

# Raining Cats and Dogs

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[ 0 : 00 ] I've been having a sermon series on this first book of the Bible.

And people of all ages are fascinated by the flood. Adults spend thousands of dollars trying to find the ark. Other adults spend thousands of dollars trying to take those who are looking for the ark to court.

And then at the other end of the age scale, children are fascinated by the story of the ark. My nephew and niece love animals. And so there is no better Bible story for them than this, where all the animals of the world are compressed into just a couple of chapters of the Bible.

For many people, this has the best things about life in it. For Noah's ark is a cross between a luxury cruise, a trip to the zoo, an adventure story with dilemma, disaster and in the end salvation.

And yet all too often the point of the story is lost with all the wrong questions that people ask. Where did the ark land? Can we find it?

[ 1 : 14 ] Was it a flood over the whole world or just a bit of the world? Could it really be that all the animals would be in one boat and yet not eat each other? How on earth did Noah build such a massive thing all by himself, even if he did have the help of three sons?

And so on. Well, what's the point of the story of Noah's ark? The story of the flood. It's certainly not a prototype of the El Nino effect.

Because this flood does not come through a weather cycle, but rather comes through God's direct judgment on an evil world. And so the preface to the story of the flood says this, The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

It's not a very bright picture of humanity, is it? That's in chapter 6, verse 5. It's a story of, it's a description of sin that is both extensive and intensive.

It is as broad as it is deep. There is nobody who escapes the condemnation of this sin, but it's not just sporadic sin, it's chronic sin that is deep in the hearts of each and every person on this world.

[ 2 : 34 ] There's a stress in this chapter 6 of the evil, corruption, wickedness, violence, term upon term are used to describe what's going on here.

And the human heart is the seat of the problem. It's found lacking. And God is not indifferent to this. God is not impassive to the suffering, to the evil, to the violence and corruption of our world.

And so chapter 6, verse 6 goes on to say, And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. That's a picture of deep anguish at what's gone on.

So the Lord said, I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created, people together with the animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I'm sorry that I have made them.

God, we're told, is sorry, cut to the heart, grieving in his heart for what he's done. Literally, the word that's used is to say that God repents of what he's done.

[ 3 : 41 ] Not that what God has done has been a sin and something that he should not have done, but rather, in retrospect, he thinks, maybe it would be better if I hadn't have done this. He's sorry that he's done it.

And he changes his mind about the creation that he's made. And so he decides to destroy it, to blot it out. But the word blot out is used in other places to wash away something, perhaps a little glimpse, a humorous glimpse even, of the sort of way in which God is going to blot out creation.

So you see, from the very beginning, it is clear that the flood is God's judgment. Nothing else. But, in the midst of this devastating description of the world, and in the midst of this devastating description of what God is about to do, comes a but in verse 8.

But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. Sometimes people ponder, what does it mean for Noah to find favor in the sight of the Lord?

And then we read on to verse 9. And these are descendants of Noah. Noah was, and three things are put there, perhaps a progression of how good he was. A righteous man. We might say somebody who's good in our society.

[ 4 : 57 ] But more than that, he was blameless in his generation. So he's not just good, he's particularly exemplary of character. But even more than that, he walked with God. And if you remember back a couple of weeks, to the previous chapter in Genesis, we heard of another man called Enoch, who walked with God.

And so great was he in God's eyes that he didn't even die. God took him up to heaven without letting him face death. So Noah is a person of great moral character, par excellence. He is indeed an outstanding man. Not just somebody who's good, but somebody who is excellent, exemplary in his behavior.

And the story goes on to emphasize his obedience. So later on in chapter 6, when where all the instructions for building the ark are given, as we've already heard, it finishes in verse 22 by saying, and Noah did everything that God had commanded.

Very simply put, but summarizing that long list of instructions about the ark, and Noah did it all. He was absolutely obedient to what God said he was to do.

[ 6 : 11 ] The same thing occurs in chapter 7, with instructions about the animals. The same thing occurs in chapter 8, with instructions to leave the ark. At every point, Noah obeys God at his word.

Totally. But perhaps Noah's finding favor in the sight of the Lord is a little bit more subtle than this. It's not just that God gave Noah favor because Noah was such a brilliant man, as though Noah deserved the favor of God. Perhaps there's something about the order in which the verses are written.

Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. Then it goes on to say that Noah was a righteous, blameless person who walked with God. That is not so much the evidence for why he took favor, but rather his response to receiving the favor of God.

Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Therefore, this is how he responded, with works of obedience, uprightness, and moral rectitude.

[ 7 : 18 ] Later on in chapter 6, it says that God has already established a relationship with Noah. So it's not God now establishing a relationship with Noah by saying, I'm going to be your friend and you'll be my friend because you're such a good person.

But rather perhaps just in his generation. Not that God chooses a righteous person, but Noah's righteousness is a response to God's initiative.

And this, of course, is a biblical pattern. Because the word for favor is the word grace. Noah receives God's grace. And it's in response to that grace, which he doesn't deserve, that he responds with righteousness, blamelessness, and walking with the Lord.

It's the same pattern we find in well-known verses in the New Testament. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, By grace you have been saved through faith. And then what does he go on to say two verses later?

This is in order that you may perform good works or works of righteousness. And that, of course, is what Noah's doing. He has received God's favor and grace.

[ 8 : 33 ] He didn't deserve it. God is generous and merciful in extending that to him. But so effective was that grace being received by Noah that his response was to live a life of righteousness, blamelessness, walking with God.

The writer to the Hebrews says that Noah obeyed by faith. It's by faith Noah built an ark. You see, it's trusting in a God in whom he already has a relationship that leads to his obedience in response to God.

He's responding to God's grace. Well, this faithful man, Noah, builds the ark in the second half of chapter 6.

The word ark really just means a chest. It's a strange sort of word. But it's really just a chest. It probably looked a bit like a ship, not really a box.

But it's sometimes used for the word for coffin. But in the Bible, it only occurs two places, here in Noah. And it's also what the baby Moses was put on in the bulrushes.

[ 9 : 42 ] So it's a container, if you like, that floats sort of like a boat. It's built of gopher wood, but we don't know what gopher wood is. But it was covered with pitch, something that was easily accessible in Palestine, and that would make it waterproof.

Its dimensions are rather large, 440 foot long, 73 foot high and 44 foot, sorry, 73 foot wide and 44 foot deep, we're told in verse 15.

That makes it a big boat. It doesn't make it bigger than the big boats of today, but it certainly makes it big. It's not sort of your America's Cup type boat. It's a bit bigger than that.

It's got a skylight, we're told, in it, or some sort of roof opening or hatch in verse 16. But God has given all these instructions to Noah about building the ark. He said, I'm going to destroy people. Now go and build an ark. But it's not until you get to verse 17 that God actually says why he's got to build the ark. That is because his means of destruction is going to be a flood.

[10:43] But to that point, Noah must have been wondering what on earth is happening. Has God flipped his lid at these instructions? But then he's told, in verse 17, that God is going to send a flood on the world.

Only Noah's immediate family is allowed entry into the ark. That is his wife, who's not named, three sons who are, and their three wives who are not named either. He's also told to take in pairs of animals.

And probably we should keep the word pair there, because though the word pairs of animals could mean twos of animals, it doesn't mean that he only took two of each kind. In chapter 7, it's clear that he took seven pairs of some kinds, depending on what sort of animal or insect or whatever it was. So literally, he's told at first, you've got to take pairs. That's his males and females together. But then how many pairs he takes is then told to us in the next chapter. And he's also told to take food in verse 21 of chapter 6.

And then at the end of the chapter, as I've already said, all this Noah did. He was obedient to God's very word. Same thing happens in chapter 7.

[11:51] He's given a week now to get the animals, although it seems that God's the one who sort of brings the animals to Noah. And then Noah again does as he's told. He takes the animals onto the ark.

And in chapter 7, verse 10, the rain begins. And it rains, and it rains, and it rains, and it rains. Just like a Melbourne day, but really even worse.

Forty days and forty nights it rains. But notice also the description of this flood, because it's not just rain.

Verse 11 of chapter 7 says, in the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the 17th day of the month, on that day, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

Now this is a picture of a flood being caused by two things. The heavens being opened, that's rain as we know it. But more than that, the fountains of the deep, that is the water under the ground, bursting forth.

[12:56] And if you remember back to the creation, in Genesis chapter 1, when God began to make things, he separated the waters above the heavens from the waters beneath.

