

Faith for the Flood

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[0 : 00] Well now if you would take your Bibles please and open to page 5, Genesis chapter 6.

This is the time we put down our shopping lists and the church bulletin and everything else and we pick up the Bible and we turn to it and we come today to the account of the flood which I think is a wonderful passage for commissioning a group of people to go to Richmond, not because of the rising waters, not at all because of that but because building a floating box in a desert in time of drought with nothing to go on but the promise of God is a very good picture of what it's like to follow Jesus today and belong to his church.

And I want to say as we begin this is a very shocking story. Beautifully told, in fact the main part of the story, it's sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion as all good sermons ought to be.

There are seven scenes, all sorts of words from the creation narrative come out and if you read it this afternoon you might notice that scenes 1 to 3 are perfectly mirrored by 5 to 7 and at the heart is this little statement in chapter 8 verse 1 of how we should understand the flood.

But the problem is this, we're so easily distracted from the main issues of the account because of the beauty of how it's told it. I'm told there are all sorts of exquisitely illustrated children's books that you can go to bookstores and by with lovely pictures of animals and of rainbows and of unicorns but virtually none of them speak about the power of God's wrath and the destruction of humanity and everything with breath except for those in the ark.

[1 : 57] This section goes from chapter 6 to the end of chapter 9. It is the centrepiece of the whole of Genesis 1 to 11. There is no other narrative, no other story in the first 11 chapters of the Bible that is given so much space and it's a bit silly for us to try and take it in one sermon but we'll do our best.

It is deeply disturbing. It reveals to us a God who is so distressed and so grieved by human sin and wickedness that he is willing to kill every living creature that he has made.

And he is so committed in love to his creation that he is willing to save the only family who trusts his promise and all the animals which is a very interesting thing which demonstrates that it's not just us but it's the creation that God is concerned for.

And if you remember back at the end of chapter 5, we come out of chapter 5 with high hopes, don't we? Remember Noah's dad when Noah was born? John names him and he says, perhaps this one will be the saviour.

This will be the one who will turn back the curse and bring the blessing of God. But we begin chapter 6 on a very low note. Just look down at chapter 6 verse 1. We're not sure what's going on here but clearly there seems to be sexual interaction between some sort of heavenly being.

[3 : 21] We're not sure what's going on here but clearly there seems to be sexual interaction between some sort of heavenly beings, demons, angels and human women.

And I think what's going on here is that human beings are trying to find a way to reverse the effect of the fall and of their sin and to extend their life somehow to reach towards immortality to produce children who might be better, children who might be half divine, half human.

It's a chilling early reminder of eugenics and the recent suggestion of compulsory fetal screening. It's a glimpse of a culture where marriage is demonised, where the boundary of God's will are regarded as the barrier to freedom and progress.

And God's response is to cut life short and to increase mortality and to reduce the number of years of human life. Very disturbing.

But things get deeper as David read. Look at verse 5. The Lord saw, this is a verse where there's no room for doubt. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.

[4 : 52] Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, grieved him to his heart.

And so he said, I will blot out man whom I've created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air. Because what happens in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls, what happens with our fantasies and our imaginations and our dreams is of deep importance and significance to God.

And all the corruption and all the violence and all the wickedness in the world is at core a betrayal of the loveliness and the beauty and the majesty of our creator God.

God made us for himself. We have this irrational and obstinate commitment to cutting him out of the picture, going our own way, of living horizontally, of refusing to honour him as God, of choosing to believe our own lies rather than what he says.

And a number of commentators I've read this week have pointed out how in North America we've created an entertainment industry which is focused on violence, sensuality and pornography.

[6 : 11] That our imaginations and our fantasies are filled with these things. Dr. Bruce Waltke, who teaches at Regent College, likens our television and movie industry to the Medusa.

You remember the Greek monster who had snake in her hair or snake for hair? When you looked at her, you turned to stone. And he said the more we continue to watch these violent things, the more our hearts turn to stone.

But what is so remarkable about these words is this is the first time in the scriptures that we are allowed to enter into the heart of God. And what we find there is not a vengeful, raging, emotional God who says, I just can't take it, I'm going to deal with it.

