

Noah's Ark

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Date: 27 August 2017

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[0 : 00] If you turn back with me for a short time this morning to Genesis chapter 9, now, the story of Noah's Ark is well known, I maybe shouldn't presume but I am presuming, it's well known to most of us. If it's not, then I would encourage you to read chapter 6 to 9 because it's really all of these chapters, we didn't read them this morning. And usually on a Wednesday in the email, if you get the email from the church, it will tell you what the theme is on Sunday and the passages and it might be an idea because with a lot of these stories, we're not going to read the whole story, we're only going to focus, we're going to deal with the whole story I hope but only read a section of the story and today we read chapter 9. And again, if you have family and kids and you do family worship, then I would encourage you during the week that we have looked at this story from the Bible to maybe focus on that with the children and read it with them, that would be tremendous.

But I had a great battle preparing this sermon, it was a bad week, I've got this sermon this morning and I'm preaching on women tonight, it's just been horrendous, just wrestling with and battling with both of these subjects, both of which I feel very unprepared and unqualified to speak about in many ways, particularly the latter.

But this passage is, this story is an amazing story but it's also a very difficult story, I find it very difficult in many different ways. But I'm asking you to pray that the Spirit will take what He wants us to learn from this account for our lives. We recognise from last week that God is light, He brings light into the world and He brings light into our lives, He's a just and a good God and we can't really pick and choose. We often think of like Noah's Ark is a pretty story of animals going into an ark and rainbows and nice things, which it is, but it's also a hugely challenging story for us because also it is very stark in its realism. So I'm going to say four things about this story, the wider story and this chapter and put it in the context of the beginning of the Bible.

The first thing I'm going to say is there's mystery, okay, I think that's very important for us to recognise and see that there is mystery in God's word. If you're reading Genesis chapter 1 to 11, creation what happens in between and then the story of Noah's Ark and you don't have any questions about that, then I posit that you are not thinking. I can't believe that the first 11 chapters will not raise in your minds all kinds of questions and sometimes difficulties because there's so much in these early chapters that isn't said. There's so much that God doesn't reveal and there's much even in what is revealed that I don't understand better people than I am sure will do, but in reading the theologians and the commentators I would argue that they don't necessarily understand either and the very difficult bits they ignore. That's what they always do. They always ignore the difficult bits, the bits that you go to look for. I wonder what the theologians think. I wonder what those who have really trained in this area, linguists think and they pass it by.

That's what happens, but we recognise and know that the Holy Spirit can take and learn, teach us and we can learn from Him and learn about the character and nature of God. So within this mystery, I think there's two connected things that I want to say. One is that Genesis 1-11, including the story of Noah's Ark, is the story of the beginning. It's the beginning that God gives us. This is pre-Patriarchal, before Abraham, it's the early days of the world of the universe. And God, we saw last week, wants us to know about beginnings. He wants us to know about the beginning. And what we see in these early chapters is catastrophe happening, a catastrophic rejection of God in these early chapters from Genesis 3 onwards.

[4 : 32] And it's introduced in chapter 3 with that devastating betrayal of God by Adam and Eve, and indeed betrayal of one another in the same context. And leading up to the flood in Genesis chapter 6, we have an increase in violence and brutality. Genesis 6 and verse 3 reminds us of that. The Lord, when pre-flood, He says, the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. That is a

multiplication of descriptions that the writer gives there, tumbling words to describe that there really was no redeeming feature in the world at the time. And that is followed after the flood by the Tower of Babel and by the organized overthrow and the challenge to God in that account in Genesis chapter 11. And it seems that the reality of the human condition before the flood and of that after the flood isn't really terribly different. Chapter 8 verse 21, I think we have almost the same words as the words we read in chapter 6. When the Lord smelled the pleasing, this is the sacrifice that Noah offered after the flood. He said, I will never again curse the ground because of man. For the intention of man's heart is evil from you, neither will I again strike every evil living creature as I've done. So this inclination of man's heart is described the same way.

And it's interesting that God saw in the beginning the creation and it was good. And then God sees the hearts of men here and it's evil. And God sees what they are intending at the Tower of Babel and he recognizes the rebellion. So it's the story of beginning, and I do contend that the world pre-flood was a different world. I'm not sure entirely in what was the thought. There's hints that it was a different world in terms of longevity of life, in terms of the type of things that were happening. And there was a very peculiar and particular descent into chaos and darkness in that world, in these beginning. That's what we have in the story of the beginning. But within that mystery, I think in the wider picture of the Bible, which we always need to take into account, there's also hints that what happened at

