

A New Beginning but ...

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 June 2017

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Okay, I wonder whether you've ever faced this dilemma before of having to choose between starting over or trying to salvage a situation.

So maybe it's that moist, yummy cake you have in the oven, except you baked it for a bit too long. And so it's now slightly burnt and a bit dry. What do you do? Do you toss it out and start over? Or do you try and salvage it and pour lots of caramel sauce over it? Or perhaps one of you may have done a school project like this. I'm not sure if my daughter did it. Anyway, I'm making it up. But she's put hours and hours into this project, researching, designing, and then decorating the poster. And then she shows it to you, and you find the title, which is all beautifully drawn up and decorated, has been misspelled like this on the slide.

Or what's she going to do? Should she start over, which is going to be heartbreaking? Or should she try and salvage it? Perhaps my suggestion would be to put the I in like so.

[1 : 08] It's sort of like the member of parliament sitting at his seat. Or perhaps you're like my friend, living overseas 15 years ago, and he was dissatisfied with work and relationships over there.

Does he try and salvage the situation or start over in a new country, which is what he did by migrating to Melbourne? It's not easy to choose sometimes, is it?

Starting over just takes so much effort and time. But salvaging doesn't work either sometimes as well. Well, over the last few weeks in Genesis, we've seen how God is sort of faced with the same dilemma.

Except his problem wasn't just burnt cakes or spelling errors. It was actually the infestation of evil throughout his creation. And this was summed up last week in a verse, verse 5 of chapter 6, which is on the slide there, where the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become, and that every inclination of the heart was only evil all the time.

And Noah, we saw, was the only exception. And so God decides, agonizing though it is, to start over. He's going to judge humanity's evil, but he's going to save Noah and his family.

[2 : 32] Now the passage we're looking at today is the entire account of Noah. So the title says that, in verse 9 of chapter 6, it's one of the ten accounts, or generations, in Genesis.

It actually spans three and a half chapters, so it goes all the way to the end of chapter 9. We only managed to read part of chapter 6 today, but we're going to cover, as I said, and start the entire account, which means, unless you're willing to stay until afternoon tea time, we're not going to be looking at each verse individually.

What we'll do instead is, we're going to do a bit of a flyover. And as we do, I'll point out some of the landmarks and highlights for you. But first, to give you a big picture of the entire passage, here's the slide which I've done to break down the chapters.

So, following a brief introduction of Noah, and why God chose him, Noah, in 6.11-7.5, then receives instructions and promises of the coming judgment.

The flood itself is being described in verses 6-24 of chapter 7. And what it portrays is actually a reversal of God's creation. Chapter 8 and verse 1 is the pivotal verse, the turning point.

[3 : 45] And there, we see that God remembered Noah. Following that, we have then the second half, which actually mirrors the first. So, we have the receding flood, which shows God recreating instructions and then promises of blessing.

Follow that. And then at the end, we come back to Noah and his sons again. But this time, we find that Noah is just like everyone else, sinful. So, in your outlines, we're going to consider the first half of this account under the heading of a first ending, where God judges humanity but saves Noah.

And then in the second half, it's a new beginning, where humanity is blessed even though sin remains. Now, before God gets underway with his judgment though, we're told in verse 9 of chapter

6 that Noah has found favor in God's eyes because he was, one, a righteous man, two, blameless among the people of his time, and three, he walked faithfully with God.

Now, just like Abraham a few chapters later, Noah's righteousness is credited to him because of his faith. This is confirmed for us in that other reading in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 7, where Noah is said to be an heir of righteousness, not because he's sinless, but because of his faith.

And the other qualities, the other two, blameless life and walk with God, are also outworkings of that faith. And so, Noah sets himself apart from the rest of humanity by shunning evil.

[5 : 18] And it is this evil that God now judges, verse 13, by putting an end, he says, to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of all them.

God will destroy both humanity and the earth. And to prepare for that, he tells Noah to build an ark. Now, we pause just to think about this violence.

It must have been pretty terrible, isn't it? Because God is about to destroy his very own creation. It's the creation that in Genesis 1 he called good. And at the end of six days, after humans were created, he said it was very good.

So what the people must have done must have been terrible for God to even think about destroying his creation. And sadly, that's what it was. Humans have let him down.

His image bearers, who were supposed to rule on his behalf and be fruitful and multiply, well, they do exactly the opposite. Instead of filling the earth, they deplete it with their killing.

[6 : 22] Their violence mars the very goodness of creation. And so God is about to judge this evil. But this judgment, although it's coming, takes a while to be fulfilled.

When you look at the dimensions of the ark, that would have been a barge that would have taken a long time to build. 300 cubits, if you look, I think, in the footnotes, that's 140 meters.

