shares some news from Poland. He says that “Victoria from Kharkiv, Ukraine obeyed the gospel in Warsaw. Praise the Lord!” This is all we know, but good things continue to happen. As hard as it has been over there, I am confident that there are many people who are Christians today who would not have obeyed the gospel if they hadn't been forced to flee from Ukraine. I am certainly not saying that the Russian invasion was good (by any means), but it's amazing to me how God has taken something terrible and has arranged for at least some good to come as a result of it. But we are thankful for Victoria's decision this week.

And this next one comes from my sister's hot tub out in Port Angeles, Washington! I got a text from Ron, my brother-in-law, a few days ago, and he shared a video of Dena being baptized out there. These are a couple of screenshots from the video. I asked how Dena found the church, and he says that one of their newer members who got baptized in their hot tub near the end of last year brought her! The hot tub is contagious! Of course, that's not really how it works. What's contagious is one person being happy about finding the Lord and sharing it with a friend. That's how it works, and we are so happy with Dena's decision to obey the gospel this week. We don't have a hot tub here in this building, but we do have a fiberglass baptistery that'll hold just over a hundred gallons of warm, clean water. We can fill it up in about half an hour. So, if we can help you at all with this or if you'd like to know more, please let me know right after worship this morning or give me a call or send a text at any time. My number is on the church sign and also on the front of the bulletin each week.

This morning, we return to our study of Hebrews – a letter (and perhaps originally a sermon) addressed to some early disciples who were having a hard time listening to Jesus, they were tempted to turn back! Last week, we moved into Hebrews 11, which spans the gap between the end of Chapter 10 (where he tells them to live by faith) and the beginning of Chapter 12 (where he points to Jesus being the perfect example of faith). In Hebrews 11, then, the author tells us what faith is, and then he illustrates by giving a series of examples – actual people (like us) who lived by faith and endured. Last week, therefore, we saw faith described as the *“assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* This week, we take a look at the first three examples, and even before we get to the text, it’s interesting to me that we basically only have one verse per person! These three men are held up as examples of faith, so the message is: You have need of endurance, you need to live by faith, and this is how you do it!

This morning, then, let’s take a look at Abel, Enoch, and Noah. And all three of these men demonstrated their faith before the flood, so these are in chronological order. The text is Hebrews 11:4-7,

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

As we learn from this passage, let’s just move through the three examples he gives, and as we do, let’s notice that faith enabled each of these three men to DO something.

I. And we start with ABEL, who “BY FAITH OFFERED TO GOD A BETTER SACRIFICE THAN CAIN.”

And since we’re moving in chronological order, I hope we notice that the Hall of Fame of God’s Faithful doesn’t start with Adam and Eve. Why? Because those two messed it up for everybody! Adam and Eve are terrible examples of faith. They were NOT faithful. So, we start with a reference that goes back to Genesis 4. After Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden of Eden, they have two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain grows up to grow crops (he is a *“tiller of the ground”*), while Abel grows up to raise animals (he is a *“keeper of flocks”*). And that’s about all we know, but the first thing we learn about these two is that they both approach God in worship, and they each bring to the Lord from what they do for a living. Cain brings an offering from the fruit of the ground, and Abel brings a firstborn from his flock. Well, in Genesis 4:4-5, we find that *“...the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.”* Why? Why does the Lord accept the offering from Abel and reject the offering from Cain? Well, we are not explicitly told back in Genesis, but we learn here in Hebrews 11 that *“By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.”* Abel’s sacrifice was *“by faith.”* In our song and scripture service two weeks ago, John read from Romans 10 where Paul says in verse 17 *“...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”* Since faith comes as a result of hearing the word of God, and since faith is expressed by our obedience to the word of God, I would suggest that somehow God revealed what he wanted in terms of a sacrifice and that Abel obeyed the word of God while Cain did not. And I think we see this in the sacrifice itself. Remember: We just learned a few weeks ago (from Hebrews 9:22) that *“without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* And we also remember that blood was shed for the very first sin. Once Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, God killed

an animal to make them a covering of skin (blood was shed). And not only do we have bloodshed involved in Abel's sacrifice, but we have another little detail in Genesis 4; we find that **"...Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground,"** and that **"Abel, on his part also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions."** Other than the sacrifice itself, did you catch the difference? Cain just brought **"fruit,"** while Abel brought **"of the firstborn of his flock."** Abel brought not just an animal, but he brought the **"firstborn."** And we know the importance of the **"firstborn"** later in scripture. And ultimately, Abel's sacrifice looks forward to the offering of Jesus (a firstborn blood sacrifice, the best of the best), while Cain's sacrifice does not.

