

side, and God counts! You and God always make a majority.

So I want you to think about who really is courageous. In our society today, courage is defined as doing what you want to do. “That’s courageous!” But that’s not courage. That’s human nature! Or courage is being willing to jump in and join the crowd. That’s not courage. That’s human nature too! What took more courage? To mock Noah building the ark, or to build the ark even while people were mocking? Are you going to be with everyone or be the only one? Courage is that little boy saying, “But he hasn’t got anything on!” Courage is building a boat on dry land.

Courage is Jesus! You want to talk about being the only one. Can you imagine if you were actually perfect? How much pressure do you think was on Jesus to join the crowd? He was always the only one. Yet, Jesus didn’t back down. He didn’t change his plans. He didn’t cower in a corner. He loved you too much! Instead, he lived a perfect life for us. Every day. He was the only one who didn’t curse or swear or lust or lie or steal or covet. And then he let himself be hung on a cross, abandoned by God, all alone. So that you never have to be alone. Courage is that little boy. Courage is Noah. Courage is Jesus our Savior.

And courage is you. Because God has placed courage in your heart. Maybe not courage to pick up snakes or join the special forces, but the courage to live for God. There’s a name for that courage—it’s faith! Faith is the God-given courage to be the only one. God’s love and promises produced Noah’s conviction. God’s Word does the same for you. No matter how uncomfortable, distracting, and distressing today’s moral climate may be, we have God’s promise that “*he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 1:6). Those are God’s words, and he cannot lie. You can put your money where God’s mouth is. He delivered Noah, and he is able to deliver you!

Is there a better story than the flood to show the difference between being with God and being against him? Between going with the crowd or standing on God’s side? Just like he did at the time of the flood, on Judgment Day, God will once again punish unbelievers while delivering his believers. It doesn’t matter if everyone is doing it. Those who choose to reject and live contrary to God and his Word will be punished most severely—just like all the people in the flood. It doesn’t matter if I’m the only one. Those who believe in Jesus will be saved, no matter how bad the circumstances get—just like Noah in the flood.

So don’t be afraid to speak up when the emperor isn’t wearing any clothes. Who knows where the crowd’s going to go. A few years ago, it was hard to believe that we had to define what marriage is. “What’s next,” we thought. Now we have to define what a man and a woman is. What’s next? This week we’re debating whether a child’s life or a gorilla’s life is worth more. What’s next? Remember this from Noah and the flood: Even though the whole world might stand against you, God will always save his people, and with your Savior Jesus, you are never the only one!

Genesis 6:5-22

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June 5, 2016

⁵ The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷ So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. ¹⁶ Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” ²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

When You’re the Only One...

Have you ever heard the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes?” It’s a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson. It’s about an emperor who loved new clothes. In fact, clothes were more important to him than castles or gold or chariots. One day, two strangers came to his court and said that they could weave the most magnificent fabrics imaginable. They had invented a way of weaving beautiful cloth so that clothes would be invisible to anyone who was a fool or unfit for his job. The emperor loved the idea. He would get more new clothes, and he could find out who in his kingdom was really fit for their jobs. He gave the men a huge sum of money to get started.

The problem was they weren’t weavers. They were con artists. They pocketed the money, set up their looms, and pretended to sew clothes, without any cloth or string at all. After a while, the emperor was curious about how things were going, but he remembered

their claim that only wise people who were fit for their jobs could actually see the clothes. So he sent the pastor in. The pastor looked at the looms, but he couldn't see anything at all. He thought to himself, "Can it be that I'm a fool? Am I unfit to be a pastor? I can't tell anyone that I can't see the cloth!" "What do you think?" asked the weavers. "They're beautiful!" he lied.

Finally, the day came when the men had finished the clothes. The emperor proudly walked into the room where the weavers had been working, and what did he see? Nothing at all! He couldn't believe it! Was he not fit to be emperor? No one could know! So he praised the clothes he couldn't see and took off his clothes and put them on. Which meant that he wasn't wearing anything at all! Then he paraded through the streets of his city, and all the people "Oohed!" and "Ahhed!" at the emperor's new clothes, because no one wanted to seem like a fool. So there rode the emperor down the street—naked—while everyone marveled at the emperor's new "clothes." Except, you could hear the voice of one little boy, who said, "But he hasn't got anything on!" But the people said, "What a silly little boy!"