So that's 100 meter dash plus more. That's 23 meters wide. And it's 13 and a half meters high. And there's only four people that were building.

Maybe the women got involved as well. But it was Noah and his three sons. And so when we first meet Noah in chapter 5, it says he was 500 years old. But guess how old he was when he stepped into the ark?

Verse 6 of chapter 7. He was 600 years old. So this is a 100 year project. But Noah, to his credit, stuck to God's word.

[7 : 27] Twice in the passage we're told. First, that very last verse in our reading. Verse 22 in chapter 6. And then again in verse 5 of chapter 7. We read that Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.

He obeyed and followed God's instructions. But his faith was such that even after he entered the ark, there was still another seven days of waiting.

Just imagine that. He goes in the ark with all the animals, closes the door, and then for one whole week. I don't know what they did in there, but they were waiting, weren't they?

Before the heavens finally opened, as God said it would. But God is always true to his word. Even, you know, I was amazed by this little detail, but even down to how the animals were going to come into the ark.

So if you notice in verse 20 of chapter 6, God had said, Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal, of every kind of creature that moves along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive.

[8 : 30] It's amazing, isn't it? He'll prompt two of each, one male, one female, to come. And then verse 8 of chapter 7, that's exactly what occurs. Pairs of every creature, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark.

And then it says, Just as God commanded Noah. Further on, when God said that it would rain for 40 days and 40 nights, verse 4, it did, it did. In verse 12, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights.

And so God is true to his word. Even to the point of saying that he will make a covenant. And then in chapter 9, he does make a covenant with Noah. Now as we read the rest of the account, there is no doubt that this is a global flood.

So I'll give you some examples. Verse 17, it says that all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. Likewise, verse 21 and verse 23 says, that every living thing was wiped from the face of the earth.

Only Noah was left, and those within him in the ark. Now I've sort of wondered how this might be possible geologically. That's an interesting question.

[9 : 39] But we don't have time for that now. So if you're interested, come and have a chat with me afterwards. I've got a few wacky ideas. And some scientific ones as well, which I've read elsewhere.

But what is actually more important is not the how of the flood, but the why, the theological significance of what is happening. For as I said earlier, what's portrayed is a reversal of God's creation.

Remember back in Genesis 1, when God separated the waters below the expanse from those above to create the sky, and then later on, he gathered the waters to one place to form dry ground. Well, there's a sort of a reversal of everything going on here, isn't there? Everything is being returned back to chaos, this empty sort of watery world, which actually is what we see at the start of Genesis 1, in verse 1 and 2.

And whereas in Genesis 1, God blessed each creature, here God judges by destroying what He's created. Anyway, the Bible tells us that after 40 days of non-stop raining, it stops.

[10 : 51] And then in chapter 7 and verse 24, we read that the waters flooded the earth for 150 days. So just imagine that eerie silence.

There's no sound of rain, no chirping of birds in the morning, there's no life except in the ark, which is bobbing along in this sort of watery grave, a bit like a rubber ducky in a giant bathtub.

It's five long months, not a word from God. Noah's there, waiting, praying perhaps, and then, you know, doing the job of zoo keeping, scooping poop, or whatever.

And then, on the 151st day, we read in verse 1 of chapter 8, that God remembered Noah. He also remembered all the animals with him in the ark.

And when God says he remembers something in the Bible, it's always significant. It's not like, oh, it's just forgotten and he's remembered and oops, you know, I better do something about this.

[12 : 00] Rather, when the Bible says God remembers, it's his way of telling us that actually God is responding to his promises. That he's acting on the basis of his spoken word, prior spoken word, even though it's taken a long time to happen.

God tells us that he remembers to assure us that he didn't forget in the first place. It's like when you as a parent take your child to her favorite ice cream store and you buy the corn and then you say, Daddy remembers that you like cookies and cream.

It's that same kind of remembering. And so with that, God sets about recreating his world. He sends a wind over the earth rather like the spirit hovers over the waters in Genesis 1 and then as the water recedes and the ground reappears, it reminds us as it did on the third day of creation in Genesis 1.

And all these hints of Genesis 1 are actually deliberate. It's to convey that God is starting over again. He's recreating like he did the first time around. But so is the symmetry of the account.

That is deliberate too. So I've got a slide which has the flood timeline here. And what we see as we read the account is that the days on each side of chapter 8 and verse 1 actually match.

[13 : 27] So we have seven days of loading the ark, seven days, shouldn't say the dove first release, that's a typo. It should say seven days before the rains came, 40 days rain, 150 days of flooding and then on the flip side it has 150 days in which the water recedes to the mountaintops and then another 40 before it recedes to the ground and then two lots of the dove the first seven days the dove comes back and then afterwards it doesn't.

What it shows is that God is not trying to recreate a brand new earth from scratch but rather he's restoring the old one back to where it should have been.

