

Cain & Abel & baby Jesus

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, this is your word, not our word. This is a word that you ultimately caused to be written. And we believe that every word in the Bible that you wanted to be there is there.
- And so, Father, it's your word. We're your people. And we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and teach us, lead us into all truth, help us to hear your word.
- May your word enter into us and have the forming and shaping power that you desire to have in our lives. And help us, Father, to know Jesus and realize what he has done for us, Father, as we hear your word.
- And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Over the years, I've talked to lots and lots of people about God.
- And there's a very often, a very sort of common, simple type of objection that people have to the idea that to Christians and Jesus and God.
- [1 : 1 0] And it's a very, very common one. People will say to me, well, you know, if God really wanted us to know all about his existence and everything like that, why doesn't he just make it more obvious? Like, why doesn't he make it more obvious in such like, in a way that, I mean, he just really appeared to everybody?
- Or that if we were doing the wrong thing or going away from him, there was some obvious thing that would happen to us just to make it very, very clear that he existed or that going away from him was going to have a terrible consequence?
- Like, why doesn't he do something like that just to make it more obvious that he exists? You know, why isn't the Bible just clearer and easier to understand?
- Why couldn't the teaching be better? And these are very, very common types of things that people have said to me over the years and even quite recently about the Christian faith and why they're not a Christian.
- So to network and sort of actually there's the passage that Ivan read and my passage as well. He actually has a lot of very interesting things to say about it. But we're going to go in a few moments sort of earlier on from where Noah, from where Ivan had read.
- [2 : 2 1] But first of all, just so you sort of have a bit of a sense why it is that I would use somebody like Noah to introduce the Christmas story. I'd like you to watch this movie, which and that sort of gives you a bit of an idea.
- That's the basic Christian hope of a basic Christian belief that the Bible, I'm holding a Bible here in my hands, that it's not just 66 different books not connected to each other, each book having lots of different parts, but that ultimately it's by one author.
- And ultimately it has one, it moves in a particular direction that God wants. And that everything in what we call the Old Testament, in fact, is pointing to Jesus.
- And so that's sort of what we've been doing in this Christmas season here at Church of the Messiah. The series is called Unusual Introductions. Two weeks ago it was Adam and Eve and baby Jesus. And this past Sunday it was Cain and Abel and baby Jesus.
- And today it's Noah and baby Jesus. So if you have Bibles, just look very briefly at Genesis 6. Earlier on, the part of the story, it's Genesis 6 verse 8.

[3 : 33] And the part that Ivan read was sort of towards the end of the story of Noah and the flood. And I'm going to read not quite the very beginning, but close to the beginning of the story of Noah and the flood.

And here's how the story goes. By the way, I'm not going to talk tonight at all about issues of whether it's historically true or not. The book of the character Noah.

As if you're curious, I talk a little bit about these issues in a blog that I put on the webpage, the church webpage, a couple of weeks ago. The first question to ask of stories is, is there some significance and power in these stories?

And if there are, then that's when it really makes sense to go looking at issues of historicity and truth. To start with historicity without looking at the meaning is to get the cart before the horse.

And a lot of us haven't even recognized the depth and the power of these old stories. So here's how it goes. Chapter 6 verse 8. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

[4 : 35] And just sort of pause in the original language. This is a very, very unusual thing to be said about Noah. It's one of only two people in the Old Testament where this particular Hebrew word of commendation is used about an individual.

These are the generations of Noah. Verse 9. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight. And the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth. And behold, it was corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh. For the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood.

Make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch. We'll just sort of stop reading here. You know, why...

[5 : 40] One of the questions that people ask is that... Is why... Why doesn't God send a really good person who just proclaims good news and goodness? Like maybe if there was just a really, really effective teacher who was not just...

And there's no question at all that he was a hypocrite. But that he was a really, really good person. And he could teach really, really good things. Why doesn't God do something like that? And if God did something like that, maybe it would be more convincing to people.

And more people would come to know him. Like why doesn't he just send somebody who's that type of powerful speaker and has a powerful life? And many people, when they hear me maybe starting to say something like that, think I'm going to talk about Jesus.

