

The other day Andrew was sitting at the table while I was feeding Mark. Mark stuck his fingers in his cereal and began to smear it all over his head. Andrew was watching all of this and could sense my concern. In response to how messy his little brother had become he said, "Oh, my God!" I was shocked. I didn't laugh or smile. I just stared at him in disbelief. When I was growing up I never heard my mother or father take the Lord's name in vain even in the most "innocent" kind of way. My father's strongest expletive was "rats" and I don't think my mother used any expletives at all. God's name was spoken only with the utmost reverence, in hushed tones. The same thing is true in our home today. Neither Kay or I ever use the name of God off-handedly. Now I hope that we don't have a holier-than-thou attitude but by upbringing and experience I found what Andrew blurted out as disturbing as any more blatant swear word.

When I heard Andrew my very first impulse was to wash out his mouth with soapy water as I remember my mother doing with me. I was too soft-hearted to do that and, besides, I was sure that Andrew would not really understand at 4 years old what I was doing. So I told him as firmly and kindly as I could that he should not use that expression

any more. That it was not nice. Obviously he had heard someone, probably an adult, use that expression and was merely trying to act grown up.

~~That incident was a warning to me "about things not yet seen."~~ "Is this an indication of worse things to come?" I thought. Then I thought, "How do I protect my children against all these unseen things that are still in the ~~future~~.<sup>^</sup> *Afterwards I thought; "In the future, even more* How do I protect my three boys against the<sup>^</sup> sinful influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil over which God's judgment hangs and will one day descend?" I'm sure that this was the concern of Noah. He was concerned about raising three boys in a world that was even more wicked than the one we live in today. ~~In some way God had warned him about things not yet seen; and especially about the judgment that was to come upon the world.~~

~~That experience with Andrew helped me to understand Noah.~~ Like Noah, I immediately experienced a sense of holy fear; a fear of God. Now for me the fear of God and the love of God are inseparable. The fear of God has played such an important role in my life. "Holy fear" is the most predominant sense that I have of God's presence. When I read the Bible or pray I am confronted with a sense of being in the presence of the holy, the transcendent, the awe-

~~some and awful God who is the father of Jesus Christ.~~

~~This "holy fear", I believe, should be expressed in some way in our worship services in the way of reverence awe, and adoration.~~

~~Our Scripture lesson tells us that it was "in holy fear" that Noah built the ark. You see, he feared God more than he feared the unseen judgment about which he had been warned. His holy fear of God was in itself an expression of this man's deep faith in God's goodness and promise of salvation. Oh, that we would fear God more than we fear the world, the flesh, and the devil. Oh, that we would fear God more than we fear the things not yet seen that trouble and worry us. That we would fear God more than we fear the world's rumors of judgment and disasters. It was "in holy fear" that Noah built an ark. And it was "in holy fear" that I opened my eyes to see the promises of God for my children who I am so concerned not to have corrupted by the world.~~

AS I meditated on our Scripture lesson it struck me as being quite significant that Noah's faith led him to build an ark for the purpose of saving his family. Why did Noah build an ark? He didn't build the ark to save the world. Christians, of course, should be concerned with saving the world. We should be involved as Christians in politics and

in social action particularly when we have gifts of leadership, time, and resources to help in those areas. We should work to see reforms enacted and injustices corrected. We should, of course, also be concerned about preaching the Gospel to the world. The Bible tells us that Noah preached the gospel to the people of his day. Without a doubt he invited them into the ark. But he didn't build the ark for the world. In this sense the ark is a type of Christ who died, not for the world in general, but for his people although whosoever will are invited to enter the ark of salvation through faith in Christ.

Noah didn't build the ark primarily to save all those animals either. God commanded him to take those animals but I don't imagine Noah was all that thrilled about having his family live in a zoo for about a year. Of course we should also have concern for endangered species and the affects of acid rain on our lakes and streams. I'm all for saving whales and baby seals. But I'm more concerned about saving my children. What is a whale in comparison to my sons and your children. As men and women whose faith is in Jesus Christ our number one priority, it seems to me, should be to see our children, like Noah's, brought into the ark of salvation.

