

“Fear and Faithfulness”

Genesis 6: 5-14, 17-22; Acts. 2:1-4, 14-21

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There's a story about a frog that decided one day to go see a fortune-teller. She told it, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is you're going to meet a beautiful young woman. She's going to be fascinated by you, to want to spend time with you, and to know everything about you. She won't be able to keep her hands off you." The frog goes, "Fantastic! But what's the bad news?" And the fortune-teller says, "You're going to meet her in biology class."

Do you ever feel like you have to struggle in a bad situation? This morning we see how God gives us his underserved kindness even in the midst of very bad and scary times.

Noah lived in bad times. We saw in the first chapters of Genesis that all started well in God's world. Then Adam and Eve ran away from God. They disobeyed his plan and brought evil into creation. From there things go from bad to worse. One of their sons murdered another, and as human society grows from Adam and Eve's descendants, it grows further apart from God's good designs. Human society was a moral wasteland, because human nature was compromised:

“The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain” (Genesis 6:5-6).

That's a bleak picture of humankind. But in the middle of it, one person shines like a light in the darkness.

The passage tells us Noah “walked with God.”

The world was running away from God, but Noah walked with God. That means he had a relationship with him, he enjoyed fellowship with him, he continued with him. He consistently followed God's will. He “practiced the presence of God.” That kind of intimacy doesn't happen automatically. You have to cultivate it. It takes work to be godly. How is your walk with God these days?

I've come to realize I can be at peace with God, and enjoy intimacy with him, and it's amazing to me that that's not the same thing as having everything going great in my life. Sometimes when the pressure's on and I feel I have nowhere else to go but to the Lord, sometimes even when I'm grieving about something in my life, but yet I feel joy in the Lord. There can be happiness even in our sadness over a loss or about the condition of the world. It's a gift that happens when we walk with God.

The passage tells us Noah was a righteous man.

The word righteous is a translation of *tsaddiq*, and it means blameless, innocent. Noah stood out among his generation. He conformed to God's standard. That means he lived

in a right relationship with God. He could do this because God gave him the grace to do it, or in other words, God helped him.

It's always that way. God's grace always comes first. God doesn't love us for what we've done, or for what we can become. He loves us just because he loves us. We can't earn God's love. It's why Paul writes,

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How can you live righteously, in such a way that God sees you as upright? We do it by trusting in Jesus, our total help for our total need, and that's grace. If we start there, then an upright life will follow. So, Noah was a righteous man, and that righteousness was a gift. His righteousness, his character, his favor with God—all this flowed out of the relationship Noah had with God. In other words, he was righteous *because* he walked with God.

The passage tells us Noah was blameless.

The word gives the idea of *completeness*. Noah fit God's standard, and so his life was complete, with nothing missing he needed to be whole. He stood out from the crowd of people that were willing to go along with wrongdoing. Noah had integrity. He was blameless, above reproach.

Now, being blameless doesn't mean he never sinned. In fact, chapter nine tells about one of his sins, when Noah got drunk and embarrassed himself in front of his sons. That's unfortunate. But even though he was a sinner, his life had integrity, because he loved and obeyed God with a whole heart.

Noah set the example of godliness in a dark world.

The passage says,

“Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth” (6:11-12).

Three times we hear that the earth has become corrupt. Everything has devolved; it's gone on a sad downward spiral of robbery and murder. Human life has disintegrated. It's what happens when you push God out.

But there was a witness to God's truth in the person of Noah. He persevered in doing what God said. In the middle of a corrupt world, he set an example of a different kind of living. He set his heart to follow God's path, to live like God.

Let me suggest four lessons for us that come out of this story.

First, obey God's word.

It reminds me of the story of Corrie and Betsy Ten Boom. They were Christians sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp during World War II for hiding Jews. Betsy told Corrie, "Give thanks in all things." Corrie said, "I won't give thanks for horrible things, like the suffering in terrible conditions. Even the barracks are swarming with fleas. I won't give thanks for these fleas!" But in the end, the fleas kept the guards away, and Betsy and Corrie were able to do their Bible study unmolested. God says to give thanks in *all* circumstances, and sure enough, he is using *everything* for our good. God knows what he's doing. So, let me ask you, do you trust him to know what he's doing?

