

The Message of the Flood

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶“Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”

¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. ¹⁹All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though¹⁴ every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²²“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

Have you seen the pictures? Just over a week ago, Hurricane Ian slammed into the Florida Gulf Coast, bringing with it 20 inches of rain, a 10 foot storm surge and wind speeds of over 150 miles an hour. In its wake, it left over 60 million dollars’ worth of damage and over 100 people dead. It was the 2nd worst storm to hit the continental US in the 21st century. If you or I would have been caught in the middle of a storm like that, can you imagine how terrifying that would be, to experience that kind of raw destructive power?

But now, just for a minute, imagine that instead of a storm that brought rain for 36 hours straight, it rained nonstop for 40 days and 40 nights. In place of a 10 ft storm surge, imagine that it was a wall of water that extended 20 ft over the highest mountain on the continent. And instead of a flood that lasted four days, it lasted over a year, with a death toll that encompassed practically the entire human race.

My friends, that’s the storm that we turn our attention to today, what we might call the most catastrophic weather event that this world has ever seen. An event that is referred to in the traditions and writings of a number of ancient cultures. But an event that is most clearly described here in Genesis chapter 6 through 9. Today we want to see what to see what our loving God wants to teach us, in what we might call:

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Now, you maybe realize that the idea of a truly universal flood, a flood that encompassed the entire globe—for a lot of people these days, well, that's crazy talk. “It could never happen,” they say. But if you look at the world around us with an unbiased eye, if you study the geographical formations like the Grand Canyon or the Royal Gorge or even the Mississippi River

Valley, when you hear about the fossils of sea creatures buried on the tops of mountains, when you learn about all those oil and coal deposits were formed under layers and layers of sedimentary rock, when you find fossils of animals that were buried alive with no chance to decay or be eaten by other animals – all this is geological evidence of a major deluge that happened worldwide. But of course, that's not why we believe in a universal flood. We believe it because God's Word says it. And Jesus, who cannot tell a lie, tells us that *“the scriptures cannot be broken.”* (John 10:35)

But just because we know that there was a universal flood, doesn't mean we can't ask the question, “Why? Why did God send a such a flood?” Well, the Bible answers that question for us in Genesis 6:5-8, where we read, *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”* You might say that the backdrop to the account of the flood. The entire human race had gone from bad to worse. It had become thoroughly corrupt, filled with violence.

Now contrast that culture of violence and depravity with a man named Noah, whom the Bible says, *found favor in the eyes of the Lord.* (Genesis 6:8) The Bible also describes Noah as *“a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time.”* (Genesis 6:9) Now, don't misunderstand those words. When the Bible says that Noah was righteous and blameless, it doesn't mean he was sinless. Rather, it means that he was right in the eyes of God, because he believed in God's promise to send a savior. And Noah put that faith into action in his life. That's what the Bible means it says that Noah *walked faithfully with God.* (Genesis 6:9)

Now you think about that a minute. The entire population of the world consisted of unbelievers, except for Noah and his family. Talk about being outnumbered! Tell me, can you relate? Do you ever feel like you're outnumbered by a world filled with unbelievers? Surrounded by a people who want nothing to do with God? A world where people promote violence like it's some kind of virtue? That's the world that Noah was living in. And that's why God, in an expression of pure grace, decided he was going to destroy that world.

Now maybe you were thinking, “Wait a minute. Destroying the world is an expression of God's grace, that is, his undeserved love? That doesn't sound like love to me. Sounds more like justice. Sounds like God's righteous anger over sin.” Oh, it's certainly that. St Paul was right when he wrote in Galatians 6:7, *God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.* And again, *“Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.* (Romans 12:19) A universal flood, designed to put to death every unbeliever in the world is certainly an expression of God's justice.

But it's also an expression of God's grace. Why do I say that? Three reasons. First, remember what God said in Genesis 6 verse 3. *“My spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are corrupt; their days will be 120 years.* In other words, at the time when the world was so, so bad, God still extended to them 120 years of grace, a time for them to turn back to him for the full and free forgiveness he was offering them through the coming Messiah. And you can bet that Noah proclaimed that grace to all who would listen during the hundred twenty years of ark building.

But there is an even clearer expression of God's grace wrapped up in this account of the flood. And it's the grace that God showed to Noah himself. Remember, Noah was a member of the human race. A race that is born with a heart opposed to God. Noah deserved to be drowned at

the bottom of the sea. But instead, God rescued him. He spared his life. That, my friends, is grace.

Again, can you relate? Day after day, you and I prove that our hearts are corrupt. We think filthy thoughts, we want the things that God forbids. We love ourselves more than anyone else. No matter how hard we try, we just can't stop sinning. And for that reason, a just God would have every reason to say, "I've had enough of you! I regret that I even made you. To hell with you all." But instead, what did God do? In pure undeserved love, he sent a perfect substitute went to hell in our place. Through the washing of holy baptism, God connected us to our Savior Jesus. In that sense, our baptism saved us. The water of our baptism connected us to Christ, who in turn, lifted us away from eternal death, and instead gave us eternal life with him. In fact, the Bible draws a parallel between the water of our baptism and the water of Noah's flood. How does St. Peter put it? *God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:20-21)* Isn't that a neat picture? Just as the waters of the flood lifted Noah and his family away from all the death and destruction going on all around them, so the waters of baptism lift us away from the eternal death and destruction that our sins have earned.

