

Genesis 6 Sermon - Noah's Ark

v5 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. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' 8 But Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord.

9 These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of cypress[b] wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 Make a roof[c] for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19 And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.' 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

By nice coincidence we are looking at the story of Noah's Ark on a Baptism Sunday. And this story is one of the metaphors the New Testament uses for Baptism. See if you can work out the parallels. This is of course everyone's favourite Sunday school story. Animals going two by two, boats built out of wood, doves and olive branches - what is not to love.

But it is not a simple or straightforward story - it takes up 3 chapters.

Context - This is the aftermath of Cain and the murder of Abel.

v11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

Have you ever experienced anything like this? William Golding wrote "*Lord of the Flies*" while he was a teacher at Salisbury Cathedral school. A place of bullying corruption, where brute strength and fear rule. We sometimes laugh sin off, as if it doesn't matter. But those moments when law and order evaporate, as is the case in Syria, or like we glimpsed for a moment in the London riots. Both the Bible and human history teach us that there is no room for naivety about the human condition.

God is grieved by creation.

6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Counterpoint to Genesis 1 - It was good. What a tragic verse this is. But it is important too. When we question why God make creation like this? He didn't, this is not creation as he intended and he is grieved by it.

The response is inevitably judgement.

What is God's responsibility in a world full of violence and corruption?

Like the United Nations looking at a country spiralling into chaos. He must step in. *v13 And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.* So far, so familiar. This is the primary response of a Holy God to injustice and Sin. And it is not just God, if you ever experience the capacity of Humanity for evil, you too will cry out for justice to be done. So the truth about God is not less than this - it is more.

The Ark of Grace. This is why the story is interesting, in fact this is why there is a story at all. The Ark is an enduring metaphor of salvation. It speaks of a God for whom judgement is not enough.

Noah found favour with God. Not his behaviour. He finds favour before he walks with God. Grace precedes faith.

But he needs to believe and respond. He Believes God and builds an Ark, and gathers up all living things, two by two.

And he needs to trust God even if people ridicule him. Look at Ch7v10 - They were in the Ark for a week before the floods came. But the rains fall, and the floods come.

Even in the midst of salvation they experience doubt and fear.

For 40 days they drift in the wilderness of the floodwater. Will God remember them? Even in the midst of God's plan of salvation there is the experience of lostness and desolation. And if Noah experiences that, don't be surprised if you do too.

The flood finally recedes and God is changed by Judgment.

8:21-22 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

22 As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'

He says that judgement is not enough and responds with a new covenant with creation. We call this 'common grace'. God is gracious to creation. He promises that he will bless and sustain it no matter what. The rain will fall and the sun will shine, irrespective of whether people are good or bad. We will experience the goodness of creation, joy and fruitfulness, love and beauty. Yes the world is fallen and a s a consequence doesn't always work as it should, but God is not acting in judgment. And that is an important theological point. Because it mean when things go wrong that is not God punishing us, but simply a consequence of a broken world.

And the sign of that covenant is the rainbow. God is committed to creation. And that echoes in eternity, where God redeems the physical world - the new creation. John 3:16 says “for God so loved the *Cosmos*” - the physical universe. How then did environmental concern become viewed with suspicion by some Christians?

Nevertheless God is keeping account

Ch9:4 *I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.*

So we are left with the unresolved problem of judgment. How is God to reconcile the requirement of justice, and the necessity of mercy? How is he to remain faithful to his covenant with creation and yet balance the books of justice?

Through a wooden Ark, God rescued the few. But through a wooden cross, Christ will rescue the many. Through the waters of judgement on humanity creation is destroyed, but through the redemption of humanity (expressed in Baptism) creation is restored and the demands of justice are fully met.

This is the foundation of the great story of the Bible. It will begin to take shape in the following chapters as Gods plan of redemption begins to emerge, and it will anticipate one moment where justice and mercy meet. And it will look forward to the redemption and restoration of creation in a new heaven and a new earth.