Now what's happening is a reverse of that. The waters above and the waters below are bursting forth and joining together in a great big flood. This is a reversal of the creation.

This is in a sense, a return to the chaos before God had finished with his creation. And then, as the water comes, God himself shuts the door.

In chapter 7, verse 16. Not Noah, but God himself. You see, the boat is more, is not really a luxury cruiser, but more a prison hulk.

Noah and his family and the animals are in effect prisoners in this boat. And God locks them in, admittedly for his protection, for their protection. But certainly there's a sense in which they are entrapped in such a boat.

[14:00] Forty days, the waters swelled, the waters swelled, the ark rose, the ark kept rising, the waters kept swelling. If you read the end of chapter 7, it's a bit repetitious.

But in a sense, it's the suspense building up. As you watch any film or read any book that's a thriller, that's got a sense of suspense or tension about it, that's what's happening here. The waters keep rising, the waters keep rising, the waters keep rising.

How far is it going to go, you wonder? Forty days and forty nights, the rain comes down and the water from under the earth comes up. But then even when that stops, that's not the end.

Because there's a further hundred and fifty days, nearly half a year, of the waters prevailing over the earth. This is a long flood, you see. It's not just a forty-day affair. We're told at the end of chapter

7 that the animals that are left on the land, they perish.

The humans that are left on the land, they perish. Only Noah and his family are spared. The story of Noah is a very carefully crafted story.

[15:10] It's not really a boring account of what happened. But rather, it's very artistic in its design. Like any good book, like any good story.

And every scene in the first half has a counterpart in the second. Let me give some examples. After the rain stopped, there's a hundred and fifty days where the waters prevail on the earth.

But in the second half, there's a hundred and fifty days when the waters recede. In the first half, before that hundred and fifty days, there were forty days of rain and the water coming up. And in the second half, there's another forty days where the earth actually dries up.

In the first half, the people and the animals enter the ark and that corresponds to them leaving the ark in a second. It begins with God speaking to Noah, it ends with God speaking to Noah. And I could find numerous more parallels.

What's going on in the story in chapters six and seven is that it's building up to a climax, step by step, going into the ark, or building the ark, going into the ark, the rain coming, the boat rising, the floods coming, day after day of rain and so on, and it reaches a pinnacle.

[16:23] And in this carefully constructed story, it then goes back down step by step, step by step. And in a sense, the story goes to a climax as indeed the water rises to a peak.

And then the story goes on towards its conclusion as the water recedes. Now you might be thinking, what on earth is this all about? This seems a bit complicated to me. The point of saying it is that firstly, the ancient Hebrews often wrote a story in that way.

And the second point is that the reason for doing that is to emphasize the turning point of the story. It's the middle that is significant. And in this story of Noah and the flood, chapter eight, verse one, is the significant verse and three words are all that are needed.

God remembered Noah. Noah. That's the turning point of the story. Not when they run out of water under the earth. Not when the sun at last comes out. But God remembers Noah.

That's the turning point. From then on, everything is now a reversal of the flood. The waters gradually recede, the land dries up, and in the end, the people and the animals come off the ark onto the dry land, and so on.

[17:33] So it's a carefully constructed story. And indeed, every scene has its counterpart in the first and the second halves to show that. The point of it is the turning point.

Chapter eight, verse one, God remembered Noah. Not that he'd forgotten Noah. It doesn't mean that God suddenly thinks, oh, what about Noah? He's been in that boat for days and days.

But when God remembers something, he acts. When God remembers something, he acts, and indeed, he acts to save. So in the book of Exodus, God remembers his people Israel.

They're crying out to him because they're oppressed by the Egyptians. When God remembers them, it doesn't mean that he thinks, oh, yes, I remember those Israelites, but rather he thinks, now I shall put in my plan of rescue. And so he raises up Moses to be the leader, to lead the people from oppression in Egypt into the promised land.

The same thing happens in the New Testament as well. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings a song when she's told that she's going to give birth to the Messiah. And one of the things in her song that she sings in Luke 1 is that God has remembered his promise to Abraham and his servants forever.

[18:47] That is, the sending of Jesus is God remembering his people and remembering his promises to his people and being faithful to keep those promises and so acting to bring them about.

So when it says God remembers Noah, it is God now acting to keep the promises that he made to Noah that would save Noah in the midst of this flood. It's also, though, a reminder of who the hero of this story is.

