

A Life Worth Dying For

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Genesis chapter 8, beginning in verse 1. But God remembered Noah, and all the beasts, and all the livestock that were with him, with him in the ark, and God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.

The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed. The rain from the heaven was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually.

At the end of 150 days, the water had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountain of Arat.

And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the top of the mountains were seen. Continue down to verse 20.

[1 : 17] Then Noah built an altar. So he gets out of the ark, he builds an altar to the Lord, and took some of every unclean animal, a clean animal, and some of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart from his youth is evil.

Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.

Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

[2 : 44] But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning.

From every beast I will require it, and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

For God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you. And with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark, it is for every beast of the earth.

I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood. And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

[3 : 57] And God said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you. And every living creature that is with you for all future generations.

I have set my bow in the cloud. 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 water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.

May God bless the hearing and the preaching of his word. You know, there's some things in life that you never forget.

[5 : 15] Things that happen to you after which you're never the same. You never forget. I read about one of those experiences in the life of a man named Donald Butch Wyman.

I, like you, skim the vast majority of things that come across my screen each week. But this one stopped me in my tracks. I was grimacing almost immediately as I began reading.

It's an old article, but on July 20, 1993, Donald Butch Wyman was cutting timber in a remote area 100 miles outside of Pittsburgh.

Suddenly, the tree he was cutting fell on him, crushing his lower body and driving his foot to the ground. He was pinned down by a massive tree.

Moving the 30-inch trunk was impossible, and Butch was scared he would bleed to death if he waited for someone to find him. He had only two options.

[6 : 19] Do the unthinkable or die where he lay. Butch looked at his trapped leg one last time.

Then, taking his pocket knife in his hand, he cut through all the mangled skin, muscle, nerves, and shattered bone of his leg.

It only took 30 seconds, Butch told reporters. But even 30 seconds was too long. I love that. Butch dragged himself up a hill to a nearby dozer, climbed in the cab, drove his truck on to a nearby farmhouse.

The photo accompanying the article has Butch in a hospital bed, smiling and showing off his bandaged limb. Smiling!

How could he be smiling? Well, because amputation is a lot better than death. Butch told a reporter, I have so much to live for that I did the only thing I could.

Choose life. Now, there's no doubt Butch never forgot that day, and you might not forget this moment for a bit.

[7 : 32] Every day, he looked at his bandaged stump. He remembered that day and the second chance at life he was given. This morning, we come to a day the Bible urges us to never forget.

We return to the scene of Noah and his family safe inside the ark, where while the rest of the world has been washed away in the flood, a most devastating judgment.

The scriptures say only eight people survived the flood. Noah and presumably six members of his family, Noah and his wife. Noah and his family have endured 40 days of rain flooding the earth, 100 days of water covering the earth, blotting out every living thing on the face of the earth.

After that, 150 more days before they walk out and start life over again. It's a story we all know. It's a story we've all heard in one way or another as children.

But what are we supposed to remember from this story? What are we supposed to take away?

What are we supposed to hold on from Noah and the flood? Are we supposed to be left discussing and defending the possibility of a flood like this?

[8 : 43] Whether it was local or relatively local or a global flood. Are we supposed to be discussing whether there could be a boat like this? It could endure a storm like this.

And all those questions are fine to consider. But as we look at the flood, we're meant to be gripped by something else. The holiness of God. We're meant to be gripped by the awareness that something is so precious to God that he's willing to sacrifice everything else to display it.

His holiness. His devotion to the display of his glory is worth more than anything else in all creation.

That's what's meant to grip us. But how are we meant to be gripped by the holiness of God? Well, as the waters begin to recede, Noah and his family show us how.

They walk out to start life again. They show us how to remember the flood. In a word, they show us that life is forever the undeserved gift of God and to be lived unto him.

[9 : 59] Life is forever the undeserved gift of God and to be lived unto him. Break this out in three points.

The first is God remembers Noah. God remembers Noah. As we've said, our text returns us to this scene where Noah is safe in the flood.