It's hard to be the only one, right? There is enormous pressure to join the crowd. Even when you know something is false or wrong, it's hard to be the only one. Nobody wants to stand out like that little boy—telling the truth. You look around and hope someone else will speak first! It's hard to be the only one! Isn't that what it feels like to be a Christian today? Gender. Marriage. Heaven. Jesus. Do you feel at times like you're the only one? The only one concerned about God's truth? Hans Christian Anderson understood us well. We go along with the crowd. It's hard to be the only one!

If there was anyone in the world who knew what it's like to be the only one, it was Noah. It's hard to imagine, but as the Bible describes the world before the flood, only Noah and his family believed in God. Now, our world today certainly seems to be headed in the wrong direction, but to have only eight believers left! Can you imagine that? How could the world get so bad? God explained. Over time, people stopped valuing faith in God. When even believers choose their spouses, they were more concerned about outward beauty than a heart of faith. In other words, they followed the crowd! It didn't happen all at once, but faith was lost until only Noah was left.

Here's God's description: "*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*" That's bad! It's called "total depravity." Within us, without God, there is nothing good. I know there's a part of you that fights against that. "I'm not like that!" But here is one place where God tells us the truth about ourselves. When you look at yourself at the end of the day, are you really good? When God finished creating the world, he looked at his work and said, "*It was very good*" (Genesis 1:31). Now, "*Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*"

As proof of people's sinfulness, God points to violence. Every sin is equal in God's eyes, but when a society stops valuing human life, it's in a bad place. At the time of the flood, "*the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.*" Is that true today? On

Memorial Day weekend, just in the city of Chicago, six people were murdered and over 60 other people were shot. On an average day in America, 3,000 babies are aborted. Does that make it on the news? No. Instead, we hear people arguing about whether a boy or a gorilla is more important. Do we value life? What would God say when he looks at us?

There's an idea in our country that simply isn't true. We're a democracy, and the idea is that the majority is always right. If we put people together and have them make a decision together, they will make the right decision. Is that true? No! The majority is often wrong! And that shouldn't surprise us. Because what are people like without God? "*Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*" I know it's hard to be the only one. I know how tempting it is to think, "How can all those people be wrong? How can what God says be true?" But think of that little boy in the story, and remember that sometimes it's good not to follow the crowd!

Because the "crowd" is going in the wrong direction, and there's no story like the flood to teach us how God feels about sin. When people sin, what does God do? There is this idea today that when we sin, God accepts it and loves it and just wants us to live the way we want to live. Except, here's what God says about sin: "*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.*" Jesus' says that Judgment Day will be like the days of Noah. Are you going to be with everyone or be the only one? The problem is that our sinful hearts lead us to follow the crowd.

So here's something amazing: "*Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*" How did Noah not give in to the pressure? How did he not join the crowd? In the book of Hebrews, the Bible explains: "*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*" (Hebrews 11:7). What phrase did you hear again and again? "*By faith.*" Faith in God's love and grace enabled Noah to be devoted to God even in the terrible times in which he lived.

In fact, "*Noah did everything just as God commanded him.*" Those are some of the most remarkable words in the Bible! Think of what God commanded him. He spent 120 years building a barge bigger than a football field miles away from any ocean. He raised his three sons to follow God, which immediately alienated them from all the other people in the world. Think of how much Noah's life must have been disrupted. Think of all the sacrifices he had to make. Think of the financial commitment to building an ark. Think of all the things he didn't have. But what he had was the most important thing! "*Noah did everything just as God commanded him.*"

Noah understood something: Even when it feels like you are the only one, you are never the only one. In fact, in this whole story of the flood, who was saving whom? God was saving Noah! Noah knew that. He trusted in God's salvation. And he put that faith to work in his life by following to a "t" all the crazy-sounding promises God made to him, because he was absolutely convinced that he was not the only one. Because God was on his