

October 15

“Hands-on Redemption”

Genesis 6:17-19

17 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.

18 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.

19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

Special Music:

“Build an Ark”

Gaither Vocal Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6a1Th78vcU>



THE NATURE OF SERVICE

**Did Noah build the ark
Because the clouds all got dark
And he knew the rains would soon be coming down?
Did he build the proud vessel
So his family could nestle
In the bowels of the boat and not predictably drown?**

**Did he build it with features
So that all of God's creatures
Could be saved from the wrath of the waves?
Did he build it with fears
Amongst all the tears
Knowing if he failed they would all go to their graves?**

**Did he build it for the salvation
Of God's great creation
By listening to God's every tangible word?
Or did he build it to escape
His inevitable fate
Thinking salvation was completely absurd?**

**Why did the old man
Stick to the plan
When so many yelled discouraging words?
Did he ever believe
That in the end he'd receive
The salvation he believed he deserved?**

**Did Noah take up the hammer
And begin all the clammer
Because he felt that the planet was doomed?
Did he follow God's plan
For the years that it spanned
For an event that he only presumed?**

**Was the ark his salvation
Through God's inspiration
So, he felt that he must follow through?
Or is the truth much more simple
As he set to example
That he did what God told him to do?**

**Would he have built the boat
And made it to float
If he had known that it was all in vain?
That God was just kidding
And intent on the ridding
Of all humankind in disdain?**

**I believe that he would
Have built that ark out of wood
Not out of selfishness or pride.
But because he loved God
And found himself awed
That in God's grace he would always abide.**

Hands-on redemption! What in the world does that mean? How many times have I preached that a person cannot earn, work, or pay for a ticket into heaven? How many times have I said that we can never, ever do what is required to make it into heaven on our own? That the reward of heaven will never be granted based on good deeds, charitable contributions, or pretentious prayers? If what you have said is the way it is, preacher, what is this Hands-on redemption that you speak of?

I have had the experience of working with many different people in many different fields. Some were experts at what they did. Others were novices. But their experience level, while often revealing, is not main factor here. The answer that I seek to talk about is not based on competence or confidence. I have simply found that I truly enjoy working with people who love what they do. It shows in their dedication to their work. Competence and confidence will come with experience, but you will never achieve mastery of any given occupation if you don't enjoy what you are doing. If you wake up in the morning and absolutely dread going to work, maybe your job is not meeting the needs of your passion.

A person can have the technical experience to play the piano, but an audience can easily tell the difference between someone who is technically proficient and someone who loves the instrument. When we watch someone who plays with a technical proficiency, we often see the pianist and the piano as two separate entities on the stage. When someone plays with love and emotion, those two separate entities blur and become one, seen together to be moving in total synchronicity to express the emotion of the music that just can't be done at

a technical level. This happens with every other instrument as well. A famous musician was once asked why he practiced so hard. His answer was “Because I think I am improving.”

The same is true of a workman and their tools, a doctor and their instruments, a bookkeeper and their ledger, a farmer and his tractor. It becomes so obvious when a farmer steps from his tractor after a long hot day. There are two ways he can see his work. One way he wipes his face with a handkerchief and curses the sun for making things so difficult. The other way, he wipes his brow and smiles at the sun being grateful for good day’s work and the reward it brings.

I know, I know. Preacher, that’s ridiculous. And yes, not every day is a great day. Some are harder than others. Some days will leave us completely worn out. But I commit to saying that those who are able to find joy in the work and find gratitude for the day, always enjoy a better quality of life.

Which is why I want to spend some time talking about Hands-on Redemption. Please take a moment and look at Noah’s motivation for building the ark. It has everything to do with our approach when it comes to our own relationship with God and the nature of our own redemption. We’ve talked about God’s unchanging nature and his motivation for telling Noah to build the ark.

But what about Noah? What is his motivation?

1) Did he build it out of fear for his life? Or maybe his family’s lives?

- 2) Did he build it out of a fear that God would destroy him like everyone else?
- 3) Did he build it to guarantee his redemption?
- 4) Would he have built it if God had guaranteed his redemption even if he didn't build it?

Why did he build it? The reasons I have just given you are all human reasons. The same reasons that we are forced to face when we decide to follow Christ. Does our relationship with God stop being pertinent when we become believers, or are we on a treadmill thinking that God will notice all the wonderful things we are doing and grant us a place at his table? Do we believe that Jesus has a seat ready for us because of all the wonderful things we are doing? Or does he welcome us to the table whether we do wonderful things or not? Why do we need to do God's work on earth if our redemption is guaranteed because we have decided to follow Jesus. Why go through the effort of soldiering on and building a boat?

Folks, there are plenty of people in the New Testament that made the decision to follow Jesus and then fell away. One of the biggest problems with being human is that...we... well, we're human. And as such we are prone to sin and failure. As much as we want to please God and help the people around us, as much as we want to be like Jesus, we simply aren't Jesus. So, the only thing that we can do is do our best and follow our Savior's example.

However, I have to ask, are we really responsible for anything beyond the redemption experience. How many of us grew up with the expression, "Once

saved, always saved.” I want to stress that particular expression is a theological sore point among many denominations. I, myself have some trouble with it. Not that it isn’t true, but that it takes the relationship with God out of the equation. The intention that Jesus expresses isn’t that redemption is our goal, but our reward. And not a profession of faith, although that was part of it. “I have decided to follow Jesus” doesn’t mean a thing if we don’t follow Jesus.

The purpose of relinquishing our lives to our Savior is so that we can be more like Jesus. We can live holy and extraordinary lives dedicated to our Heavenly Father, doing what he would have us do. Being his hands and feet in this world. That we are changed from the inside out to answer God’s call whenever and wherever he calls to us.