The rest of the world has been washed away, but Noah and his family is left. They're the only ones left in the world. As Taylor pointed out last night or last week, God had promised.

He had covenanted with Noah beforehand that he would keep him safe. Well, God has kept his promise. God has kept him and his family safe. God has delivered them. The ancient world viewed the sea as the most uncontrollable force.

But these verses present the sea as merely obeying the command of God. While he's in the midst of the flood, verse 1 makes this very clear.

[11:01] When it says, verse 1, 8, 8-1, it says, But God remembered Noah. Now, when we remember something, we recall it.

We think back. We take a trip down memory lane. We enjoy nostalgia and thinking about those things. But when God remembers, he begins to act.

We see that throughout the Pentateuch, first five books of the scriptures. When God remembers Abraham, he saves Lot. When God remembers Rachel, she concedes. When God remembers his covenant and sees the people groaning under slavery in Egypt, he comes to deliver them.

Exodus 2, 24 and 25. Some of the best verses in these first five books of scripture. It says, God heard. They're groaning. These slaves that no one paid attention to.

And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel. And God knew.

[12:07] God heard. God remembered. God saw. And God knew. The very next verse is the story of the burning bush. Why? Because God saw.

God remembered. God knew. Because God was coming to act. That's what the scriptures is telling us. And that's the case here as well. Now, one author, Brevard Child, says, God's remembering always implies his movement toward the object.

And that's the case here. After remembering Noah and his family and all the animals, he begins to act. Look back there in 8.1. God remembered. Second sentence.

And God made a wind blow over the earth. And the waters began to grow calm. It continues. God stops the rain.

It's not a natural event. God restrains the rain. They're his storehouses. He restrains them. The waters begin to recede.

[13:15] And they continue to recede for 150 days. Now, threading through this passage, I don't have time to unpack it all, are striking parallels with the days of creation.

The wind and earth and waters from day one are in verse 8.1. The sky from day two are in 8.2. The dry ground and the mountains from day three are in 8.3 through 5.

The birds from day five are in 8.6 through 12. The living creatures that he lists out several times are in verses from day six are in 8.17 to 19.

And as we read, it reminds us that Noah and his family were created in the image of God just like in day six. Well, God, what's going on here is Moses is telling us God is not merely delivering Noah back to the old world.

God is renewing the old world for him. There's something so much more going on than merely delivering him back but renewing a world for him.

[14:22] Noah waits another 40 days for the waters to recede. Then he sends out a raven, a strong, high-flying bird to go through the earth to see if there's any ground to land on.

After that, he sends out a dove, a gentle, low-flying bird. Look how carefully he tells that story. Look in verse 8, chapter 8, verse 8.

Then he sent forth a dove from him. That's Noah. Noah sent forth a dove from him to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no place to set her foot.

And she returned to him to the ark. For the waters were still on the face of the earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him.

He waited another seven days. And again, he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening.

[15:29] And behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided.

Now, 600 years of Noah's life just sped by. And the years after his life just speed by.

But Moses takes five, six verses to outline the sending out of these birds. Many say this story is, and the story of the dove and the olive of his branch is pointing to peace.

That's what we often think. We pass out. We might say to somebody, I'm giving an olive branch. I'm coming to make peace. I'm coming to repent.

Or something like that. The ancient Greek god Athena is said to have planted the first olive tree after conquering the city of Athens. Olive wreaths were worn by brides.

[16:31] The ancient world and Olympic victors. But is that why there's so much attention on this dove? Peace?

I don't think so. The dove, as you know, gets occasional reference in the rest of the Old Testament and the Psalms. Psalm 55 and other places. But it doesn't take center stage again until the baptism of Jesus Christ.

The dove comes down. The Holy Spirit comes down like a dove on Jesus Christ. Not to symbolize peace. But to symbolize that a new creation is coming.

That's what's going on here as well. God is renewing the earth. He's not merely saying there's finally peace on the earth. God is renewing it.

God is doing something fresh and new. And so Noah waits another seven days and then turns him loose. Look in 8-12. He waited another seven days and sent forth the dove.