Noah's Ark was part of the story of beginnings, okay? Cataclysmic beginnings. There's creation, then there's recreation after the flood, and then there's new creation at the end of time, or new creation in Jesus Christ. And these are all cataclysmic events, huge events. They flood a massive event of tectonic proportions and something great was happening. And we see in chapter 9, the chapter we read, that it's worded recreationally. In other words, the same kind of language that God uses with Noah, as he did with Adam. He speaks to Noah, he asks him to be fruitful and to have stewardship over the animal world, although there's differences in that relationship. Water is significant in both of these accounts, bringing order in the beginning, and there's order again from the chaos of the flood, being controlled and tamed in Genesis, unleashed in the flood, then receding. And in both cases, words of promise that point forward to the great recreation, or as the New Testament calls it, the new creation, or the new birth, which is all linked to what Jesus has done and will do on his return. And there's various verses, both in the Old and New Testament, that speak about that. Isaiah 65 and verse 17 says, for behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth, the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. There's that link, therefore, in another cataclysmic, massive recreation that's happening through Jesus Christ. And 2 Peter 3, 13, and then Revelation 21. But according to his promise, Peter says to the people he's writing to, we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, this recreation that we wait for, knowing a creation in our own lives in Christ, waiting for what he will do with the world, Revelation 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. It's very similar to the language of Noah. The first heaven and the first earth has passed away. And interestingly, again, there's water referenced, and the sea was no more. And there's that link, and there's that continuum throughout the Bible as it speaks, both of the beginning, Genesis 1 to 11, and beginnings that link it into the ongoing work of God in the universe and in our lives. And a response to that mystery, which we really only, is only pointed towards in this sermon, is always trust and awe. It's always that, worship and adoration to me. We've lost, I know we've lost, it's just a world we live in. Our first world has lost the sense of awe and worship of God. I know that. And yet we look for that response when we see the unity and also the mystery of what is revealed for us. And within that, seeing that same great God that we'll go on to speak about who comes into our broken world of inexplicable darkness, evil and death in Christ, that we know. And although there's much unspoken and there's a huge amount we don't know about beginnings, we do know about His redemptive story within which it falls. And we do know

enough to know that there's nobody in this world that loves you more than Jesus Christ as you put your trust in Him and enables us to worship because we were made for Him.

So that's the first thing that is missing. The second thing is, there is judgment, okay? You can't get away from it. This child story that is in all the children's story books, but there is judgment at the very heart of this story. Because at the beginning, story Genesis 1-11 introduces the clear and challenging truth that death is both a just sentence for rejecting God as the source of life and light as we saw. But it also becomes, therefore, our human tendency. And I use this word, guardedly,

there's a naturalizing of death because it becomes our tendency, it becomes the direction which we're living because of what has happened. And we see that right from the beginning. There's division, there's jealousy, there's fratricide, there's violence, there's war, there's attrition, there's murder, right from the beginning as God is rejected and as death enters into the world. And the flood, of course, is the culmination of that in these beginning chapters where God is sorry for what He's done in that remarkable language, and He vows to begin to judge and to begin again. Now, that is a huge challenge, that truth. It's a huge challenge. It personalizes our accountability to God because we're mortal and we face death. It communizes our guilt before God, which people rage at today, don't they? And internally, we often rage at it, if we're honest with ourselves when we look in the mirror. We rage at our accountability to God. We rage at what we feel is His injustice at so many levels. But the account of the flood draws all of this truth right into our line of vision. It's not an old fable, it's not an old strange story. It is reality for us to consider. And it puts death onto a completely different level for us as we think about our lives. Death was God's just and is God's just judgment on humanity that chose to turn to darkness and unbelief. It's not simply a natural act to which we passively submit. But within that, there's this great opportunity of rescue, which is of course the heart of the gospel.

[14:39] Now, I think as we need to be in 21st century Edinburgh culture, we need to be thinking Christians. We need to think about difficult truth and wrestle with it and understand it by God's grace and by God's spirit and recognize that it is just and good but difficult to share. But we must be thinking Christians. I think naturally we all recoil from this whole concept of judgment. And if you went out in the street and spoke about Noah's Ark and what God did that he wiped out humanity, you would find a recoiling happening from people who heard that. We recoil naturally from judgment. But the interesting thing is we are all relentless legalists actually. Although we recoil from the concept of judgment, we're all relentless legalists. We all judge all the time. You are sitting today judging this sermon and I'm judging you're listening. We're all judging one another. We do it all the time. It's natural to us. We're always making decisions about what is right and wrong.

We are always weighing things. It happens in politics, in the staff room, in the canteen. We are people who are relentlessly condemning or acquitting ourselves or other people. We judge other people. We have standards and we all believe in justice. Nobody doubts that.