But the redemption experience that so many choose to embrace is, “I give my life to Jesus. I believe he is the son of God and he died for my sins. My sins are washed away, and I am clean. Now, I will go out and find something to do for his glory.” We don’t find that last part in any theology. We are changed from within, and God has a purpose for each of us, and it is that purpose that we should be seeking. Are we to live exemplary lives? Of course, we are. But everything we do comes from God and returns to God. That glory is not ours to share with our Lord. It is exclusively his because we belong to him.

When looking at our work this way, do we continue to think that Noah built the ark for his own redemption or because God asked him to? What would Noah be thinking if the rain hadn’t come? Would he have still built the ark and for what

purpose? What if God asks us to do something that we cannot see the purpose for? Is our joy in the service of God or in the reward?

I know, I know. So many questions. But I have a few more for us as we continue to think along these lines.

Would Joseph have asked his father Jacob, and his brothers to come and live in Egypt if he knew that within several generations they would become the slaves of the Egyptians?

Would Moses have led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and to the edge of the Promised Land if he had known that he would never live to see the promised land himself?

Would Nehemiah have rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem if he had known in advance of all of the resistance he would face?

We serve God in the now and our service is not dependent on the future. We flourish in our relationship with God because we are actively engaged with his work. His work. Not work we choose to do for him. Our purpose is not to pick and choose how we will serve God. It is he who chooses how we will be of service according to his needs.

David so very badly wanted to build the temple to God. He wanted so much to please God. He was ready to start to work even though God had not told him to build the temple. But the truth is that it simply wasn't his job. God had already chosen Solomon to build his temple. But God did encourage David to gather the materials necessary for the building of the temple. We might see that

as kind of a letdown for David. “Oh, God, my, God! Why would you have me take on this lesser task of gathering materials so that someone else can accomplish building your temple? I’m quite capable of making this happen! I can do this.” And God replies, “But this is not your job. It is your job to gather the materials so that the person I have chosen to perform the task will have what they need to build the temple. Can you not find joy in that service?”

I will admit that it can be frustrating to serve in what we see as an inferior role. But that is because we don’t find joy in the service. We think that if we are not responsible for the entire project that we somehow are deemed unworthy. David did his part. Solomon did his part. It’s the way that God does things. It is not up to us to decide for God who gets to do what.

In theatre, one of the first things to be learned is that there are no small parts. Every part and job has its purpose for the success of the overall run of the show. If someone fails to do their part, it isn’t just the person that fails, the whole production that suffers. It becomes incomplete and ultimately affects the reaction of the audience. There really are no small parts or jobs.

Do you remember this parable from Matthew 13?

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.

4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

We often talk about the seeds that fall on the side of the path that speak on those with deaf ears and never get planted. We also talk at great lengths about the seeds that fall on good soil that produces crops. What we don't often talk about is the in between:

20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

The unfortunate truth is that many of us fall into these two categories. That is because we are not willing to relinquish ourselves into the loving arms of Christ.

We hear the words of redemption but never give into God's purpose for us. Most of the time it is because we are working so hard to do what that he hasn't asked us to do, because we just don't seem to be interested in the blessings that come from doing the things he wants us to. We might think that doing something good for the sake of doing good things should earn us some points, when it may not be what God needs from us. Maybe we need to be gathering materials for the next big thing. Maybe our job is to do the next big thing. But if we are not walking with God, not taking his counsel on all that we do, not maintaining our prayer life, then we cannot know what he expects us to do. We might be afraid to admit it, but there is probably a reluctance to know because we might not be ready to hear what he has to tell us.

Are we willing to build the boat when we don't see a hint of rain or the need for redemption? Can we begin to realize that redemption is not in the building of the boat, but in doing what God asks us to do, even if we can't see the need or the ultimate result?

Take a minute and contemplate Jonah. Yes, we focus on his reluctance to go to Nineveh as God asked him to. But after being released from the big fish, he did as he was asked. And he did it with fervor. He knew what was at stake, the very lives of the people of Nineveh. And with God speaking through him, he was successful in turning their heart back to their Creator. And then Jonah got mad at God because he expected a totally different result. He did not realize that the joy of service was not in the result, but in the performance of the service, doing what God asked him to do. He was not responsible for the outcome, only the action.

Noah would have built a Trojan Horse if God had asked him to. Noah's purpose in building the ark was not for redemption, but to do the work of God. And if God had held back the flood and the ark wasn't needed, then so be it. He had accomplished what God had asked him to do. His purpose in the work was to please his Creator. Nothing more. The consequence of redemption for him and his family was a blessing and a result of his obedience.

This week, I want us all to contemplate our purpose and pray that God opens our eyes to reveal if what we are doing is what he is asking of us. Or are we lost in our desire to do something for God, hoping to earn some brownie points. It is so easy for us to get trapped on a gerbil wheel trying to please God when he really needs us to be doing something else entirely. It is never about what we want to do, but what he needs for us to do. I'm pretty sure that Noah didn't wake up one morning and say I'm going to build me an ark just in case it floods in a hundred years. No, it was the whisper of God. It wasn't Noah's job to preach to the masses or even to try and turn them from their ways. He had one job. Build a boat.

So, what about us? Are we chasing our tails trying to impress God with our devotion or are we taking time to listen for what he wants us to do. Are we ready to take up our hammers and saws, and Build a Boat if that is what he wants us to do? Are we ready to collect the animals if he asks us to? Are we prepared to do God's will on earth in spite of all the obstacles and questions that we have, knowing that it is God's will and he is providing what we need?

17 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.

18 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.

19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

**Are we listening to the whisper of God in our hearts the way that Noah did?
Are we prepared to step out on faith and build a boat if God asks us too, even though there's not a hint of rain in the forecast, even if it is going to take the rest of our lives?**

God bless you all!

AMEN

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