Well, once Cain sees that his sacrifice is rejected, he's upset, so God approaches him proactively, and says (in Genesis 4:6-7), **"Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."** As I see it, God is giving Cain a second chance, a do-over, but instead of accepting the do-over and coming back with a proper sacrifice, Cain murders his own brother out in the field. Now, we have an interesting note in 1 John 3:12, where John says that we are not to be like Cain, **"...who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."** I just hope we notice that Cain's evil actions started not with the murder, but with the sacrifice. Even before the murder, **"his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."**

Concerning Abel's righteous deeds, then, the author of Hebrews tells us that **"through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."** So, there's a message for us here, and the message is: When we approach God in worship, we must approach him in faith, according to his word. And the other reminder here is that when we act in faith, there may be some negative consequences in the here and now. Abel did the right thing and was murdered for it. There will always be Cains in this world, those who persecute and harass those who are righteous. The author of Hebrews, then, uses Abel as an example of faith. He acts in faith, and he gets murdered. Getting murdered isn't usually considered a preferred outcome, but Abel was pleasing to God.

And another quick note before we move on: In the big scheme of things, Abel really doesn't do too much, does he? Unlike the other heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, Abel isn't the "Father of the Faithful," he doesn't lead millions out of slavery, he doesn't march around the walls of Jericho, he doesn't face off with Goliath. All Abel does is offer a sacrifice. But like the woman giving her last two coins (in Mark 14), our faithfulness is not determined by the size of our sacrifice but by our faithfulness, **"...for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"** (1 Samuel 16:7). So Abel, then, is an example of worshipping God by faith.

II. As we continue, we come to ENOCH, a man who BY FAITH WALKED WITH GOD AND WAS TAKEN UP SO THAT HE WOULD NOT SEE DEATH.

And this reference goes back to a long list of names in Genesis 5. We studied this in our Wednesday class several months ago, and in Genesis 5 we had a huge genealogy (a list of names), "Adam lived so many years, and became the father of Seth, and lived some more years, and then he died," and so on [paraphrased]. And the pattern is rather consistent, until we get to Enoch. In Genesis 5:21-24, where the text says that, **"Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."** That's pretty weird, isn't it? In a chapter full of births and deaths, Enoch is the one guy who never dies. But instead, he **"walked with God,"** and then **"he was not, for God took him."** Enoch is one of only two men who are said to have avoided death: Enoch and the prophet Elijah. And this idea of walking with God is mentioned

twice in that little passage from Genesis. And it sounds like Enoch only started walking with God after the birth of his son, Methuselah. And that's interesting to me: Having kids has a way of changing us! And that seems to be what happens with Enoch. Here's a man living in one of the most evil societies the world has ever seen; this is just a few generations before the flood, so it's bad out there. And apparently Enoch might have been a part of that...until he became a father. Once he has a son (at the age of 65), he is described as walking with God for the next 300 years. And according to that passage in Jude, Enoch even became a prophet, speaking out against the evil in the world around him. When Enoch became a father, something changed! Sometimes, having kids has a way of causing us to rethink our priorities.

And that seems to be what happens with Enoch. He walks with God. To walk with somebody is to be close to them, to communicate, to walk at the same pace, enjoying each other's company. And somewhere along the line, the author of Hebrews tells us that Enoch was *"pleasing to God."* We think of what God says through the prophet Micah in Micah 6:8, *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* To walk with God is to do justice and to love kindness. And so, in a time when sin ruled the world, Enoch was different. Enoch walked with God, and God spared him the agony of death. Someone suggested that God and Enoch were walking together one day and God said, "You know, Enoch, we've been walking together so long, we're now closer to my house than we are to yours. Why don't you just come home with me?" And so Enoch walked home with God.