And I could. But in fact, actually, the first person to talk about is Noah. Here in some of the other parts of the story, we see that Noah is described as being an uncharacteristically good person.

Not a perfect person, but a blameless person. Not perfect or sinless, but a blameless person of exceptional piety. And later on in other parts of the Bible, it talks about how he was a herald.

[6 : 48] In other words, he went about... He didn't just... Not only did he personally live a very, very powerfully good life, but he actually went and spoke to people about it. And he spoke to people about how to live a better life and how to be a better person and how not to be corrupt and how not to be violent and how not to be a range of types of things.

But here's the thing, is that the... Noah does all of these things, but we can ask ourselves, how does it work out? How does it work out? If you put up the next screen, how it's going to work out is that, in fact, the story of Noah shows that God sending a really good person who proclaims good news and goodness does not work.

How does it show that? Well, what happens is immediately after this part, after we've described who Noah is, what in fact happens is that nobody at all responds to his teaching or his person.

And so the judgment that God has said to Noah is going to happen, that it comes. And if you go on and read the rest of chapter 6 and chapter 7, chapter 6 describes how Noah believes God, that God is in fact going to judge the earth.

And so he builds the ark and he trusts that God will seal him into the ark and that God will send the animals. And God does all of those things. And then, Lord, have mercy, the fountains from the water underneath the earth starts coming up and rain starts to fall.

[8 : 14] And who knows what other types of things that happens, but God works it in such a way so that there's a flood that it goes... There's water, water, water for days and days. And then there's water covering everything for days and days and days.

And all of the people die and all of the animals die. And now all that's left at the end of it is just Noah and his family and the living creatures in the boat.

You see, if people say, you know, if God was just to send like a really good person who could speak really well and could maybe do good apologetics and good philosophy and good ethics and good morals and just really convince people, then people would respond, why doesn't God do that?

Well, the response is that right at the very beginning of the Bible is that God tries that and it doesn't work. Like, he tries it and it doesn't work.

But, you know, other people might say, like as I began this talk, some of the other things that people might say is that, well, why doesn't God... Maybe you can put this slide up, Andrew. Why doesn't God start over with good people?

[9 : 18] Like, why doesn't God just start over with good people? Okay, like let's get rid of all the bad people and we can just sort of start over with good people. Years ago, I used to be like a sort of a quasi type of Marxist and whenever I was trying to think about how we could have this type of classless society, sort of always bothered me that even if certain areas in a country or certain countries were to try to practice this, it wouldn't work because all the other countries maybe wouldn't be practicing it.

How do you sort of have it spread? I know it sounds very naive and childish and people probably roll their eyes and, you know, for all of us, probably, if God could just show us tapes of things that we used to believe, we would all be horribly mortified.

But, you know, people say, well, you can say, well, why isn't God just sort of get rid of the bad people? I've had people say this to me and just start over with the good people and then the world would be a better place and they'd all know God.

Well, funnily enough, whenever somebody suggests that to me, they never include themselves amongst the bad people. They think they'd be one of the good people who would continue. But why doesn't God try just really revealing that he exists to us in such a way that it'd be impossible to deny?

Or why doesn't God do something so that it'd just be really clear that if you do these wrong things, that really bad things are going to happen to you? Or why doesn't he just try to be nice to us? Well, in fact, the rest of the story of Noah shows all of these particular things.

[10 : 40] God kills all of the flesh on earth, leaving only Noah and his close immediate family. Noah, this exceptionally good man who's an exceptional teacher.

And that's what happens. And what else is how could anybody other than those seven people who are on the ark, how could they not know that God exists after this?

And how could they not know that serious consequences befall people who rebel against God? And the part that Ivan just read a few minutes ago, which talks about the covenant, this God's promise to be in an unending relationship with people if they just, you know, they follow his laws and he will continue to bless them and cause them to multiply.

Like all of the types of things that we might say that God should try are all tried in the story of Noah. Put up the next screen.

Here's the thing. I'm not going to read it because there's children present. And maybe I'll just say it very briefly. If you go and you read Genesis 3 through the story of Noah and the flood, it goes chapter 6, 7, 8, 9.