[17:39] And she did not return to him anymore. She found the freedom of the air and the nest of the trees. Then at the beginning of the 601st year of his life, Noah opens the ark to see the earth.

Look down there with me in verse 8-15. In the 601st year, so he's been a whole year in this flood. In the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried off the earth. And Noah removed the covering and looked.

Behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the 27th day of the first month, the earth had dried out. Then God said to Noah, Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you.

Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh. Birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. That they may swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply.

It tells him to go out. Well, look in verse 18. Kind of re-says just what he's already said. Noah faithfully obeys. Noah went out.

[18:49] And his sons and his wife and his sons' wives were with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, every bird, everything that moves on the ground went out by families from the ark.

It's fascinating that these verses, five, six verses, capture what God says. Go out. Everybody go out. And then it tells us that Noah did exactly what God said.

In so many ways, the fact of these five verses is to slow everything down. Just like the raven and the dove. Slow everything down. Because Noah, the second Adam, is walking out of the ark into a world washed clean by the flood.

One of the things carefully recorded throughout this passage, throughout the last several chapters as well, is the amount of time Noah waited. 40 days of flood.

150 days of water prevailing. 150 days of water receding. 40 days of waiting. Seven days after sending the first dove.

[19:54] Seven more days after sending the dove again. And then a month. Just to cap it off. A full year.

Now we're meant to notice and take note of Noah's faithfulness and obedience, but we're also meant to notice that God has not forgotten Noah while he was waiting.

There's no doubt Moses drew attention to this detail so the Israelites did not lose heart as they waited for God in Egypt. As they waited for God wandering through the wilderness for 40 years. There's no doubt God preserved this detail so that we would not lose heart while we wait as well. It's all too common to become discouraged while we wait.

Become impatient and angry. I'll never forget early in our marriage, I came to a place where I believed God was nowhere to be found. We were struggling.

[20:59] I can't relate to people that just never had a conflict. That was not us. That's still not us. Not that we're throwing things. Our first year of marriage was very hard because it revealed so much sin in our lives.

But this night was the worst. I forget what we had a conflict about, as is often the case.

But I was enraged. I was harsh with my wife, Kim. Loud and angry. Things escalated until I finally grabbed a basket of wooden apples.

I don't know how they got in my house, but we had this basket of wooden apples given to us at our wedding. I just grabbed them and threw them across the room and watched these apples just break.

About like I was ready to break up our marriage. I stormed out of the house with my keys and I was out of there. I was done. God was not in this marriage.

[22 : 01] I was done with this marriage. I'll never forget as I stuck my key in the ignition. It was as if God said to me, I am with you. I am in this.

I want to help you. In God's kindness, that awareness that all of this wasn't a surprise led to conviction and repentance.

It wasn't all smooth sailing, let me assure you. I realized God had not forgotten me. God was using these painful twists and turns to lead me to himself.

John Calvin, commenting on these verses of Noah, he says, We are accustomed to imagine God absent except when we have some sensible experience of his presence.

Let us therefore learn by this example of Noah to repose on the providence of God, to depend on the providence of God.

[23 : 12] Even while he seems to be most forgetful of us. For at length, by affording us help, so in time, by affording us help, he will testify that he has been mindful of us all along.

God also remembered the animals. So he's drawing out. God remembered all the animals on the boat. For if, on account of the salvation promised to man, his favor is extended to brute cattle and to wild beasts, what may we suppose will be his favor towards his own children, to whom he has so liberally and so sacredly pledged his faithfulness?

If he's faithful to these cattle, how much more his children? And all the waiting in Noah's life is carefully recorded so that we'd rest on the providence of God.

Where are you waiting? Better yet, where do you need to learn to rest? In your prayers for a job that's more fulfilling, in your longings for children, in your desires for a season where things finally slowed down, in your longing to be finally through the dark clouds and be happy again.

Can you imagine being cooped up in an ark for a year? Maybe your circumstances feel more like that, less like green pastures and more like a prison.

[24 : 37] Well, we must learn to rest on the providence of God, the God who remembered Noah hadn't forgotten you. Point two, God blesses Noah. God blesses Noah.