Nor do we find the sloppy, sentimental tolerance of Father Christmas. What we find is a parent who is deeply grieved by the evil and rejection of their child.

When God looks at our hearts and he sees our fantasies and our imagination and our dreams and that they're consumed against him, he is grieved to his heart.

[7 : 20] I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but it is deeply costly for God to be our God. Every imagination and thoughts of our hearts which defy him and dishonor him, they're not just disobedience, but they bring him grief and pain.

And the passage tells us that God deals with our decisions and our thoughts and our actions with profound and eternal seriousness.

And so we read, I will blot out humanity, verse 7. Verse 13, I will make an end to all flesh. Verse 17, I will bring a flood to destroy all flesh.

Because the sovereign God who gave breath to every living thing has absolute right to take that breath away. Chapter 6, verse 18, I think here is the biggest surprise of all.

But, but. You love verses in the Bible that begin with but. But I will establish my covenant with you. You'll come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, your sons' wives with you.

[8 : 35] The every living thing of all flesh. Bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female, birds, animals, creeping things, etc, etc. Don't you think the most shocking thing about this narrative is that God should even want to continue with us?

He is so committed to purpose, his purpose of blessing. He is so committed to loving and redeeming that he gives Noah this task of building the ark.

And he saves Noah and the family and the animals because they are caught up in our destiny somehow. And even though he knows the long history of how we are going to treat him shabbily. How it is going to cost him day by day by day until it finally costs him the death of his own son. Yet he perseveres with his blessing. And the way he does that is he makes a covenant.

He promises. And this is the turning point in the story, of course. Now there is hope. Now there is light. It goes from just a story of judgment into a story of preservation.

[9 : 46] And a salvation through judgment. And Noah must play his part. God says build a box. That's what the word means.

Build a box. And if you look at it, it's shaped like a coffin, really. Great big coffin. And take all the animals inside.

And that's why we read the last verse of chapter 6. Noah did this. He did all that God commanded him.

That is a very encouraging verse. In a culture dominated by violence and evil fantasies. And where marriage is demonized.

It is possible to be different. Here is one man who is different. He stands out. He walks with God. He's a righteous man. He's not sinless.

[10:41] But he hears God's word. And he acts on it. And if you do the calculation through this passage. That one verse covers 100 years.

For 100 years. In this culture committed to violence and corruption. Noah builds this huge box with nothing to go on. But the promise of God.

And I want to pause on this for just a minute. In the New Testament. We are told that Noah was not just a carpenter. But he's also a preacher of righteousness.

He doesn't slink away to a secluded lumber mill. And get on with the building of the ark. But for 100 years. He preached to his generation.

He warned and he explained. And this was his message. You have filled the earth with violence and corruption. And the God of heaven and earth has decided to destroy every living thing.

[11:43] But he will save everyone that comes into this box with us. And he has the biggest visual display that any preacher has ever had. Now just think about.

Can you think of a message. That would be less popular than that one. I mean surely Noah should tone the judgment stuff down.

Surely he ought not to say there's just one place. That you can be saved. Surely he ought to make the box more attractive. You know come into the box.

God will fulfill all your dreams. There are leather benches. There's the best windows you will let.

Surely if he made the box more attractive people would come. You know what should he say.

There he is for 100 years. He has heard every joke about water and deserts and boats that you can imagine. And every time he speaks about the coming flood.

[12:42] People will ridicule and mock him. They're too busy chasing their dreams and fantasies. Because you see the idea that God is going to destroy everything is absolutely unbelievable.

And through 100 years of preaching. Not one single person believed the word of God and turned to him. You read in the New Testament that God waited with patience during the days of Noah.

He could have brought the flood immediately. God waited 100 years so that people would come into the ark. And not a single person did. And so the waters come.

And David read this from chapter 7 verse 11 onwards. And I don't know if you were focusing clearly enough. But there are a number of words that are picked up from the creation narrative of Genesis 1.

But they're placed in reverse order. It's a supernatural flood. As the chasms of the deep open and the water rises. And as the sky is open and the water falls.

[13:51] And what it is, is it's the creator uncreating. Decreating. Because the creatures have defied the boundaries of God. God now removes the boundaries of safety.

