

# NOAH: PERSEVERANCE AND PROMISE

MATTHEW 24:36–46 (NIV84)

Today, we continue our sermon series on Our Family Tree and look more closely at those who make up our extended spiritual family in the Old Testament. As I was reflecting on this week's family member, Noah, I couldn't help but think about our own family gatherings. How each of us may have an Uncle Willy or Aunt Dee. You know the one relative that always seem to draw attention to something going on in their life and then speaks THEIR truth into the life of everyone else around them. The one that seems to be going on their own journey, pursuing some great prize, and out to convince everyone else they should come along for the ride.

In sharing their story, they highlight one crazy idea after another... drawing you into the possibilities that could come your way if only you were on board. They point out the devastation and destruction that would certainly come your way if you choose to continue on your current path in life. They do not even hesitate for a moment to point out where your own life is way off track and begin encouraging you to follow them to the true promised land.

As I was sharing this with one of my family members, they responded without hesitation... oh, you mean you!! ... For those of you laughing, if you are looking around your own family tree for Uncle Willy or Aunt Dee and can't find one. It might just be you as well!

Many of us grew up with the story of Noah and the Ark. Even the unchurched know the story of a man who built an ark and took two of every kind of animal aboard. Noah's Story is probably the best known and most depicted story of the Old Testament – cartoons, films, and songs have been written to retell the story.

Noah was the man whom God had called upon to build His Ark. For Noah, obedience meant a long-term commitment to a huge project. Many of us have trouble sticking to any project for more than a few weeks, whether it is directed by God or not. Isn't it interesting that the length of Noah's obedience was greater than our lifespan today? For 120 years Noah worked at constructing the Ark. The only comparable long-term project would be our entire lives. Noah lived, in gratitude of God's grace, by showing an entire lifetime of obedience to Him.

Our key takeaway from today's Scripture is simply this: We are called to be faithful and wise servants of the Lord – keeping watch, persevering in the storm and being ready for the promise of the day Christ returns! As our vision at St. Timothy's guides us – we are called to Know the Father, Grow as Disciples of Christ, Go in the Spirit and I would add – Show the love of God to all those around us!

We could easily picture or recall how Noah persevered through the storms of life. We assume he endured the reproach and ridicule of his family, friends and neighbors throughout his lifetime. Noah did what God told him in spite of the condemnation and criticism.

Listen to how God sees Noah: *"Noah was a good man, a man of integrity in his community. Noah walked with God."* How would you feel about being scrutinized if this was the way God described you? Noah lived faithfully and persevered through life's trials and temptations; Noah listened closely... to God's plan, purpose and promise; Noah responded without hesitation... and did all that he was commanded after receiving his calling from God.

He weathered the flood. When we go through difficult times, when we feel we are being tested, if we hold on to our trust in God, if we follow God in obedience to His calling, then we too will see the full effect of God's grace, mercy and love. We can persevere and see God's promise in our own lives as well.

On closer examination, Noah's life involves not one, but two great and tragic floods. The people in Noah's day were flooded with evil. A flood of sin, followed by a flood of God's response to that sin – a divine rebuilding of the human race. The number of those who revered God for His creation and His love had dwindled to one solitary man. God's response to the rising tide of sin was a 120-year-long last chance at redemption, during which time he had Noah bring warning of impending doom facing those ignoring His call to repentance.

In today's reading from Matthew 24, we learn that the second coming of Christ will be one of the most glorious and unexpected events – you won't see it coming, but it will happen. Of all the unexpected happenings that take place in our lives, this one will be the biggest wonder of them all.

Jesus tells us to get ready. He tells us that most people won't be ready – he compares the world at Judgment Day to the world at the time of the flood: *"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."* (v. 37-39)

What was wrong with the people at the time of the flood? Why weren't they ready? Why did they have no relationship with God? Their entire lives revolved around earthly things, and nothing else. I'm sure they all knew about Noah, the man building His ark on the mountaintop. But they ignored his work at hand. They ignored having any real type of relationship with God. They ignored the crazy uncle in the family tree. And then the flood came, and took them all away.

The people of Noah's time were so immersed in their ordinary, everyday pursuits that they were blind to the imminent disaster, a disaster which Noah's attentiveness to God's word and personal righteousness caused him to see. This is the lesson for us, we need to stand out and stand up for God. We are called to be prepared and engage others to prepare alongside us. We should live our daily lives with a willingness and openness to heed God's warnings; we should be in a constant state of readiness for Christ's second coming as we see in 1 Peter 3:

*<sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 3:15, 20-21)*

We should see Noah's story not as a tragedy of circumstances but as a warning followed by a covenant, a unconditional promise, where God is the initiator, the keeper and the fulfiller. Our God is a God of promise. God's promise is made not only with Noah, it also includes his descendants and every living creature. God created this vast, magnificent universe, and He loves it. Because God cares for all of creation, He makes us, you and me, in His image and calls us to be responsible stewards—managers of His creation.

Our text in Matthew reveals God's hope for us in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. He brings together the promise of Noah with the promise of Christ. The two belong together; they do not contradict each other; they complement each other. We can see the true nature of God and His activity—how consistent and long-suffering God is in his grace and mercy towards us and all of creation. God's unconditional grace and love never changes. God's faithfulness endures forever! In a world of constant changes, we can live with the utmost confidence that our security rests with our gracious, loving God.