After being delivered from the floods of judgment, the story continues with Noah making an offering. Look in verse 20. Then the Lord built an altar to the Lord, or that Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings to the Lord.

Unlike Cain who offered some of what he had, Noah offers some of everything that he had. And the Lord is pleased. Look again in verse 21.

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because a man for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Neither will I ever strike down every living creature as I have done. There's a lot going on in this verse. What does it all mean that the Lord suddenly smells the offering, smells the aroma of the sacrifice, and promises to never again curse the ground.

[25 : 51] But immediately after that, the Lord says, the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. That sounds exactly like Genesis 6, 5.

We had that for you right before the flood. The reason for the flood, Noah said, or the Lord said, every intention of the thoughts of man's heart is evil continually.

Why, after the Lord is pleased with this pleasing aroma, does he reiterate again that man's heart is evil continually?

If he's saying the same thing, how is the Lord's promise going to continue? How is it comforting? How will we know that the Lord will never flood the earth again? The Lord is saying something different here.

On the one hand, he's saying, even after the flood, man is not changed. We can attest to that.

[26 : 58] Proof positive. Today, the intentions of man's and woman's heart is still evil continually. The Lord would be completely just to flood the earth as many times as he wants.

But he promises not to do so. Why? The evil in man's heart is so deep seated that no judgment can cure it.

That's what the Lord is saying. No fresh starts will make it better. The heart continues to be evil and deserving of the judgment of God.

In so many ways, it's underlining that our deepest problem remains. Our deepest problem is not cancer or kidney stone or any of these things or sadness or discomfort or any of these things. Our deepest problem is the wrath of God. But these verses are whispering that our deepest need will be for a sacrifice to cover that wrath.

[28 : 02] And that's what's going on when the Lord smells the pleasing or the aroma of the sacrifice. The Lord is not pleased by the flood. Man is still sinful and man's sin still arouses the wrath of God.

But the Lord is pleased with this sacrifice. It satisfies his wrath for a time and anticipates the sacrifice of his son who will satisfy it forever.

Then the Lord blesses and commits Noah to continue life. So once he said, I will not end life prematurely again. Then he blesses Noah and sends him out.

Look at 9.1. He says, And God blessed Noah. That's the same thing we saw in Genesis 1.27. And in Genesis 5.2 and 3.

God blesses him and continues to commit to him. To give life to the world. Since the world is going to continue.

[29 : 01] Life will be blessed. The Lord goes even further and says, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Tucked into these verses, God, it's all about life.

The Lord says, Go out and propagate life. Make babies. Protect life. Even as he himself commits to provide for life. He says, Propagate life.

Look at 9.1. He says, Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. 9.7 down there. And you, Be fruitful and multiply.

Increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it. Don't you think Noah would have been a bit gun shy? You know, More babies? Are you kidding me?

Bring more babies into this world that was just flooded? Well, the Lord has assured him, Go and make babies. The Lord wants Noah to bank on his promise that he'll never curse the world again.

[30 : 04] So, too, the Lord is calling us. The vast majority of us, the calling of God on our lives is to get married and have kids. What are you waiting for? It's the calling of God for the vast majority of those who walk the earth.

The image bearers is to fill it with more image bearers so that more image bearers can fill it with the glory of God. Noah continues, or the Lord continues and tells Noah how he's going to provide for life.

Look in 9.2 and 3. He says, The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea into your hand.

They are delivered. It's all yours. They're all delivered to you. And he continues, Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.

And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. All of it's yours. Surely, excepting kale, which I'm sure he meant to be ornamental purely.

[31 : 12] But did you notice right here, there's no separation between clean and unclean. There's no eat the cattle, but not the pig, or anything like that.

The Lord is saying, Everything is yours and clean. 1 Timothy 4 reminds us, Everything created by God is good and nothing to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it's made holy by the word of God and prayer.

In the obsession with health in our day, it is important to realize the freeness of the command of God. God gave us beef and broccoli, sometimes together in Hibachi, sharp cheddar cheese and chocolate chip cookies, donuts and deviled eggs, funnel cakes and fried chips.

