

To free us from the fear of death

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[0:00] Genesis chapter 6, and we can read verses 1 to verse 10. Genesis chapter 6, verses 1 to verse 10.

When men began to increase in number on the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

Then the Lord said, My spirit will not contend with man forever. For he is mortal. His days will be 120 years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterwards, when the sons of God went to the daughters of men, and their children by them.

They were the heroes of old, men of renown. The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thought of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. 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.

[1:19] For I am grieved I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Our second reading is from chapter 7. Chapter 7 and verses 1 down to verse 5.

The Lord then said to Noah, Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth.

Seven days from now, I will send rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.

And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him. Now turning to chapter 8, chapter 8 and verses 15 down to 22. Chapter 8, verses 15 to 22.

[2:43] Then God said to Noah, Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you, the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground, so that you can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.

So Noah came out together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives, all the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground, and all the birds, everything that moves on the earth came out of the ark, one kind after another.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and taking some of the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood, and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done.

As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease. And our final reading, Genesis chapter 9, verses 1 to 17, where God makes the covenant with Noah.

Genesis 9, 1 to 17. Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, and fill the earth.

[4:15] The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth, all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, upon all the fish of the sea.

They are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has lifeblood still in

it.

And for your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God has God made man. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth and increase upon it.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 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. [5 : 29] 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.

And God said this, 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.

I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 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. 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.

So God said to Noah, this is the sign of a covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth. Amen. That's again saying this time, saying to God, that's important for the church to do is to, in a sense, recover the story of Noah.

[6 : 43] Because certainly in Western culture, we've got a sort of funny attitude to the Noah story in that we have made it, the Noah's Ark, a nice cute children's play toy.

I'm guessing maybe a lot of our children had one, still have one, that they like to play with. You go to a children's Bible, usually a very popular story because it's got lots of nice cute animals being saved.

It can be easy to lose sight of the huge significance of the Noah story. On the one hand, it's the most graphic account that we have of human sin and the judgment of God in the whole Old Testament.

And so you'll find Jesus and the New Testament writers using the story of Noah to remind us of the judgment of God. But then we also can easily lose sight of this wonderful covenant that God makes with Noah.

It's a covenant that ultimately preserves the world so that Jesus can come. That what we're going to see is life is preserved so that God's plan of salvation can continue despite human sin.

[7 : 54] So we need the story of Noah. And so what we're going to do is we're going to look at some of the key features of the covenant that God makes with Noah to help explain the gospel of God's grace to us.

It's obviously a big story which shows in itself that it's significant. We're going to jump around a little bit to get a feel for what's going on here. But let's begin where the story of Noah begins with the darkness of human sin.

So especially the first seven verses of chapter six. We could say in the whole of Genesis 4 to 11, which is sometimes described as sort of the pre-history before the time of Abraham, what we see is very quickly the effect of the fall into sin.

Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 turn away from God and His Word, fall into sin. And we see the impact really quickly. We see Cain killing his brother Abel. We meet a man called Lamech who rejoices at murdering people because they insult him.

We see the story of Noah. And then after this, even in a renewed earth, beginning again with Noah, and very quickly we get to the Tower of Babel again. And so we see, in a sense, a race to the bottom as mankind time and again rejects their creator.

[9 : 14] One of the things that we said last week when we were looking at Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 is that there's this theme of two seeds. When God cursed Satan in the garden, He said there would be war between two seeds.

There'd be the godly seed and there'd be a godless seed. And again, we see that in this story. And we see it in chapters 4 to 11. We see Abel, who's godly.

We see Cain, who's godless. And we meet Enoch, the man who walks with God and is taken up to heaven. And he's the great-grandfather of Noah, where we are now.

And I think that that two seeds theme perhaps helps us to understand this strange, in a sense, difficult to understand verses that begin chapter 6.

Especially verse 2, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they married any of them they chose. Now, we might think, oh, here is angels coming down from heaven and marrying women.

[10:18] And that sounds very strange. But I think, if we think about this two seeds theme, it seems more likely here's a description of the godly people deciding, let's just marry with these godless people over here.

Let's not try and be distinct and be for God. And so it's a sign that even as God is desiring to show grace, people are turning away from Him.

It's possibly where it's pointing us towards. But certainly, by the time we get to chapter 6 and verse 5, we see a very dark picture, don't we? 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 of the time.

Sometimes theologians talk about total depravity, that every part of us is corrupted by sin. Not completely, but every part is affected by sin.