But we need to recognize the question is not judgment. The question isn't whether we think judgment is right. Of course the question is who judges? And the question is what is the standard of judgment? That is, and these are different things. And that is what we need to be challenged by and challenge others with. Because part of the wrestling spiritually is that we want to be the judge. We want to be the arbiters of right and wrong. And we know at a human level there is lots of human judgment that's significant. But at an ultimate level we also want that position, which takes us right back to Genesis where in the beginning the rebellion was that man wanted to be in God's place. And today one of the reasons why there is such a rage in secular atheism and evolutionary anthropology against God is because you can't have God in that closed system. It's simply not possible to have

God in that system because it brings in the reality of something outside of ourselves that we may be accountable to. And that system we must never forget has far more problems and mystery and has no accounting for the genesis of morality or justice or personhood or love beyond its plain existence. No cause, no explanation. We have an explanation, we still have problems. But we are not the only ones. There is always going to be problems and we recognize that. But if there is no objective standard for judgment, then there can be no judgment and it is irrational to leave God out of the picture.

Truth, Genesis 6-9 is speaking of universal beginnings, okay? It's speaking of universal truth. That means truth can't just be for me. Localize truth, little truth, minor truth, truth at a subjective level. This is the story of beginning, of humanity beginning and of truth beginning. And we reflect our lives in the shadow of this truth that's revealed. There is judgment. Isaiah 28 verse 21 is a very interesting, I'm jumping about one or two verses that really bring, I hope draw things in. But that speaks about the Lord judging at Mount Peresim and it says, as the valley of Gideon he will be roused to do his deed, his strange is his deed and to work his work, alien is his work. And that pivotal verse in the middle of the Bible is reminding us that judgment is real but it's his strange work. It's kind of, it's a necessary reality of God but it's not objectively his being as it were. It's his strange work. His light will inevitably dispel darkness. His love inevitably will deal with hate. It's a

consequence of his nature. It's a responsive necessary characteristic. But throughout even this account he's long suffering and patient and he gives people opportunity to turn to him, knows a preacher of righteousness and they see what he's doing and they hear his message but they will not turn. And it's interesting.

[20 : 18] I think this is an important point and you may disagree with me here. But it may be a good argument if you do. Okay. Judgment cannot change us. That's why judgment is God's strange work. It's called here the Isaiah 28. It can't change us. It's judicial but it's not radically saving. It doesn't change our hearts. In other words, can I broaden that a little bit and say the fear of hell is not the gospel. Hell is a reality, an awful reality but it is, and fearing hell is not the gospel. It is a consequence of rejecting the love of God but it is not the gospel. And fear of hell will not change you to turn to God. Fear, as in abject fear of that, is the wrong motive for knowing and coming to trust in Jesus Christ. It is the truth and judgment is the truth but it's not the answer. It's not the answer. And I think Noah's, the flood is clear representation of that because there's this catastrophic judgment. God clearly acts justly, terrifyingly and dreadfully. Noah and his family are saved and redeemed in the ark. And the very next chapter, there's incest, there's drunkenness, and then shortly after there's a tower of

Babel. He would think, wouldn't he? If anything was going to change him, that would. But it doesn't because it's his strange work and it's not the gospel and it's not his mercy.

And that brings us onto the third thing which is that there is mercy. Chapter 6, we didn't read chapter 6, verse 8, says, but Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God, 8 and 9. Noah walked with God. And there's mercy in this traumatic story, real and promised. There's gentle pointers right through Genesis 1 to 11 of God's mercy. There's the promise of Jesus Christ in the very beginning, Genesis chapter 3. There's the clothing he provides for Adam and Eve. There's the protection from death. There's freedom for their descendants to live and to have families and to enjoy the world and to seek God out and to follow him, to call in his name for forgiveness in life. And many did for a while until it all receded and Noah was the only believer, the only one. And then in the chapter following there, his redemption and his family's redemption, there's this covenant in chapter 9, this covenant of preservation where a new stewardship and a new responsibility is given to Noah and to his offspring to re-inhabit the world, a new beginning, a new laws of protection against violence and evil. And his mercy is shown to all creation, not just to humanity but to the animals also. A promise that never again would there be such a destruction, never again would the magnitude of his judgment come as it did then with the sign of the rainbow being the sign of his promise. And within that covenant of preservation focused around the person of Noah and his family is the preservation of the line of Jesus, from the seed of the woman in Genesis 3, right through to the birth of Jesus from the womb of Mary. And there's an Old Testament, there's also a theme throughout the Old Testament of that line being preserved at different points when it was all but to be annihilated. God was preserving this promise, this line from the beginning that Jesus would come to be your Savior and my Savior as Christians.