[11 : 49] And after, at the end of 9, the story cycle of Noah ends with Noah getting drunk and one of his sons sexually assaulting him.

That's how the story of Noah ends. They've lived through the flood. They've had unbelievable proof that God exists.

They've seen unbelievable evidence that God can act in a way to judge. And that's how the story cycle of Noah ends. The story of Noah shows that God starting over with good people or intimidating us or being nice to us does not work.

Like it does not work. Now you're all so glad you've come to church tonight. I've managed to completely and utterly depress everybody. So, let's show this next movie.

Let's show this next movie. What the story of Noah does is it does three things.

[13 : 03] The first thing it does is it tries to bring before us the reality of a problem. Sometimes I'm not, I occasionally read books on management and leadership and often what they say, sometimes what they say in issues of leadership and even in terms of management, is that you have to sell the problem before you sell the solution.

If people don't understand the problem, they won't appreciate the solution. And really what the story of Noah does on one level is it brings before us a problem. And it shows how, in fact, right within the warp, the story of the Bible, that a very common type of, a set of common type of solutions that people would suggest, the story of Noah and the flood shows that, in fact, those solutions of God's clear judgment, of his clear reality, that they don't work.

It doesn't work in changing us. And the story of Noah then points, though, in two other ways because on one level the person of Noah is a promise and the person of Noah is also a bit of a, sort of a, it sets in contrast the surprising thing that God is going to do in the person of his son.

If you have your Bibles and you turn to Luke chapter 2, I'm just going to read part of the Christmas story, verses 8 to 11. And in Luke chapter 2, 8 to 11, in light of Noah and the problem which we see, here's how Jesus is introduced.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

[14 : 45] And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, what's born?

A Savior who is Christ the Lord. And we're just going to have a look at the story again. This is a very artistic way.

Some people think in images. I think this is a very interesting series of images to tell the story of Jesus. It's done with sand on lighted glass.

I can barely draw a stick figure.

When I see something like that, it always just amazes me that somebody could just do that with sand in their fingers. Here's the thing. Andrew, if you could put this next slide up, that would be great.

[15 : 49] Noah was a righteous man who was spared God's judgment. Jesus was a righteous man who came to bear my judgment and yours.

That is why he is called Messiah, Savior, and the Lord. Noah was a righteous man who was spared God's judgment.

Jesus was a righteous man who came to bear my judgment and yours. And that's why he's called Messiah, Savior, and the Lord. Most people in Canada nowadays don't really believe that there's any worry about something like the judgment of God.

At different times, I guess, when I was a teenager and in my 20s and even into my 30s, there were many people who worried about a nuclear holocaust. And I think it's almost been a constant, a low-level fear of many people in the West of some type of environmental disaster that would befall us.

I remember friends seriously not wanting to move to California in the 70s because they were worried that the earthquake would happen and California would slide into the sea. Forty-some-odd years later, it hasn't happened.

[17 : 05] So we often don't think of the judgment of God anymore. But we do think that if there was some type of cataclysmic judgment, whether from God or just from our own actions, that we would hope that we would be like Noah, that somehow we would be spared or delivered from the midst of that judgment.

Christians believe, or are called to believe, that our fear of dying or suffering some ecological judgment or whatever is a bit of an echo ringing around in our subconscious of a basic fear of God's judgment.

It's one of those clues or riddles that the Bible says that God doesn't leave himself without a witness, that God continues to put little riddles and little clues in human consciousness to warn them, to let them know that he exists.

And ultimately, if we follow those clues or those riddles, that they point us to this truth that only God, only God, only God can do something to rescue us or to save us.

And all we can do is receive what only God can do. In a sense, then, we look at Noah, and for us, part of the story of Noah is not only establishing the problem that even if God was to come down and make it very clear that certain things would be wrong and would be punished, that that would still not make us better people, that we would still rebel against God, that that whole path does not possibly work.