In the testimony of Noah, God gives a visible sign of His covenant promise – the rainbow. We all know the rainbow comes to life out of the rainstorms and the sunshine that follows. In our lives we all face ups and downs, times of storms and struggles, times of quiet and peace. These all come together to produce something beautiful as we see God's promise come into the light.

God gives us another visible sign with the same promise. It is the cross of Christ Jesus. For Christ is the light of the world that draws all of us into His family. Jesus went to the cross for every single one of us. Taking with Him all of our shortcomings, all of our sins – he took them on himself and paid for them by dying on the cross. He then rose from the dead, He rose to God's right hand – He intercedes on our behalf for all of our sins to gain God's forgiveness. Our faith in Jesus allows us to know for sure that we will be with God through all eternity.

We are called to show and share God's promise, we are called to be different from unbelievers and different from luke-warm Christians. We are called to worship, read His Word, or engage with Him in prayer. We are called to be different from people who sin and take their sin lightly. We are called to be watchful, alive, awake, alert for all signs of Christ's "coming,"

To be watchful, to be ready, means that we will be modern-day Noah's, called to build His ark to rescue others from the flood of sin that is overtaking their lives. Our church, and churches like ours, we are the ark for today. God calls us to be seen as one who is different, one who has a real and growing relationship with God. Unlike those in Noah's time, we are not motivated by fear of punishment. We can be certain Jesus has taken all of our punishment away at the cross. As forgiven children of God, our motivation is joy, hope and anticipation. The unexpected day of Christ's arrival will be the most awe-inspiring day of our lives.

God used Noah in a mighty way. He preserved mankind through the Great Flood. God wants to use us in mighty way as well. Right now, God is still making that call on our lives. Today, we can see a rising and very real flood of sin and depravity and desperateness all around us. Our friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members live their lives apart from God's love, God's grace, God's power as they are wallowing in their sin.

We are here to answer God's call and demonstrate God's love to our community. Our calling is to give ourselves away in courageous faith to rescue those drowning in the storms of life. There is no doubt about it, the waters of sin, and ungodliness, and perversion are increasing greatly upon the earth. In the journey God laid out for Noah, the ark went upon the face of the waters and rode over the top of the waters of destruction.

It is still true today that God calls us to live righteous and holy. He calls us to differentiate our lives from the world. He asks us to rise above our circumstances. The darker it gets the brighter our light will shine; the higher the waters of sin rise, the higher the waves of His goodness will rise. Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. Our mission in life is to give ourselves away to let others know God loves them.

Guiding us as we guide His ark is the Holy Spirit – providing discernment, direction, and conviction. He puts to good use our gifts, passion, focus, and faith. He enables us to be about the business of rescuing the drowning. God has given us His Word and His Promise – His own testimony about himself. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ beckons us onward, calling us into deeper relationship with Him, and sets us on a course alongside Him. All the while, He desires that each of us bring as many people with us as possible.

One day soon everything we know as reality will be gone in a flash! Jesus will return and will claim us as His own. Knowing this, we must remain focused on the future and His coming return. We are called to do everything in His power to reveal to our families, our co-workers, our neighbors and our friends that God genuinely loves them. We'll accomplish this in our worship, our witness, our discipleship, and our fellowship, meeting Jesus where He is already at work and joining Him on His mission.

As we join Jesus on His mission, we should take on more thing away from Noah's mission, God never asked Noah about his preferences... instead, he called on him to make sacrifices; real sacrifices; personal sacrifices. It would be easy to start thinking this boat He has given us to sail upon is a premiere cruise ship where we can sit in the sun and soak it all in; where we can feed ourselves in abundance; where we enjoy the entertainment on board and rejoice in our own personal happiness. His Ark, this church, is for His purpose not our pleasure.

Noah lived faithfully. God called on Noah to persevere through the biggest challenge he could have ever imagined. God gave him a plan, a purpose and a promise. God has given us a call to action – to share his good news. So we, like Noah, need to live faithfully and listen closely to his plan and his purpose. We need to persevere with courage. We need to share His promise.

What about us? What about you? Are you living a life that is pleasing to God? Are you ready to move on faith and share His love with others? Together we can live out His vision for us... Knowing the Father, growing as Disciples of Christ, going in the Spirit - all simply for one purpose Showing the love of God in every way possible. Persevering over the World and Pursuing His Promise! Let us pray...

## Matthew 24:36–46 (NIV84)

### *The Day and Hour Unknown*

<sup>36</sup> "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

<sup>42</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

<sup>45</sup> "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

## Genesis 6:9–14, 17–22 (NIV84)

<sup>9</sup> This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. <sup>10</sup> Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. <sup>13</sup> So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. <sup>14</sup> So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out...

<sup>17</sup> I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. <sup>18</sup> But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. <sup>19</sup> You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup> Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. <sup>21</sup> You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

<sup>22</sup> Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

## **Genesis 9:7–17 (NIV84)**

### *God's Covenant With Noah*

**9** <sup>7</sup> As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup> “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup> Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

<sup>17</sup> So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

## **1 Peter 3:14–22 (NIV84)**

<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.