So there is mercy in this. And lastly and very briefly there is also faith spoken of here and faith I think that points forward to our own life of faith as Christians. Noah walked with the Lord, a euphemism for being a person of faith who trusted. He was a preacher of righteousness. He was someone who loved the Lord and feared the Lord and who trusted the Lord. Even in the desert as it were, building this ridiculous big boat, he trusted God with the ridicule that he would have received for what he was doing and the craziness of what it seemed like in the sunbaked environment in which they were living. But he understood and knew the Lord, the Redeemer that's spoken of here. He understood the sacrifice for sin,

God's justice and God's mercy. I know it's different because he had so little light at one level yet he is spoken of as someone who walked with God and who shared that truth and who preached that truth and I'm sure who begged for people to turn to the living God.

[26 : 15] And that of course points forward to the walk of faith that's spoken of in the passage that Corey read in Hebrews chapter 11, the ongoing challenge of faith. And that's our challenge as we take God's reveal word into our own lives. So Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1, remind of faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. That's exactly the same, almost that's spoken of Noah in the way that he believed. And we have that future aspect to our faith, but it's always the, it's also that recognition. If you go on in Hebrews, it speaks about believing that it's

God who is at the beginning and who was the creator and who is the source of all things. It brings things back faith to the beginning again and it speaks about having a reasonable recognition of what God has done in creation and in redemption. It's thoughtful. That chapter in Hebrews 11 is speaking about a reasonable faith using our brains, thinking through examining God and the world that we see around us, examining the realities, challenging the presuppositions that are natural to us and others, reasoning and wrestling with things, by asking the hard questions, but not just of God, not just asking God the hard questions that we're often keen to ask Him and often keep us from Him, but ask those who don't believe and ask yourself the hard questions that need to be asked about life and about humanity and about love and about justice and about hope and about a future and about why we're here and what is the reason.

It's not enough to have, it's not enough at one level to have blind faith. I rail against blind faith, faith that isn't reasoned and thought out and growing and developing and intellectual as well as heart. Blind faith won't cut it in the world in which we live, but neither will blind unbelief. Don't have that stupid position of just living without thinking and living without wrestling and living in a shallow reality that doesn't challenge us about who we are and about our life and our death and our future. The ongoing challenge of faith is that it's thoughtful and that it reflects the faith that Noah had which was a walk with God, and that is to be characteristic of our life of faith, is to be in that, you know, speaking about a relationship with God, isn't it, listening and learning from God in Christ. Noah was an heir of the righteousness that is by faith and he points us to God's ultimate answer to death which is not judgment but redemption. Now interestingly, isn't it, as we finish with this twist, there is judgment in redemption. It is part of the answer, but it's not judgment on us. It's judgment on himself. Isn't that ironic? And isn't that awesome that the judge leaves his judgment seat and enters the dock? He dies. He takes the flood as it were. He takes the judgment because he knows we can't meet the perfect and righteous standard of God. And that's the glory of grace. He is driven to do that by His love for you, by His outstanding love that provides, and we mustn't think that this is theoretical or disengaged from our lives. It's the very core of what makes us living beings if we are Christians, that we see someone who has done this. I'm speechless. I have no words who has done this for us, and He has offered to us as the one who has done this, who has provided the answer. There's a rationale and a reason, and it's driven by outstanding love from his heart and soul as the living God to provide the answer that we can't provide for ourselves. And it's a free and a full gift as we reach out to Him by grace and recognize for Him, recognize Him for who He is. And that walk with God and the challenge to me and the challenge to you today is if you are the last person in this universe that is walking with God, will you do it? Is your faith cultural? Is it because people around you have faith?

Is it because you were brought up to have faith? Or like Noah, if you are the last person, let's not say in the universe, let's just say in your world to make it a bit more reasonable.

The only person that you know who is a believer, will you ditch it because it's an inconvenient truth? Or will you recognize the promise of what is yet to come in your creation, new creation in Christ, and what He promises to do on that last great day when the world will not be destroyed but will be renovated and renewed because He promised that that would be the case. And each time you see a rainbow, that is what you're to remember. He will recreate His world because it's good, and it will be good because that is His end design. Amen.

Let us pray. Father, we pray that you would help us to understand more of your grace and of your mercy, that we would be in awe of your justice, that we would humbly submit to your creating glory as our maker, that we would not put you on a par with ourselves, and certainly that we wouldn't put you below us. And may we recognize the perspective of everything biblically must be through the cross, which is the center of God's redemptive and glorious, grace-filled rescue plan for us. Help this truth to be not deemed irrelevant to us today as people here listen with burdens, with battles, with tiredness, with practical issues. May these truths not be something that they lay aside in the week into which they will work and week into which they will enter, but may it be inspiring and challenging, and may it point us all to the one before whom we need to fall on our knees and worship and seek

[34 : 07] His love and forgiveness and grace to sustain us when it seems all is pointless and hopeless. Help us then, we pray, dear God, in Jesus' name. Amen.