

2.4.18

O. INTRO:

We moved to Wichita early summer of 1969.

Later that summer a Hurricane, named Camille, hit the gulf coast.

It devastated Biloxi, MS where my grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins lived.

We had a house full for a couple of weeks as relatives had to come live with us until essential services could be restored.

I remember sleeping on the living room floor with my brothers and cousins...pretty fun.

It was a memorable summer; about 3 weeks earlier we had watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon.

Some here are thinking..."yes, I remember that summer like it was yesterday."

More here are thinking..."man, you are really old."

But to my point...Camille is the second most intense storm to strike the US on record.

It killed 259 people.

I remember reading a book about the storm in it there were some people who lived in an apartment complex in Biloxi by the gulf.

They had heard the warnings before and nothing significant had happened...so they were cynics about hurricane warnings.

They had no idea what was coming their way...they decided to throw a hurricane party right there beside the ocean...they drank, ate, celebrated...and they died.

Weather prediction has become more reliable but it is still not absolute or anywhere near it.

Just think back to this fall and how hard it was to track those storms even with all of our experience and technology.

Cynicism is not good thinking and does not lead to good choices in life...in the case of these hurricane partiers their cynicism cost them their lives.

Clearly cynicism is wrong, but we are right to have guarded confidence in human experts of all kinds...people can be wrong.

But we must become people with absolute confidence in God...he will not be wrong.

He doesn't predict the future...he is in charge of it.

We must continually close the gap on where we are and where we could be in our faith.

That is the journey we are on together this winter season of 2018.

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

I. Two more faith stories this week

Noah:

Gen. 6:9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

It is clear that the author's point behind the flood story is not primarily why God sent the flood by why God saved Noah.

This is clear from how the narrative begins and how it unfolds.

He is the first to be called a "righteous" man in the Bible.

He was not righteous because he did no wrong...if you read the entire story you will see this clearly was not the case.

He was righteous because he took God at his word: he believed God and then acted on that belief.

Gen. 6:22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

He was saved by his faith because of where his faith was placed.

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

By faith (confidence in God) when warned about things not yet seen (faith is different from sight)...in holy fear...took action (that appeared foolish) to save his family.

"Save" is the word used most frequently in the NT for salvation through faith in Christ.

This "ark" story is a gospel story...the OT points resolutely towards Jesus.

This story is historically, factually true...and it also points forward as a "typology" or a picture of Christ.

He is the Ark that saves us from the coming wrath of God.

Noah's holy fear did not mean he was deeply afraid of drowning.

I'm sure he was afraid of drowning...but that fear would not be holy.

This phrase means deep awe and respect for God.

Unlike Cain who did not heed God's warning (he lacked "holy fear")...Noah took God at his word...he believed and he acted.

The foundation for our failure to thrive as humans is that we resolutely believe ourselves over and against God.

A common manifestation of that in contemporary society is the inability to see the difference between the "hard good" and the "hard bad."

If something is "hard" or "painful" in that it goes against what I desire, or feel, or don't want

to be true.

Or using my own reason I conclude that it should not be true, "hard to believe"...then regardless of what God might have said about the matter...I trust myself.

If God calls me to something that involves sacrifice or pain or it goes against my basic desires...then either God is not really saying that (how could he, its hard) or I will simply have to overrule God in my life.

I know better (because I want different, and this is hard...if he only had all the facts he would agree with me)

Hard is bad, pain is bad, struggle is bad...if I want it, If I believe I need it...then I should have it.

If God thinks otherwise...then God is not to be trusted...I am.

The results of this approach to life are disastrous...though often those results show up over time rather than in an instant.

So like in Noah's time...he heeded the warning when the sky was blue and the lumber for the boat was sitting in the dust in the middle of a field.

Meanwhile those around him did not heed the warning...and day after day for months on end...no judgment came...they relaxed while Noah worked.

They mocked, while Noah believed.

The longer judgment was delayed...the more confident they became...the more fixed in their belief that they indeed are smarter than God.

They rebelled against God...then wait for it, wait for it..."hah, no lightning bolt, no flood...just as I thought, I'm free to do as I please."

But rebellion is most often not followed by a bolt of lightning judgment...but rather the judgment of a bitter harvest...slow ruin rather than instant judgment.

Now for them, the flood did come...a literal one.

But most often the flood comes in the form of an unraveling life...life may appear to unravel very quickly...but the process began long before the visible unraveling.

It appeared that Noah was foolishly wasting his life and resources while they were enjoying theirs.

This appeared to be true, until it didn't.

Faith has eyes on God.

Experience has eyes on history.