But there's one more expression of God's grace in the flood. Think about it this way. Imagine what would have happened if a world full of violent, godless unbelievers would have taken their natural hostility toward God and directed it against the last remaining remnants of God's people? What if Noah and his family would have been killed by the unbelievers of the world? You realize what else would have died along with them? That's right, the bloodline of the Savior. The line of Jesus ran through Noah and his son Shem. If they would have died, so would God's promise to send a Savior. That means that when God preserved the lives of Noah and his family, he wasn't thinking of just them. He was thinking of you and me, who are the beneficiaries of the savior who came from the line of a man named Noah. That too, is grace.

So, the question is, did all those expressions of God's grace have an impact on Noah's heart and life? Absolutely. First, God's grace prompted Noah to put his trust in God, that is, to take God at his word, even if what God said didn't make a lot of sense to Noah's human reason. I mean, think about it. God was asking Noah to build this huge wooden box on dry ground, with no means of transporting it to the ocean. And yet Noah trusted that God had a plan. When Noah told the people that he was building the ark because it was going to rain, that may well have been something that the people of the earth had never seen before. Genesis chapter 2 tells us that the earth was watered not by rain but by streams that came up from the ground. People were probably saying, "Rain? What are you talking about, Noah?" And when God told Noah that he was going to put all these animals in the ark, Noah was probably thinking to himself, "How in the world is that going to work." But Noah set aside his reason and trusted that God would provide. And when the time came for God to close the door on the ark with Noah and his family inside, Noah trusted the God hadn't just closed the door on Noah's coffin, but rather on this gigantic life preserver. I mean, you think about the faith that it took for Noah and his family to say, "God, we don't know how this is going to work, and it seems really, really, scary to be locked in a room with a bunch of wild animals while the world is being destroyed all around us, but because of the grace you've shown to us, because of the promises you made to us, we're going to put our lives in your hands."

And mind you, it wasn't just for one day or one week or even one month that Noah and his family put their trust in God. They were locked inside the ark for 375 days. Tell me that

there weren't times when they caught themselves saying, "God, is it over yet? God, how much longer do we have to wait?"

Once again, can you relate? Are there times when you're tempted to say, "God, why are you doing it this way? How much longer do I have to endure this? I'm afraid that this is not going to end well." And yet, if you think about it, the very same thing that bolstered the faith of Noah and his family, bolsters our faith as well. And that's God's grace, the undeserved love that God has shown to us in Christ. The unbreakable promises he is made to us in his word. Promises like *Hebrews 13:5, Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. Or Genesis 15:1, I am your Shield, your very great reward.* Or the words of Jesus in John 10:10, *I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.* Ultimately, it's God's gracious promises to us about life on the other side of the grave, that prompts us to trust God with our lives on this side of the grave, even when the wind is howling and the water's rising.

But there's one more way that God's grace in the flood impacted Noah's heart and life. It not only increased his faith in God. It also increased his gratitude toward God. Isn't that something that is expressed so beautifully here in our text? When Noah came out of the ark, accompanied by all those animals, what's the first thing he did? Did he start exploring this brand-new world all around him? Did he say, "Man, let's burn that stinking animal house to the ground?" No, instead what does he do? We read, *Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.* You think about that a minute. Before Noah fires up the grill for the very first BBQ on solid ground, he takes some of those precious, clean animals, and he turns them into a burnt offering. The Hebrew word that is used there describes a sacrifice in which the entire animal is offered up to God. You talk about an incredibly valuable thank offering to God. I mean, Noah has only seven clean animals to eat and the first thing he does is gives one back to God? That, my friends, is not only an expression of gratitude to God. It's also an expression of trust in God. Noah is trusting that God was going to continue to provide for his family even if Noah sends the very first meal up in smoke.

Again, is there an application for our lives today? I think there is. When believers step back and look at the big picture, when we realize that, "Man, that could have been me, yes, that should have been me drowned at the bottom of the sea, or worse, sent to hell forever, but then God in pure grace rescued me. He put me in the ark of Jesus Christ and now he's given me everything I need to live a new life to his glory—how could I not respond like Noah did, by offering up a thank offering to God, something that I know is valuable, whether it's a generous portion of my time or my money or that steak dinner that I was so looking forward to. Our offerings to God are our way of saying in a tangible way, "God, I am so grateful for the grace that you've shown to me in the past and I'm trusting that you'll continue to show me grace in the future. That, my friends, is the message of the Flood. It's all about God's grace, applied to Noah, and applied to our lives as well, in Jesus' name. Amen.