If you ever went to Sunday school, I'll bet my bottom dollar, which isn't very far down, that the hero of the story that you were told was Noah. And I'm sure if Charlton Heston were in a film about Noah, he'd be Noah and people would think he's the hero.

But they'd get it wrong because the hero of the story is God. For the turning point is God remembers Noah.

Not Noah does something, not Noah appeases God's wrath, but God remembers Noah. But indeed, the whole of Noah's flood story is about God acting.

[ 19 : 53 ] It is God who extends his grace and favor to Noah. not because of Noah, but freely extended to him. The ark is God's design. Noah might have built it, but Noah did exactly what God commanded.

The initiative, you see, comes from God. And it's God who chose Noah to be righteous and to save him. Not Noah's choice. Not an election or a public referendum or something, but God who chose him.

And it's God who established a relationship by a covenant with Noah. not Noah, or not Noah's nagging wife, if indeed she was nagging, but God who did it.

You see, it's a reminder to us that salvation belongs to God. Salvation comes from God, not from Noah, not from his navigational skills, not because he was a clever boatman and able to negotiate around all these high peaks while they were still showing or anything like that, not because he was a clever shipwright and able to build great ships, but because of God.

It is God's initiative and salvation comes from God and God alone. So when this story ends with this picture of hope, hope comes from God.

[ 21 : 03 ] Not Noah, not anybody else, and the same applies today. If we are to have hope in this world and for eternity, our hope must be placed in God and God alone.

For if we place our hope in Noah or the equivalents of today or in some other person or some institution or structure, our hope will be disappointed, but hope in God is never disappointed.

Well, from chapter 8, verse 1, the flood begins to recede. It doesn't stop with the sun coming out, which is what we might expect, and what other ancient peoples, when they wrote stories of floods, had.

But notice what happens to subside the waters at the end of chapter 8, verse 1. And God made a wind blow over the earth. And the waters subsided. This is sort of like an ancient helicopter that comes down on a cricket pitch that's been waterlogged and they're trying to speed up resumption of play.

There's no sun to dry up the water, so they bring in the helicopter to try and dry it up with a great big wind. Well, that's sort of what God's doing here, causing a wind to dry up the waters.

[ 22 : 11 ] But that's God's way. Ancient people often worship the sun, so God avoids the temptation for them to worship the sun by providing something else, a wind. Remember that it's through the Red Sea that was parted by a strong wind that God brought salvation to Moses and the Israelites.

And the same thing's happening here. But actually, there's another illusion that's going on here as well. Because where already have there been a wind in Genesis?

Well, you may not know because the word for wind is also the word for spirit. And the very beginning of the Bible, the second verse, the spirit of God or what we might say the wind of God was blowing or hovering over the earth.

Now, what's this suggesting? It's suggesting that the reversal of the flood is an act of new creation. Just as God's wind or spirit was blowing over the earth in Genesis 1, at the beginning of creation, now it's blowing over the earth in this act of new creation, the reversal of the flood.

And there are more suggestions of that sort of thing as well. God stops up the waters of heaven and stops down, if you like, plugs up the whole of the waters under the earth in chapter 8, verse 2, just like he did in the first creation by separating the water above and the water below.

[ 23 : 27 ] And then when the flood is actually over and Noah and his family leave the ark, they are told things just like Adam had been told in Genesis 1. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, eat all these sorts of things.

God blessed them as he blessed Adam in Genesis chapter 1 and so on. All sorts of things that show us what God is doing in reversing the flood is building a new creation because the old has been destroyed by the flood.

In Armenia, the clergy wear funny hats. I'm glad I'm not an Armenian clergyman because though I've got a collection at home in a bag of funny hats, I'm not sure that I'd like to wear an Armenian clergy hat in public.

It's a bit like a great big hood but it's long and pointy and black. It's not quite like a witch's hat, it's more like a Ku Klux Klan black copy.

And it's a great big hood that points up. Why? Because the Armenian Christian church traces its origins back to Noah's Ark because Noah's Ark ended up in the mountains of Ararat which is in eastern Turkey today in an area called Armenia.

[ 24 : 51 ] And we're told in chapter 8 that that's where Noah's Ark landed. That's why people go to Mount Ararat to try and find the Ark. I think it's a vain exercise. I don't think finding the Ark even if it is there to be found would actually prove anything in the eyes of a cynical world anyway.