Both faith and experience "see" but only faith "sees" the road ahead, experience sees the road behind.

When you couple faith and experience you have wisdom...closing the gap.

But in any case, Experience will prove God true in every life...good or bad...here's how.

Gal. 6:8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

The thing about sowing and reaping is that what you put in the ground is what will eventually become the crop you will to have eat someday.

The other thing about it is that young plants of all kinds look very similar.

Then as they mature you can see "Oh that one is a bitter weed, and that one is food."
-It takes time to see the difference results of different lifestyles

So sowing and reaping in a fixed law of life...all sow, all reap what they sow.

So...By his faith Noah condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

How did he "condemn" the world by his faith?

It wasn't that he was standing on boat in the field, yelling at his neighbors and calling down judgment on them.

He was much too busy obeying God to spend time judging his neighbors.

It was his faith revealed in actions that condemned them, not his words.

It was his belief in God that was revealed in his actions that brought this judgment.

To believe and to act was not beyond any of them, if it was not beyond Noah...he choose to trust and obey...they choose not to.

He did not believe God **because** he was righteous.

He was righteous **because** he believed God.

He was saved because he took God at his word and acted on it.

Others could have done the same...yet they did not.

Next story...Abraham

Heb. 11:8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Gen. 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

The word translated "when called" has the implication of immediacy to it.

It was something like this...

The Lord said "go to the place I will show you"...and as the words were still ringing in Abraham's ears...he was packing up the family.

Its not that at times he didn't struggle with what God called him to...he did.

And in fact he sometimes took matters into his own hands rather than trusting God.

But on the whole...he lived with a ready "yes."

God said "Go"

He didn't say "where, why, how"

He said "Yes"

It was by "faith" not "by sight"...because he was acting on a word from God.

There is a type of information gathering or intelligence gathering that is called HUMINT...human intelligence.

It's information gained by interpersonal contact vs. more technical means (computers, cell signals, satellites, etc.)

HUMINT is information gained by agents on the ground, snooping around, talking to people...making judgments.

He didn't rely on his own intelligence (HUMINT), but neither did he deny it.

He used his mind to determine that it was a wise course of action to trust God.

It is not faith **or** reason...it is faith **and** reason.

It makes good sense, common sense if you will...to believe God.

He didn't know what was next after next, just what was next...he was to go and God would show him as he went.

This is, I think, the most common way we will see God close the gap on our faith...where we are now and where could be next.

He will give opportunities to trust him...we will not see next after next...just next.

If we wait until we have a full site picture...near perfect clarity on what might and might not happen...then we don't move in faith.

It will be impossible to grow in faith without taking actual steps of faith.

Faith is by definition not seeing all that is coming.

But it is not the same as folly...which is jumping without the facts.

Faith is jumping...but knowing the fact of the trustworthiness of God.

So Abraham left and he made his home in the land God promised him...but the plunge of faith quickly turned into the plodding of faith.

9 By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

He would have many more opportunities to take "plunges" of faith...some he did well at some not so well.

But overall...his life of faith was a long walk in the same direction.

It was "yes, yes, yes" then sometimes a "YES!"...Then back to "yes, yes, yes"

I think many young men and women struggle more with the thousand little "yes"...at least I did.

I was ready for the plunge...give a big "YES" any day.

But I had to learn to plod.

Older people...we need to remember the necessity of the big "YES"...the times when God says take the plunge.

When we are young we believe we are bullet proof...as we age...we can become risk adverse.

We have learned to trust God with the plodding...we need to relearn how to trust God with the plunging.

But remember...if you love the plunge...all plunges are preceded by and followed by lots of plodding.

If you love to plod, there will be times along the way where you must plunge to continue on.

We need to be people who simply live with a ready "yes"...big or small...plod or plunge.

Because a life of faith will always require believing God and acting on that belief...and it will always be a long series of "yes"...some all caps, some not.

What is it that keeps the "yes" in front of us?

Especially when the plodding becomes disappointing or disheartening?

Or the plunge is just terrifying?

A final faith that sees beyond this life...this is not all, or even mostly of what there is for us.

10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

In CS Lewis's book Perelandra part of his space trilogy.

A man named Ransom travels to a new world where he encounters an unfallen "Eve"

On this world Eve lives on Islands that float on the vast sea.

There are fixed lands and she may visit them, explore them, enjoy them...but she is not to settle on them or sleep on them.

She is told by God to return to live and sleep on the floating islands at night...to trust him with where she will awake.

The unfallen Eve is astonished to find that on earth millions live on fixed land.

She bursts out "how do you endure it...land all tied down...does not the thought of it crush you?"