And that's why this account here of recreating is also a bit different to Genesis 1. If you read Genesis 1 you get this sense of a glorious fanfare, don't you? God speaks and things happen, you know, life, activity, they just birth forth everywhere.

It's all very exuberant, isn't it? Here however, the recreating is actually a bit more subdued. It's a sober acknowledgement of the judgment that's gone before.

And it takes place without God's authoritative voice even though we know that God is still in control. It's only when we get to verse 15 that God speaks again and when he does he calls Noah out of the ark.

[14 : 52] And when he does it's almost as if Noah is stepping out as another Adam. He's called to bring the animals out with him so that they can multiply and be fruitful and increase. And these are the very same words aren't they that are used back in Genesis 1.

And then when we go to Genesis 9 God actually gives Noah the same mandate that he gave to Adam but again with some differences. So he says Noah in verse 1 if you look there he says be

fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

But because creation is now marred by sin he actually no longer commands Noah to rule over the animals like he said to Adam. Instead he says the fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth and on all the birds of the air on every creature that moves along the ground and all the fish in the sea they are given into your hands.

Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. And so what we see now here is there is actually the fear in the animals of human rule. And animals can be killed for food.

Likewise animals themselves will threaten the life of humans as it says in the next two verses. God does say of course that there will be accounting for any human bloodshed.

[16:13] In fact all these verses all speak to the fact that all life is actually accountable to God because he's the giver of life. And this is particularly true in verse 6 for humans because it says that they are made in God's image.

sin is still alive and kicking. It's rather like you cleaning your house, which I sort of do sometimes.

But you know, no sooner have you packed away the vacuum cleaner with that whole bucket of dust, then you start to see dust accumulating again, isn't it? And this is what happens here, that the flood has in one sense washed away human sin up to then.

But then no sooner has Noah stepped out, we start seeing sin accumulating and flourishing again. And the Lord himself laments this very fact.

So we skipped over it, but come back again to chapter 8 and verse 21. What had happened then was that Noah had come out of the ark and made a sacrifice to the Lord. And it so pleased the Lord that he actually promised not to curse the ground again, which I take to mean that he's not going to add to the curse of Genesis 3.

[17:29] But nevertheless, he does this because it is a concession by God, because he then says that he knows every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

He's saying I'm not going to curse the ground again, even though I know that the human heart from childbirth or childhood is evil. And so this is the sad thing, isn't it?

Nothing has really changed. The human heart is still the same. Even when we go to the next chapter, I know all of us know of this story about the rainbow and we always think it's good news.

God has promised never again to destroy the earth by flood and it is good news because God has made that promise. But if you think about it, it's actually also an implicit acknowledgement that we're not for God's covenant, the world may very well be judged by flood again.

That is, human sinfulness is such that God had to make this covenant and promise in the first place because if sin wasn't there, why would he need to say that?

[18:34] And yet God in his kindness enters into this unilateral universal and eternal covenant and if you read the passage, eight times the word covenant is mentioned as if to say, I'm making this promise because I want to restrain my judgment on evil and were it not for my word, my promise, judgment would have come.

And so whenever God sees a rainbow in the sky and just last week I saw two in the one, that was amazing actually, God says that he will remember, he will sort of remind himself not to destroy the earth by flood again.

Well, as we look at the final section from verse 18 of chapter 9, as if to prove God's point again, we see Noah and his family and we see human sinfulness.

So what we have here is this is the righteous hero that God saves, the only one that God saves, sinfulness, and yet we find in his last years it turns out that he's just like everyone else, sinful.

This is not the seed, not the offspring that we are looking for to save humanity. Now, I have to say Noah continues to be a man of faith, that's not the point here, but what we see here is his fallenness.

[20:04] So in his final years, he's seen planting a vineyard, getting himself drunk, and then lying there naked in disgrace in his tent. It's not that Noah didn't know better, because it says in verse 20 that he was a man of the soil, so he knew how to grow things.

And I think, I don't know, I don't know how to make wine. You can only make wine if you know how to do it, right? So it's not like Noah just one day, I don't know, there's wine here, let me drink and see what, no, he actually knew what he was doing.

Wine making is a very technical, a thing that experts only can do. Ham, his son, is even worse, isn't he?

Because he finds his dad naked and then he reports it to his two brothers, probably gleefully. And as a result, Noah's curse falls on Ham's son Canaan.

And I think that little account is put in there to give us a context for when God's judgment of Canaan will come later on, when Israel enters the promised land.

[21 : 11] And so sadly, what we see here is Noah's life is just like all his predecessors. Yes, he was a man of faith, but yet he was marred by sin as well.

And we find at the very end of the account the very same predictable refrain that we saw in chapter 5. It says, Noah lived 350 years after the flood.