And there's so much more. There's so much food to enjoy. Sadly, we Christians like to draw boxes around certain things and call them off limits and feel better about ourselves.

Could be a double cheeseburger or candy corn. I ate that stuff. Red wine or a cigar. The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, loved to enjoy the good gifts that God has given and had a penchant for exposing the religious folks who made lists of all the things Christians shouldn't enjoy.

[32 : 34] In fact, he loved cigars. He wrote into the paper saying, I smoke cigars to the glory of God. Take that up with Mr. Spurgeon in heaven.

In fact, and I quote, we have for you, when I have found intense pain relieved, a weary brain soothed, and calm, refreshing sleep obtained by a cigar, I have felt grateful to God and have

blessed his name.

Once a lady asked him if smoking was sinful. He said, only if done excessively. When she asked him what excessive would be, he said, smoking two cigars at once.

Obviously, excessive smoking is a problem. We must not be enslaved to anything, whether that's cigars, cigarettes, wine, coffee, or cookies, or even exercise, for that matter.

God is providing for life. That's what's going on in these passages. Even after the judgment that we deserve, God is providing abundantly for life.

[33 : 48] God calls us to protect life. There's a darker side to the world now. The Lord commands him to protect. Animals fear human beings. Animals fear what they're going to do.

They're in dread. They're in dread of them. So the Lord says, protect the animals. Don't be a savage. Protect the animals. Don't eat them while the blood is still in them. Don't eat them in the fields.

So kill your doves this week, but clean them, wash them, grill them, thank God, and then eat.

Protect the life of man as well. Look in verse 5 and 6.

He says, from his fellow man I will require reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for God has made man in his own image.

Strikingly, people take those very verses and argue for and against capital punishment. The most important takeaway is protecting life, cherishing life.

[34 : 51] Turn away from the sin of Cain. If you shed the blood of man, there'll be a reckoning because man was made in the image of God. Life is the undeserved gift of God. That's what's threatened through this passage.

Protect it or you'll pay. Third, God makes a covenant with Noah. God makes a covenant. We saw this word emerge last week, chapter 6, 18, what is littered throughout this passage.

What is a covenant? You know, who uses it? We may talk about a marriage covenant or something like that. Michael Horton helpfully says, a covenant is a relationship of oaths and bonds and involves mutual, though not necessarily equal, commitments.

A relationship of an oath or bond, you know, maybe cross my fingers, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye. I mean, in some ways that's mirroring, nobody ever did that, I guess, except for me, but that's mirroring a covenant.

Like, I'm committing to this, keeping that secret or something like that, I'm committing to it and if I don't uphold my sight of it, you get to stick a needle in my eye. I don't think anybody's followed that through or we'd have needles everywhere.

[36 : 09] It was common in the ancient world, though, for a larger nation to make a covenant with a smaller nation to say, listen, we'll defend your territory, you just, you collect taxes for us, you do different things for us, we'll defend you and the Lord is making a similar agreement here with Noah.

The covenant obviously involves several parties but this covenant involves the whole earth. It was said again and again, look in verse 8, behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark, it is for every beast of the earth.

So this covenant is unlike so many of the others that will come in Genesis and the rest of the scripture because this covenant is with the whole earth. The parties of the covenant are the Lord and all that he has made.

The promise of this covenant, look in verse 11, he says, I will establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off. Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth even as God commands man to protect life so he commits to protecting life again.

Never again. Never again. The Lord is pledging.

[37 : 44] This covenant is unlike the one with Abraham and others because it's completely unilateral.

The Lord is committing. If you notice running through that passage, underlined a number of times, I, me, I, me, I, me, I, me. Noah's not doing anything.

God is committing everything to him and the sign of the covenant is amazing. All the biblical covenants have a sign. The Abrahamic covenant we remember was a sign of circumcision.

He had faith in God and was counted to him as righteousness and then God called him to circumcise his sons. The new covenant includes a sign of baptism but this covenant includes a different sign.