Our text makes it very clear that Noah built the ark, primarily, to save his family. And, I might say quite boldly, that I am more concerned about the salvation of my sons than I am concerned for the salvation of anybody else. I certainly would be sad if no one ever responded to the Gospel that I preach, as I'm sure Noah was sad that no one responded to his preaching. But I would be infinitely sad if my children were not to respond to the Gospel. My heaven would be a hell for me without my wife and children. Rarely do I hold my children in my arms, by night or day, that I do not utter a prayer, silent or aloud that God would open their eyes at an early age to see their need of Jesus; ~~that I might see them enter the ark of salvation~~

One of the greatest concerns Christian parents have is for the salvation and welfare of their children. I know a woman, a Christian, whose oldest son is in his twenties. He was raised in a Christian home but has caused his parents real heart-ache.<sup>^</sup> ~~He dropped out of high school. He entered no majors but was dismissed with less than honorable discharge.~~ He was arrested several years ago for robbery. He lived for a while with a girl before finally getting married. He has had about 15 jobs in the last several years simply because he ~~keeps getting fired.~~ <sup>does not submit to authority.</sup> He has been involved in I don't know how many car accidents and he is now in the hospital as a result of an accident caused by speeding and reckless driving. Last week I got a letter

filled, as usual, with so much concern for her son and his salvation.

I thought of her when I was meditating on our Scripture lesson. It seems to me that one of the most precious promises contained in the Gospel addresses our concern for our children's salvation. One of the clearest expressions of the great love that God has for believers is his promise to save the children of believers. Time after time in Scripture we see how a father's faith or a mother's faith has led to the salvation of their children. ~~We have the great promise in Acts 16:31, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."~~ And in the book of Genesis we read, "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark;" Why? "for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." God has made it clear by precept and example, all through His Word, that it is His will that a believer's whole family should be saved and that He has made abundant provision for the salvation of the household *as well as the individual.*  
Acts 16:31.

That is the clear message of our Scripture lesson.

"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family." It was Noah's faith which led to the salvation of his whole family. That

does not mean, however, that our children will be saved automatically. We can have no sure hope of seeing our children grow up to know and love the Lord unless we, like Noah, are living a life of observable faith. Imagine the impact Noah had on his sons as he worked away for a hundred years building a boat on dry land miles away from the ocean. I'm sure those sons must have thought their father was a nut at times. Their father must have been a source of embarrassment for them at times as they played with the other children in the neighborhood. I'm sure they were known as the sons of the crazy guy building the battle-ship in his back-yard. But they knew that Noah was not a nominal believer. They could see his faith. <sup>They may have gone through a time of teenage rebellion but</sup> ~~And~~ when the storm clouds came, and the rains began to fall, they entered the ark with their father. They could see his faith. They knew his faith was not simply traditionalism.

Unless our children see our faith at work in our lives day by day we cannot claim God's covenant promises with much assurance. Unless they see that our great concern is for their salvation they aren't going to take us seriously when we make them go to Sunday school or church once a week. They will see that we have concern for their health. We will take them to the dentist and pediatrician whether or

not they want to go because we have faith that doctors can contribute significantly to our children's health. Our children will sense that we are concerned with their intellectual development when we make them to their homework, take them museums, and buy and read them books. We do these things as parents because we have faith that these things will add significantly to the intellectual growth of our children. Our children come to realize that we are concerned to develop within them all the social graces because we have faith that good personal relationships will be fostered thereby.

But will they see that we really do believe God's word, that we heed it's warnings, and that by faith we are looking to Christ for our salvation as well as the salvation of our children. Will our children see that we are infinitely more concerned that they know the Lord Jesus than the president of the class. Will our children see that <sup>we</sup> are infinitely more concerned that they trust Christ and obey his laws than that they obey all the rules of etiquette? Will they see that we are infinitely more concerned that they entered the ark of salvation through faith in Christ than that they enter Harvard or Yale?

Let our Scripture lesson, then, be a word of warning

to parents who have only a nominal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and may that warning lead them to work for the salvation of their children as Noah did. But let it also be a word of encouragement for Christian parents whose children have drifted away from the Lord. Let them now begin or continue to plead God's covenant promises to save the children of believers. Let them pray with faith and assurance that God will indeed bring their children into the ark of salvation. Let our Scripture lesson also be a word of hope for Christian parents of young children as they grow up in a world that will try to allure and seduce them away from Jesus Christ. And most of all let this word of God we have heard lead those of you who have seen your children grow up to know, love, and serve the Lord to praise and adore the God who has given us such gracious promises.

An anonymous poet once wrote these words concerning her children,

Without my children, Father, I cannot see thy face;  
I plead the blood-stained lintel, thy covenant of  
grace.

O wonderful Redeemer, who suffered for our sake,  
When o'er the guilty nations the judgment-storm  
shall break,  
With joy from that safe shelter may we then meet  
thine eye,  
Beneath the blood-stained lintel, my children, Lord,  
and I.