So, God tells Noah, get ready, because the flood is coming. God isn't silent; he tells us what he wants. He speaks to us through the Bible. He wants to bring us close to him. Even when it's hard, even when we don't like the direction he's taking us, it's for our ultimate good. Just ask yourself, don't you think that the God of the universe, the Lord who made me, that he knows better than I do what's for my ultimate good? That he can take care of us?

Chapter six concludes with the words, "Noah did this. He did all that God commanded him." That's the key to this passage. Everything God says, Noah does. In the next chapter, the phrase is repeated three more times. It's like what Mary tells the people about Jesus at a wedding celebration in Cana: "Do whatever he says to do." Good advice. We have to do that if we expect to enjoy life and blessing.

The movie *Evan Almighty* is a comedy that updates the story of Noah. God appears to Evan, who's a new U.S. congressman, and tells him to build an ark. Evan brushes it off until God makes it clear he means business. Lumber starts being dropped off in front of his house; he finds he's bought several lots around his home in the new subdivision; and animals start following him around. After a while, Evan starts growing a beard and long hair, and he can't shave quick enough to get rid of them. The problem is, there's a cost to following what God says. People take him for a crackpot. His wife and kids don't get him. His constituents are seriously worried. It's not always easy to do what God wants. But whenever he tries to run away from God, everything goes disastrously wrong. So even learned to obey what God told him to do.

Noah worked for years on a project nobody could understand. But he hung in there, and did what God wanted him to. Sometimes what God says doesn't make sense from our point of view. All we can do is trust he knows what he's talking about. You can trust him, even when people around you think it's crazy.

### Second, trust in God's provision.

Even when he sends his judgment by way of a flood, there's good news. God says,

"But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you" (Genesis 6:18).

Does the word "covenant" ring a bell with you? Covenant is one of the key words of the Bible, and it occurs almost 290 times. This is the first time. When God makes a covenant, he's making a promise. He's saying, "I solemnly swear." He's promising to bind himself to his people, take care of his people, like when David said,

“I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he turned to me and heard my cry” (Psalm 40:1).

Who is like the LORD our God,  
the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look  
on the heavens and the earth? (Psalm 113:6)

And God still shows his kindness. He still warns his people. He still takes care of us, because he’s faithful to everyone who obeys him. That doesn’t mean he always protects us from trouble. But he always cares for us *through* the trouble. Peter made that clear when he wrote to the church,

“God did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; and the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment” (2 Peter 2: 5, 9).

God can take care of you even when the world is scary, so trust him.

### Third, remember God’s power.

The flood reminds us of the reality of the coming judgment. It’s why Jesus says in Matthew 24,

“For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:38-39).

All the way through the Old Testament, the writers say God “remembered” someone. It’s a way of saying God gives his mercy and saves someone. He rescues people from death, and he gives the gift of life to a barren womb. He remembers us, and he calls us to remember, too. He told Israel,

“You shall *remember* that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

So God tells us to remember his salvation. And he remembers, too. When the floodwaters covered the earth, Genesis says,

“But God *remembered* Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” (8:1).

It’s not only for ancient Israel, it’s for us, too. It’s how we know who we are—we remember. It will give you perspective, and desire to be true to God who has been faithful to us.

Noah remembered by building an altar to the Lord, and offering a sacrifice. And God says,

“I will never again curse the ground because of man, even though the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:20-22).

We don’t have to make a sacrifice anymore, because the Lord himself has made the perfect sacrifice.

That’s what Pentecost is about—remembering God’s mighty act to save us in the life and death of Jesus Christ, and to experience God’s power in the church. We enjoy his power in remembering, when he applies his Spirit to us, just like he promised his disciples:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

Did you know that the ship is an ancient symbol of the church? It reminds us that God carries through the troubled waters, and rescues us. He takes care of us, no matter what the storms that rage. We will experience his power, because he loves us. And deep in his love, all is at peace.