He removes that distinction between the sea and the dry land. And the water rises. And four times we read the waters prevail. The waters prevail. The waters prevail.

And verse 21. All flesh died that moved on the earth. Birds and cattle. Beasts. All swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth. And every man.

Everything on the dry land. In whose nostrils was the breath of life. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground. There's only one thing that floats.

It's the box of God. And the box is like creation in miniature. There are plants and there are the animals represented. And Noah and his family is taking care of them.

[14:51] And then we come to the center of the narrative. Scene 4. Which is just one verse.

Chapter 8 verse 1. God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.

And God made a wind blow over the earth. And the waters subsided. It's a great verse because it tells us. It's not just some freak accident that's happened. It's God who is doing this.

And in the same way that the breath and the spirit of God brooded over the waters in creation. So now the wind and breath of God brood over the waters. And they subside.

We don't have time to look at the lovely dove and raven story. And then the ark touches ground and God opens the ark. And the earth has been washed clean.

And we have high hopes for a new creation. And in chapter 8 and in chapter 9 God repeats the blessings. Be fruitful and multiply.

[15 : 50] And then we read in chapter 8 verse 20. Noah built an altar to the Lord. And he took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor the Lord said in his heart. I will never again curse the ground because of man. For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Neither will I ever again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains. Seed time and harvest. Cold and heat.

Summer and winter. Day and night. Shall not cease. Wonderful. Wonderful. The first thing Noah does is he builds an altar. Offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

And for the second time in the Bible we hear about the heart of God. The first time God's heart is grieved. But now God's heart is pleased.

[16 : 49] Sparkling new world. Is it Eden? No it's not. Because God says that the essential character of rebellion and sinfulness in humanity remains.

I think we're supposed to see that the problem of sin is so virulent. It's so radical in us. That you can wash the whole world clean and it remains.

And of course every child is a blessing from God. And yet we're told here that the resident evil dwells in us from childhood. Despite the fact that we have tried to convince ourselves that we're very nice people.

And what the world needs is for us to be nice people and nice to each other. God's view is that there is no such thing as a good hearted person. But even now God remains committed to his original purposes.

And in chapter 9 verse 11 we read again. I will establish my covenant with you. That never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood.

[17 : 58] And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said this is a sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations.

I'll set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Until the day when God creates a new heavens and a new earth God will never destroy the earth again.

And he takes the rainbow and he says this is going to be a very happy reminder to me of my kindness to you. And so the story ends.

No it doesn't. There's one more event that needs to be told. In verse 20 of chapter 9. Noah was the first tiller of the soil.

I'd have you read this with me but it's a little unsavoury. He planted a vineyard and he drank of the wine and became drunk. And he lay uncovered in his tent.

[19 : 00] And Ham the father of Cain saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father.

And their faces were turned away and they did not see their father's nakedness. And when Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him he said, Cursed be Cainan. A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. And he also said, Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem and let Cainan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem and let Cainan be his slave.

Now if we need any proof that sin is alive and well after the flood we have it here. And here is the one who walked with God. Here is the one who was righteous.

Who preached. Drunk. Passed out on the ground. And degraded. And there is a hint of sexual impropriety in the word nakedness.

[20 : 03] And I think that explains something of the strength of Noah's prophecy for Ham and Cainan. The righteous one who started so well is conquered by sin.

And he is a great warning to us. I want to read to you from one of my favourite commentators who turns 65 in a couple of weeks time.

He says we are all sinners. The very best of us are sinners. And this passage is for those who are older. Who have walked with Christ for a long time.

You can get overtaken by sensualities that you have long avoided. We never get beyond these things. We allow ourselves little sins and indulgences which we avoided for years.

Justifying them by saying I am too old for it to matter. The tendency when you are older is just to ease up. When all the world was against him.

[21 : 02] Noah played it straight and played the man. But in his vineyard. In his own home and place. Where there were no enemies watching. And he didn't need to prove his virtue. He just relaxes.

And Noah is not the only man who walked in public view. But who has laid uncovered on his own tent floor. You become so careless about spiritual disciplines.