And here is this graphic picture of humanity inclined towards wickedness at every turn. It's important for us to recognize that God is not remote and God is not unconcerned about the situation, about the world that He's made and the people that He's made.

[11:33] Look at the language of verse 6. Very powerful language. The Lord was grieved that He'd made man on the earth and His heart was filled with pain.

Human rebellion, our deliberate rejection of God, human sin causes God to feel a sense of pain and sorrow.

And because of this, verse 7, the Lord said, I'll wipe mankind from the face of the earth, for I am grieved that I have made them.

As the people have deliberately, willfully dishonored God, rebelled against God, God announces that judgment is going to fall.

If God has made a glorious masterpiece in creating the world, then people have taken pain and they have just defaced it because of sin.

[12:33] It's like ugly graffiti all over God's masterpiece and He says, I'm going to wipe it clean and I'm going to start again. We were made, the Bible says, people were made in covenant with God.

Humanity is deliberately turning its back on God and therefore judgment is coming. Now it is curse and not blessing that the people will experience. That explains the flood of chapter 7.

Humanity and rebellion, total depravity, and God feels the weight and the pain of that sin. Fast forward to the time of Jesus, we see the same thing again.

We go to the cross, what do we find there? We find here is Jesus who's come into the world precisely because of our human condition, precisely because of our sin and God will again, in the person of His Son Jesus, feel the pain of sin and the consequences for that sin as Jesus carries the sin of His people so that we might escape the flood of God's judgment.

It pours out on Him so that we might be set free. So we see the darkness of human sin, which is so important for us to understand why Jesus is good news.

[14:02] But then alongside the darkness, we also find Moses presenting for us the beauty of saving grace. So we meet determination in Genesis 6.

We meet a people who are determined to turn their back on God. They're determined towards wickedness. We find that God is determined to judge in line with His holy character. He kind of sweeps in under the carpet.

But we also find that God is determined, eternally determined, to save and rescue some, to rescue one. He's determined to show undeserved grace to Noah.

Just like you go into a jewelry shop and you might see a diamond ring that's presented on the nice black velvet. Or you think about when you look up, if you go away from where there's streetlights and you go out on a dark night and you see the stars shining, it's the same thing that we see here.

It's against the darkness of human sin that the beauty of God's love and God's grace is going to shine in the life of Noah. Verses 8 and 9 are really important.

[15:10] Let's read them again. Chapter 6, verse 8. But Noah found favor, literally, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Now, when it comes to these two verses, it's really important to get the timing and the order right.

Because some people read the story, hear the story, and think, well, Noah was righteous. He was the one good guy in a world full of bad guys. God saw his merit, his goodness.

He's saved because of his obedience, in other words. So some people read the Noah story that way, but that messes up how the Bible presents salvation. Is that how salvation works?

We are good people, and then God rewards us if we've been good enough. Are we the hero in our own story, and God comes to give us the reward for good work done?

[16:15] Is Noah the one person in the whole world who is staying good and true while all around turns away from God? And that's why he's declared to be righteous, and that's why he's spared.

And that's not how the Bible presents salvation. What comes first is that Noah found grace, found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

He received grace from the Lord. That Noah too was in the darkness, and God in his grace and mercy plucked him out of the darkness and set his love on him because of God's mercy and God's love alone.

That's always the way salvation works. Nobody earns it. It's always a gift of God's grace so that God gets the glory, not Noah and not us.

Saving grace is always a gift from God towards those who the Bible says are spiritually dead, unable to respond to God unless God sends the Spirit to reveal our needs.

[17:21] If you've got time this evening, read Ephesians 2, first 10 verses, and you'll see that really clearly from Paul. So God saves Noah by grace.

God makes him righteous. God declares him righteous. And as we'll see, God does that so that his great plan of redemption can continue. Verse 9 begins, this is the account of Noah.

This is like a section break, or better, begins a new section in the book of Genesis. Whenever you read, this is the account of, in Genesis, here's a new stage in God's dealings with his people.

So because God has shown Noah grace, the next stage of God's plan of redemption can come.

Judgment will fall, but grace will come to Noah, and the plan of salvation can continue.

The human race is kept alive so that people might turn back to God and be saved. One of the things that you see in all the covenants, I guess, is that one person is saved or one group is saved for the sake of the many.

[18:31] So we see it here, Noah is saved for the sake of the human race. Abraham is saved to be a blessing to the nations. We find Israel is saved to be a light to the nations.

And that's the way it works individually as well. So often, God saves a person in a family so that he might extend blessing to others within that family.