[18 : 32] On the other hand, the story of Noah is a bit of a picture of what, if we're honest, we long would have happened to us. But the story of Noah is an even deeper riddle in that it's the story of Jesus, who is also a righteous man and also exemplary in his generation, also a great teacher, but he does not come like Noah to escape judgment.

He who does not have any reason to be judged by God comes to bear my judgment in yours, so that I, by my faith and trust in Jesus' finished work upon the cross, can be like Noah, can be like Noah.

Noah. And we Christians believe that this is true, that what Luke is describing is true, that Jesus is historical, that it really fundamentally is true.

It's not just rituals, and it's not just liturgies. This next movie helps to show that. Noah was a righteous man who was spared God's judgment.

Jesus was a righteous man who came to bear my judgment in yours. That is why he is called Messiah, Savior and Lord. He's called Messiah because he's the one that God promised.

[19 : 56] God promised someone, and that promised someone is the Messiah. And he's Savior because that's exactly what he does, that he is the one who bears my judgment in yours.

And by bearing my judgment in yours and offering instead his standing before God, he truly is Savior. And we believe he's Lord, not only in the sense that after he saves us, we are to follow him as Lord, but in fact in this particular case, in Luke chapter 2, it's referring to the fact that God himself is the one at work.

Jesus is God's son and our Savior. That's why he's called the Lord. You see, the story of Noah shows that only God, only God, only God can do something.

And we need to be responsive and open to accept what only God can do. And this last movie showed that in fact, it's not religion that we're talking about, it's not just mere stories that we're talking about, that all of these stories, all of the things in this book, that they point to a real person who really did live amongst us and he really did come to die.

He was really the only baby who was born to die. And he came to die to be our Savior. And that's what Christmas is about.

[21 : 15] And just before I close in prayer, I'd like to show you one final movie that draws this wonderful connection between Christmas and Easter and helps bring out the true significance of Christmas.

Andrew. Please stand.

Today, in Starbucks, it was a very, very precious moment in a Starbucks.

I was here finishing my talk, my sermon for tonight and my sermon for tomorrow. And there was a young woman who came into the Starbucks with an older woman. And they sat just two tables over.

There was a table and then another table. And then they, you know, over here, bits and pieces of their conversation. Before you knew it, I knew it, the young woman had opened her Bible.

[22 : 18] And the two women were in a conversation because the older woman was wondering whether the younger woman was urging the older woman to give her life to Jesus. Right in that Starbucks at Laurier and O'Connor this morning at noon.

And I felt so privileged to be there. Two over. And I knew that part of the reason I was there was not only to work on my sermon tonight, but to pray for the two of them.

Such a privilege. And so I would work and pray and work and pray and work and pray and then I left and they were still there. I could overhear the older woman asking the younger woman questions and the younger woman would open her Bible and show her things from God's Word about God's promises to her.

You know, there's no better time than to return to Jesus or to come to Jesus than on Christmas Eve. And it really is just a matter of saying, God, I realize that only you can do what is necessary for me to be with you for all eternity and for me to begin to know that eternity life here on this side of the grave.

And I know and understand that it's come through your Son, it works through your Son, and Father, only you, may it just only be you, may just Jesus do whatever it has to do in my life, that I might be his and that I might be yours, that just only you, I receive what only you can do and have done in Jesus.

[23 : 46] No better time than tonight. Let's bow our heads. Father, I think again of that young woman and the older woman in the Starbucks at Laurier and O'Connor and I ask your blessing on both of them.

I don't know what the outcome of the conversation was, but I ask that your Holy Spirit would continue to work in both of them and I ask that your Holy Spirit would work in us. Father, that for those of us who have trusted Jesus as our Savior and our Lord, that you would draw us closer to him tonight, that you would draw us closer to him throughout this Christmas season.

And Father, that if there are any here who are trying to consider and sort these things out, that your Holy Spirit would just work in the lives of those who are here in our midst, that they would turn to you, that they would know that only you can do, that only you can fit us for heaven, that only you, only you can deal with those things in us as human beings that we can't fix by ourselves.

Only you. And help us, Father, to cry out to you and to trust what Jesus does for us and did for us. Only you. And all this I ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior.

Amen.