And irritabilities. Laziness. Anger. Sensuality. Start to take over. If these walls could talk. They would take our grey hairs down to hell.

Stern stuff isn't it? And I think he's right. Either we are like the tree planted by streams of water. That bring forth our fruit in due season.

Or our fruit withers and shrivels. And we become spiritually blunt. And that is perfectly illustrated in the prophecy of Noah. Where there will be two groups of humanity.

[22 : 01] And what divides them is their attitude to sin. One wishes to cover sin. The other just wishes to celebrate it. And so we finish. And I'd like you if you have your Bible to turn to the New Testament to Matthew chapter 24 please.

Matthew 24 on page 26 in the New Testament. Verse 37. This is very helpful to us because Jesus teaches us how to understand the Noah account.

And Jesus has been speaking about the fact that he will come as judge of the living and the dead. That is that our world also is heading towards a judgment. And we pick up Matthew 24 verse 37.

Should we read three verses together to the end of 39? As were the days of Noah. So will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as in those days before the flood. They were eating and drinking. Marrying and giving in marriage. Until the day when Noah entered the ark.

[23 : 15] And they did not know until the flood came. And swept them away. So will be the coming of the Son of Man. See what Jesus is saying? Our world is like the world before the flood comes.

God had promised his judgment by water. But people refused to believe it would happen. And now God has promised another judgment.

This time through his Son. And this time by fire. People still refuse to believe it will happen. Even though we have the evidence of the flood. God has promised us. And in Noah's day people were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage.

Which are just the really normal and wonderful activities of life. But here is the thing. Those wonderful activities led them to believe. That it's absolutely impossible that God should destroy it all.

And it's absolutely unbelievable to people today that God will destroy it all. Even though Jesus himself has said it. And risen from the dead. I don't know if there's any Christian who doesn't struggle with this.

[24 : 20] And yet I need to say. If you are someone who refuses to believe that God will judge the earth. You cannot believe that God's heart is grieved by sin.

Let alone the clear teaching of Jesus. You need to repent while there is time. And ask God to give you the faith to believe this. Do not be like those in Noah's day.

Who thought that life is just going to go on forever. Eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage. God could not show us more of his love. And through the flood God demonstrated.

That he is very able. And very willing to save all those who trust his word. And take the place of salvation. That he offered. The box of God if you like.

And God is able to save every single one of us. From the final judgment. If we place our faith in the one person.

[25 : 17] In whom is our salvation. Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead. And what do we say to our brothers and sisters. Who are going to Richmond. From this passage.

I think we need to say this to them. That the people of Richmond. Do not want to hear the message. Of the coming judgment of the son of man. Nor do they want to hear of the rescue in Jesus Christ. Any more than the people in Vancouver do. They will be far too busy. Eating and drinking. And giving in marriage. But God has promised.

To save us through Jesus Christ. And it is the only place to be. When the judgment comes. And we want to give you Noah. As a wonderful example.

Of life before the flood. Proclaiming this word. Which is infinitely more important. Than all the eating and drinking and marrying.

[26 : 15] This world has to give. And though he stood up before the whole world. Through him God worked. Which shows that God continues to work.

Through very sinful people. God continues also to be grieved by sin. God continues to love us. With a tenderness. That's impossible for us to grasp.

So that he sends his son Jesus Christ. Not just to be the place of salvation. But to seek us. And to save us. And to bring us home. And in his death.

Jesus Christ experienced the judgment of God. The waves of God. Washed over him. In our place. In the Psalms.

We read. Thy wrath lies heavy on me. Thou dost overwhelm me with thy waves. That's a picture of Jesus on the cross. And Jesus has promised. That he will come again with all gods.

[27 : 14] Angels. He will bring God's judgment. And he will deal with sin. Finally. And that this world will be. Burned up. And replaced with a new heavens.

And a new earth. And it is a massive. And monumental kindness. That he has not come. Till now. The only reason he is holding back his coming.

Is because of his goodness. And patience. So that others may come to repentance. And that means this. It means people. Matter much more than things.

It means. The next life. Matters much more than this life. And it means that Jesus Christ matters. Above everything else.

So let's pray. and then we will see you in your morning.