But in this context, the author of Hebrews adds what is pretty much a "by the way" statement. Enoch pleased God; oh, and by the way, *"...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."* The author clearly sees this in Enoch. Enoch, 1.) Believed in God, but 2.) Enoch also believed that God would reward those who seek him. As he brought up a son in an evil world, Enoch was looking to the reward, and he walked with God by faith.

III. As we come to the end of this passage, we come to NOAH, a man who BY FAITH OBEYED GOD BY BUILDING AN ARK.

We go back to Genesis 6, and the Lord sees that *"the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of his heart was only evil continually."* So, the Lord decides to destroy every living thing, but he finds an exception in Noah, *"a righteous man, blameless in his lifetime,"* because *"Noah walked with God"* (according to Genesis 6:9). Does that sound familiar? Noah's great-grandfather Enoch also walked with God!

Well, God then warns Noah about a coming flood and tells him to build an ark, a giant barge, giving Noah the exact specifications, including the dimensions and even what kind of wood he is to use. And here in this passage in Hebrews, notice how the author specifically mentions that Noah is warned about *"things not yet seen."* Remember verse 1, where faith is described as the *"conviction of things not seen"*? Noah had faith that God would destroy the world with water, even though he'd most likely never even seen a single drop of rain. We are told in Genesis 2:5-6 that rain hadn't yet fallen on the earth, *"But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground."* But Noah could see what was coming *"by faith,"* and so he obeyed; he *"in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household."* Going back to Genesis, it seems that it took him 120 years to build the ark. It was a massive structure – 450' long, by 75' wide, by 45' tall, consisting of three decks, one door on the side, and a window at the top. And Hebrews tells us that by building the ark he *"condemned the world."* Noah's righteousness stood in stark contrast to the world around him. Can we imagine the ridicule? But Noah obeyed, and through his obedience he saved his family.

By the way, I'll sometimes hear people criticize Noah by saying that after preaching righteousness for 120 years he "only saved his family." And I understand: It would have been great if Noah could have saved the whole world, but you know what? If I can save my family, that is enough! If I can somehow spend eternity in heaven with my family, that is quite the accomplishment. So, when I hear people criticize the church by saying, "We're only baptizing our children," I always remind them of Noah. Noah was faithful in the eyes of God. And through his obedience, Noah ***"became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."*** Every tree cut down was an act of faith – every cut made, every peg driven, every brushstroke of pitch was a reminder that Noah feared the Lord and could see (by faith) what others were not able to see.

And today, we have Noah as an example of faith – not that we have to build an ark, but that our faith causes us to obey the Lord, just like he did. Over in 1 Peter 3, Peter writes about how ***"...the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water."*** And then he applies it to us by saying, ***"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*** Just as water separated Noah from a sinful world, so also baptism separates us from our sin, ***"Baptism now saves you,"*** Peter says. And Noah teaches us the importance of obeying God by faith.

Conclusion:

This morning, we've been reminded to worship like Abel, to walk with God like Enoch, and to obey the Lord just as Noah did. All of this we do ***"by faith,"*** for we know that ***"without faith it is impossible to please God."*** This week, let's live by faith with heaven as our goal – worshiping, walking with God, and obeying the Lord by faith, fully assured of what we hope for, confident of what we cannot yet see.

Before we get ready to partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We know that without faith it is impossible to please you, and so this morning we pray for greater faith. We are thankful for Abel, and Enoch, and Noah. We are thankful for their example of living by faith, even when those around them were not living by faith. We pray, Father, for eyes to see what is not seen. We pray for strength as we press toward the goal. We pray for the joy of salvation. Thank you for making us a part of your family, the church. When we drift and when we doubt, please, Father, use your people to call us back home.

Help us to be more like Jesus. We come to you in his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com