And we're told in verse 4 of chapter 8 that the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. And there's a nice little wordplay here for those who understand Hebrew you'd sort of smile at the little joke.

If you remember back two weeks when we read through chapter 5 Noah's name was explained. The word Noah means comfort or rest. So in a sense what we're told is that the Ark Noahed on Mount Ararat to try and put it into a sort of sense.

And it's a little play on words but it's a reminder to us that what God said would happen does happen. Noah will be the one who brings rest to his people and he does when the Ark actually lands and rests or Noah's on Mount Ararat.

Having done that there's still 150 days before the dry land begins to appear. He sends a raven out comes back empty handed a dove the second dove brings back an olive branch the third dove doesn't bring back anything at all and it seems that it's ready to get out onto the dry land though Noah waits until God commands him so to do and when God commands him to leave with all the animals and his family that he does obedient Noah.

[ 26 : 21 ] And his first act when he leaves the Ark is to build an altar. And I guess he hasn't had an altar on the Ark because it would run the risk of burning the thing down so maybe he's been waiting but of course the significance is that his first act is to worship God because he knows that salvation is from God and that's why the first thing he does on getting onto dry land is to build an altar and make a sacrifice to God as thanksgiving to God for his salvation.

And the aroma of this sacrifice reaches God and God is pleased but it leads God to say a remarkable thing in chapter 8 at the end and when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor the Lord said in his heart I will never again curse the ground because of humankind.

Well that's not so surprising but what follows is for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth. That was the reason for the flood in the first place because the human heart was evil totally God was going to bring judgment but now because the human heart is evil God is going to bring mercy.

The cause of judgment becomes a cause of mercy. What it's saying is the flood hasn't changed the world. A new creation might be in part but it's not really because humanity is unchanged.

The heart of humanity remains evil. A flood can't change that. And we have to read a lot more into the Bible before we find what does. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[ 27 : 57 ] The flood may not change humans but in a sense it changes God because it causes him to make a vow, even a covenant, a pledge that he will never again destroy humanity like he did in the flood.

The flood is over and he says that, he reaffirms that to Noah and he gives him a sign in chapter 9 verse 13 onwards. I have set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

the rainbow is God's sign. But it's God's sign for God's self, not for us. Because it's when God sees the rainbow that he will remember the promises he's made to this creation.

He doesn't put it up and say, Noah, I want you to look at the rainbow and I want you to remember something. But rather he says, I'll put up the rainbow and when I see it, I will remember. So when we see a rainbow, we should think God is remembering his promise never to destroy this earth.

[ 29 : 17 ] It's a good thing that God has promised. But it's more than that. The rainbow is not just a happy little sign because when do we see rainbows? As this chapter tells us, we see them in the clouds and in a sense after a storm or rain.

You see, the rainbow is not just associated with hope, but it comes out of the judgment of a storm. For throughout the Bible, clouds are often the sign of God's judgment.

When Jesus said he was going to come back to judge the world, he'd be coming on clouds to judge. So in the midst of those clouds of judgment is the rainbow of God's hope.

Salvation, you see, is offered not independent of judgment, but rather through it. Through the storm comes the hope that God offers to this world. Well, let me finish.

this is not, you see, in the end, a cute kid's story about fluffy animals on a pleasure cruise in a bath. But rather it's the story of God the judge, and yet also God the merciful one.

[ 30 : 25 ] It's a story of warning. It's a warning to us that our world is no different from the world of Noah's day. The flood did not change that.

and the description of Noah's world may very well be a description of our own world and our society. And in Noah's day, that world and that society was unprepared.

It ignored the warnings and so was destroyed by the judgment of God. And just as the rain brought destruction on Noah's day, so too, it seems, will Jesus Christ when he returns to judge this world.

In fact, Jesus warned the very same thing. He said to the people, just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man.

They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day Noah entered the ark. And the flood came and destroyed all of them.

[ 31 : 34 ] And Jesus is saying the same sort of thing will happen when he returns. One day. It could be soon. It may be far off.

But let us not be unprepared like Noah's generation was. Let us respond to the grace that God offers as Noah did with faithful obedience, walking righteously and blamelessly with God.

And let us trust and praise the God of salvation, salvation, for in him alone is there hope. Thank you.