He lived a total of 950 years, and then he died, just like everyone else except Enoch. Well, that's our sort of quick fly hover of the flood, but it's now sort of time to land and try and work out what this passage means for us today.

Is the flood only a good Bible story to be telling your kids, or does it have something to teach us even for the grown ups? Well, I guess the first and most important thing to realize is that as with many things in Genesis, the flood represents a pattern or model of how God works in this world. And in the case of the flood, it's a picture of what God's judgment looks like in the face of sin and wickedness. Evil grieves the Lord greatly, and it prompts him to act even against his own creation.

[22 : 30] But in the midst of judgment, we see also God's other side. That is that God is gracious to save, even in the midst of judgment. In fact, I take it that whenever God is about to judge, he always provides a way of escape and a way of rescue.

And so here he rescues a remnant, Noah and his family, those who are counted righteous by faith. And if you look through the Bible, you see this sort of pattern repeating itself. So when Israel's first generation rebelled, they're about to enter the land, but they sort of didn't believe the report of the spies.

Well, God judged them, didn't he, and destroyed them. But God brought Joshua and Caleb, a remnant, into the land, and they let the young ones in. Likewise, when we get to the divided kingdoms of Israel, the north and the south, when God judged them, he actually took a remnant and took them to Babylon in exile to save them actually, because afterwards, he was going to bring them back to save them.

And so Jesus, when he was on this earth, he had this message, didn't he? He said, many are called, but few are chosen. Wide is the road that leads to destruction, and narrow the road to life, but only a few find it.

And so it shouldn't surprise us then that the Bible continues to speak of another judgment, on an even bigger scale than the flood. There is still sin and there's still evil in this world, so God has to judge, God has to deal with it somehow.

[24 : 00] God may have promised never to destroy the flood, the earth by flood again, but he has to find another way. And for those of us who know and believe in Jesus, we are thankful, aren't we, that one of the ways of escape that he's provided for us is that the judgment fell on Jesus, on the cross.

Instead of pouring out his judgment on us, he was God poured his judgment on Jesus instead. And if we believe, then we are like Noah and his family.

We're saved in God's ark, and this ark is Jesus. But for the rest of humanity, well, there is actually another day of judgment coming.

It may take a long time to come, more than a hundred years even, but let's not be deceived of its reality. Jesus himself warned of that coming day, so I've got a verse in Matthew chapter 24, three verses actually.

And Jesus himself was influenced by the flood in his thinking of the coming judgment. For he says, as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark.

[25 : 17] They knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Friends, I'm sure you know this, but life is more than just eating and drinking, marrying and having children and seeing them grow up.

Life is more than just getting from one holiday to the next and working hard in between to get the money to do it. None of these things are bad in themselves, but if these are the only things that occupy us and we're oblivious to the coming judgment, then Jesus says, we're actually no better

than the people in Noah's day, are we?

And so friends, if there is anyone here today who has not yet taken refuge in the ark by faith in Jesus, then let me urge you to do so. If you know of family and friends who are in that situation, then pray for them and when the time is right, when the opportunity presents itself, warn them of it. Tell them that judgment is coming. It's not a very popular thing to say today, is it? But that is the reality. I suspect that the day before the rain came for Noah, the sky was probably clear and sunny like it is today.

It was probably a good day for drinking and marrying, but then the flood still came the day after. So friends, don't put off placing your trust in Jesus just because life is good at the moment.

[26 : 50] God is the God. If, if, however, you've already sought refuge in Jesus, then I think the encouragement for us today is to wait patiently for the Lord's salvation. You may feel that right now your life is one of the fiercest storms, and you might be buffeted by winds and waves, but let me encourage you that when you're in Christ Jesus, then you're in the safest place possible.

God remembered Noah just as he promised, and God remembers those who are his. And one day, just as his promise, his son will return and call us out into his glory.

It's almost as if it will be the day that Noah stepped out of the ark. We too will step out into the new day, into this new creation, a new heaven and a new earth. So hang in there, wait patiently for the Lord, and do not lose heart.

I want to conclude by just going to a passage in Peter's second letter. I was struck when I read it, and I think Peter himself was pretty influenced by the flood, just as Jesus was.

So chapter three and verse three. Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

[28 : 07] They will say, why is this coming? Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.

But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. Skipping down to verse 11, since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. Let me pray for us.

Let me ask God to help us live holy and godly lives. Father, we thank you again for your son, our ark, in whom we can seek refuge in the coming judgment.

[29 : 21] Father, if we know of family and friends who are not yet in this refuge, help us to warn them, to share with them about the good news of Jesus.

we pray and ask in mercy, save them please. And Father, for the rest of us, help us to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord.

Help us in our lives to be godly and holy so that we may speed its coming. We pray this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.