"Not at all," said Ransom.

"The very thought of a world which was all sea like yours would make my people unhappy and afraid."

For me, it is a powerful way of describing us in our "fallen state" with a determination to control the outcomes of our lives.

We have a distaste for even a fear of faith, except for faith in ourselves.

We want a permanence that we can control...we want to live and sleep and wake on fixed land.

Yet this desire for permanence and security apart from God is undoing us, making us insecure, anxious.

Greg Greer, physician...deals daily with people whose primary condition is they are anxious about their lives.

Here is our culture's lullaby.

"Now I lay me down but I cannot sleep...mostly because I will not trust the Lord my soul to sleep."

I would rather drive than fly...even a long drive.

I'm not afraid of flying...I don't even get sick anymore...thanks to getting older and Dramamine.

I like having a steering wheel in my hand.

I love control or at least the illusion of it.

Our perceptions of permanence and living on fixed lands, our belief that we are in control...is illusion...we must see that if we are to live wisely in this life.

Of course I am not advocating passivity...right column/left column.

I am saying that much of our life, is in the left column...everything beyond this life is left column...we must learn to trust God with the unseen.

Abraham's permanent dwelling in the Promised Land was a tent.

The only land he ever actually owned there was the piece of ground he bought to bury his wife.

He was looking forward to a city with foundations...designed and built by God.

If you are adverse to city life, love the country...you might misunderstand the meaning of this phrase...a city with foundations.

You say..."God, do you have a cabin for me in heaven...you can let someone else have my room in the mansion."

I also would prefer a dirt road and shimmering leaves of a cottonwood when the sun hits them...to golden streets.

The whole city thing is a metaphor...much like the "streets of gold and precious jewels" we see elsewhere in the NT.

The end of this age is not literally walking precious metal streets...it is a new heavens and a new earth.

The idea is a place of incredible beauty and value.

A city with foundations indicates a place of permanence...lasting security.

It was a place of provision.

It was a place of safety...walls to keep out enemies.

It was a place of community...people to live life with and around.

It is all this because it is the place of God...designed and built by him...this is the most important point...and why it is beautiful and valuable.

Abraham lived a nomad life by faith...looking past this life to the next one.

His faith allowed him to experience God in amazing ways while he lived...but it was his faith that looked beyond his life that allowed him to endure the difficulties that life brings.

The essence of faith as the writer of Hebrews sees it is...To leave the certainties one knows

and go out into what is quite unknown—relying on nothing other than the Word of God

CONCLUSION:

A vision of faithfulness...plodding with God can turn into the loss of a sense of adventure and expectancy.

A vision of faith-filled-ness...plunging with God can turn into an aversion to the ordinary...we can become experience junkies and miss God in the day to day ordinary...which is going to comprise most of our journey.

We want to embrace a life of faith with all of its plodding and plunging.

We want to close the gap by becoming people who live with a ready "yes."

1. Plodding with God

Leonard Ravenhill wrote that "All men (and women) that God uses spend some time on the shelf."

Meaning there are going to be times where we feel like we have been set aside.

Do not despise the times of plodding...if you overlook them you will miss the depth that God wants to build into your life.

2. Plunging with God

Faith grows like a muscle...it must be pushed beyond where it is to become stronger.

How will you learn experientially that God rewards those who earnestly seek him...if you do not earnestly seek him?

Meaning pursue him, obey him, love people, live with a ready "yes"

Yes I will give.

Yes I will go.

Yes I will speak.

Yes I will be quiet.

Yes I will forgive, choose to not be bitter.

Yes I will obey even though I don't feel like it.

The next "yes" will often call you beyond the current "yes"

But it is his invitation to join him.

3. Looking forward to life fully with God

"Okay, but what am I guaranteed if I live this way...all this plodding and plunging?"

A life designed by God.

and

A life that does not end at death.

You may have a long life and lots of health...or not

You may avoid many problems that plague people...or not.

God may use you in visible and powerful ways...people may take note and be encouraged.

Or not...God may use you in invisible and powerful ways.

But in the end...all that ends.

So we must, we must...live on the floating islands.

We must lose the illusion of permanence here, the illusion of control.

Plod with God

Plunge with God

Look forward to life with God beyond this life.

Live and then die when the time comes...with a ready "yes"

Do you see the enormously powerful and practical applications for this?

Do you see how the gospel can and does change everything?

If you will trust Christ, the Ark that saves us from God's wrath.

If you will trust Christ, the place of promise...the home our hearts long for.

Every part of your life will be directly impacted...every part.

Close the gap...believe God, act on that belief.

-Plunge or plod