Or God saves someone in a friendship group so that they might be a blessing and an influence to others. When I think about my family story, I can certainly see that.

On neither side of my parents' families was there anybody who went to church or anybody who was Christian, but God by grace saved my mom. And she's still the only one in that generation who has any interest in God.

But because of that choice, it's been a blessing to us. Perhaps that's been your experience as well. And it's that principle of God saving by grace that drives all of our kingdom mission.

[19:36] We recognize, gives us confidence really, because we understand that it's not on us to save a person. It drives us to prayer because we recognize that it's a gift from God.

And so it's really important for us to understand grace and how that plays out in the way we seek to conduct mission. So we've seen the darkness of sin.

We see the beauty of saving grace. We also get to the, I guess the central, sort of distinctive feature of this covenant with Noah. And it's the idea that God preserves life.

That's one of the distinctives of the covenant with Noah. Life is preserved. Life is saved. And this serves to extend God's plan of salvation.

So chapter 6 and verses 17 and 18, we are told, I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens.

[20:35] Every creature that has the breath of life in it, everything on earth will perish. But I will establish, or I will make firm my covenant with you. And you will enter the ark, you and your sons

and your wife and your sons' wives with you.

And then they're also to bring in the animals. Because, life will be preserved because God is going to keep his covenant promise.

Noah and his family will be kept alive because God is a faithful God. Chapter 7 verse 1 is worth our attention. Chapter 7 verse 1, the Lord then said to Noah, go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.

Now when it says, I have found you righteous, God's speaking to Noah and Noah alone. And that's important because here is Noah as the head of his family. And he is the one who receives this covenant.

And what happens? His wife and his children also are included in covenant blessing. Here's one important reason why we baptize our children.

[21 : 52] if we are believers in this church. Because we believe that God chooses to work through families, to extend his covenant blessing to our children.

Now we see it from the story of Noah. So Noah and his family and the animals are brought into the ark. And then God shuts the door of the ark and the rain comes down, the floodwaters come, and everything outside of the ark is destroyed.

But there's a clear focus from the end of chapter 8 into chapter 9 on the fact that God is still preserving things alive. So turn over towards the end of chapter 8 from verse 20 to chapter 9 verse 7.

Let's just very briefly notice ways in which God intends to preserve life. So maybe chapter 9 verse 1, God blessed Noah and his sons saying to them, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

So here is the same language that God used speaking to Adam and Eve, a reminder that this is a covenant that's being established once more with Noah.

[23 : 17] Life will be preserved as Noah and his family will be fruitful and increase in number. Life will also be preserved because God is going to provide food.

Something's different between life now and life in the Garden of Eden. Chapter 3, verse 3, sorry, of chapter 9, everything that lives and moves will be food for you.

Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. So, so far in this, the story of the Bible, in the Garden of Eden, God used animals, animal skins to provide a covering for Adam and Eve to cover their shame and their nakedness.

We also see in Genesis chapter 4, Abel using an animal as a sacrifice and now here we see that God provides animals to help preserve life for people.

So, it's been added to our diet. And then, very importantly, chapter 5 and 6, we get a reminder about how special life is, human life is, in God's eyes.

[24 : 34] end of verse 5, from each man too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

For in the image of God has God made man. So, even after the fall into sin, men and women, boys and girls, we are still made in the image of God.

our life matters, is valued by God. Murder is forbidden so that life will be preserved, so that wickedness will be curtailed.

And all of this because of God's covenant promise, because of God's desire to preserve life so that his blessing might come to the world. Again, chapter 9, verse 11, here's a reminder of God's covenant commitment after the flood.

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.

[25 : 42] So, here is an everlasting promise. Until the end of human history, there will not be total destruction by a flood that God is going to preserve.

If we scale back a little bit from what's happening here, we're being reminded that we live out our history, we live out our days under the common grace of God.

God is showing goodness and kindness to everybody in the world. End of chapter 8, he's reminding us that there's goodness and kindness and life preserving in the seasons, in the rhythm of the year, in the way that God cares for families, in the way that God keeps people alive.

And this time that we live where God is keeping people alive is also the time where the gospel is spreading, where God is seeking to build his kingdom, where God wants to show saving grace to

those he is calling to himself.

And so, the two go together. Life must be kept alive because people ultimately need to hear about Jesus, the promised Savior. our mission as a church of living for God, of serving others, of seeking to extend love and care, of pointing people to Jesus, it only happens because of this covenant, because God is determined to preserve life for his own purpose.

[27 : 10] Peter, in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9, says, God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

In a sense, it summarizes what's going on in the covenant with Noah. God doesn't judge us instantly as our sins deserve, but rather he is patient with us, and he's patient with the world, and he sends us Jesus, and he gives us time to repent.

It's the foundation of Christian mission, that while we have life, while we have time, we have opportunities to help people to hear the news that they really, really need to.

So life is preserved, and then as Noah and his family come out of the ark, and as they've offered the sacrifice to God that God is pleased with, and as God announces the covenant, he also gives a sign, a covenant sign of God's grace.

verse 13, is where verse 12 and 13 of chapter 9, 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.

[28 : 33] I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And then verse 16, 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.

So God gives this visible sign to Noah, the rainbow. This sign is an outward representation of God's promise. We thought about covenant signs.

We will see more of them as we look at the covenants, but in human terms, it's like when we give a wedding ring as a sign of commitment.

It's like the Lord's Supper, when Jesus gives the bread and the wine a visible symbol of an inner truth. We take the bread and the wine and it reminds us that we are united to Christ through what he does for us on the cross.

God's love. And this sign that God gives is a beautiful reminder of grace in judgment. Because how did the judgment of God come?

[29 : 52] It came through the flood. And where there is a flood, there is inevitably storm clouds that gather. So they would have looked up in the sky, would have looked up in the sky, would have seen the clouds, and he would know that's a symbol of God's judgment.

But where is the sign of grace that Noah is given? It's also in the clouds, the rainbow in the clouds. And so he is being invited and we are being invited to remember God is just, God deals with sin, God is holy, but God is also gracious.

God in mercy determines to save some. God is how does the rainbow speak hope to Noah? That is an important thing to recognize.

Look at verse 16 again. Whenever the rainbow appears, this is God speaking, whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant.

So the rainbow doesn't speak hope to Noah because he sees a rainbow in the clouds and Noah thinks to himself, well I've been a good person and I feel like I'm living faithfully so I've got hope that judgment isn't going to come.

[31 : 06] No, he can look at the rainbow and remember God has promised to be faithful to his covenant. So the rainbow is to speak hope of God seeing and God remembering.

It's supposed to point him to the faithfulness of God to keep this promise. God has taken the initiative to save him and Noah's hope and our hope rests in the faithfulness of God to his promise. You've maybe seen the bridge in Paris which has now spawned lots of replicas. I think it's called the Pont des Arts. It's somewhere near the center of Paris.

But anyway, it's a place where it's a romantic city apparently in Paris so people will go to the bridge, perhaps they'll write a nice message to their loved one on a padlock and then will chain it on the bridge as a symbol of their undying love for person X or person Y.

And you know that padlock, that permanent symbol, I guess a person could then return to that bridge months or years later and be encouraged to remember, ah, that one that put the padlock there, that's a promise of their love and their faithfulness.

[32 : 26] when we go to the Lord's Supper, we don't go to the Lord's Supper thinking, ah, yes, this reminds me about my faithfulness since the last time we sat.

It doesn't remind me that I have lived well and I deserve to be at the table. No, it speaks about the faithfulness of Christ to us. This is a covenant that God makes.

This is a promise that Jesus brings and it speaks of his faithfulness to us and that's our hope. It's the same with the rainbow. It speaks to us of a faithful God, a God of grace.

Of course, this isn't the only place where grace in judgment is seen. Grace in judgment is seen too at the cross of Jesus, isn't it? We see God's just anger, God's holy anger against sin on display but there it's not poured out on us, though we deserve it.

It's poured out on Jesus, the sin bearer of the world, as he comes to be our substitute and our sacrifice. But that cross which stands as a place of judgment also is a place of grace for us because there we find forgiveness, there we find eternal life, there we find our welcome into the love of God, into the family of God.

[33 : 49] So these signs of the covenant are precious reminders to us of God's grace and God's faithfulness. So that's a very brief look at the covenant of Noah and you know we need this story, this story of Noah and God's grace to him because it's an honest reminder to us of the darkness of our human hearts.

You know we don't need to look too far to recognize that fundamentally nothing changes, that the inclinations of people's hearts are still against God rather than towards God.

It's a story that highlights again God's initiative in saving us by grace, reminding us that Christianity is not a religion of works or merit, it's sheer grace, it's God's gift.

And it explains to us God's kindness in deciding, choosing to preserve life on earth. It's an act of mercy so that we might enjoy, we might live knowing God's kindness, that we might while we have time turn to the Lord God, turn to Jesus and be saved.

Let's pray about that.