

In the Beginning

Cleansing Flood (Genesis 6:5-13; 7:17-24)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on March 20, 2022

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're going to be studying one of the most widely known stories in Scripture. Everyone knows about Noah and the Flood. I could ask any of the children in service this morning, and they could tell me about the basic plot line and characters. Because it's one of the first stories we teach them. **Every picture storybook bible I've seen includes Noah and the ark. And they usually include pairs of cute animals climbing on board.**
 - My own kids played with a miniature toy ark complete with little wooden cutouts of Noah and his wife along with pairs of more cute animals. And the surprising thing is that the toy ark was made by a popular toy company that's not faith-based. It just goes to show how recognizable Noah's ark is – even in our ever more secular culture.

- ❖ **But notice how every depiction of the story centers on Noah and the ark.** There's usually still mention of a coming flood. But all the illustrations and images focus on the ark where Noah, his family, and all the animals are safe and sound. **What's never illustrated is the utter destruction of the world with everything and everyone else in it.** Which is understandable. I'd be hesitant to read to young children a bible that had illustrations of people drowning in the flood. We've got to use age-appropriate discretion.
 - **But even adults, we too can have an overly sanitized view of Noah and the Flood, and we can lose sight of its main point.** That point being divine judgment. The story centers – not so much on Noah and his efforts to save his family and a pair of all the animals – but rather on **God and his grief over the sinfulness of man and his intent to cleanse this fallen world and start over again.**

- ❖ This morning I want to present a de-sanitized version of this familiar story. One that includes the hard parts about judgment and destruction. One that presents a full picture of what happened. But there's good reason to do so. Not because we want to glory in gore and violence. **But because we know that until we recognize how frightening this story can be – until we feel, towards sin and its corrupting effects, as God feels – then we won't fully appreciate the way in which the story of Scripture leads to an ultimate resolution.**
 - The good news from above just doesn't seem as good until it's set in contrast to the badness of life here below. So we want to paint a realistic picture of Noah and the Flood, so that we can truly treasure the bigger picture that it represents. That is, the beauty and glory of the gospel.

- ❖ The story of Noah and the Flood spans four chapters. We'll study portions of chapters 6 and 7 today and save 8 and 9 for next week. This morning I want to draw out four observations. We'll consider (1) The pervasiveness of humanity's sin, (2) The acuteness of God's pain, (3) The extensiveness of the flood's destruction, and (4) The incompleteness of the flood's effect.

The Pervasiveness of Humanity's Sin

- ❖ We begin with the pervasiveness of humanity's sin. Chapter 6 begins with a brief account of how sin – which entered this once pristine world in Genesis 3 – continues to increase and spoil everything it touches.

- ❖ We didn't read vv1-4 earlier, and we could spend a whole sermon trying to dissect it because of its interpretative challenges. But bottomline, the first four verses are telling us that sin and perversion is on the rise expressed in many ways, including illicit sexual relationships.
 - Things are getting ugly. **Sin, which started in the Garden among one couple, has pervaded every corner of the earth and every corner of the human heart.** God notices. Listen to v5, "*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 depressing. What a sad and tragic assessment of the human condition! Notice how far we have fallen short. Genesis 1 said that everything God formed was good and beautiful. But here, in Genesis 6, it says every thought that humanity forms is evil and repulsive.
 - Now what does that mean? Does it mean we are incapable of good intentions or righteous thoughts? It seems to be an overstatement to say that every intention of ours is continually evil. **But what I think v5 means to suggest is that every intention of the thoughts of our fallen hearts are not centered – and never are centered – on the glory of God.** In our natural state, we don't think about doing things for God's glory. And that ultimately is what makes our intentions evil continually.

- ❖ That understanding is reinforced in v11 where it says, "*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.*" In Genesis 1, God told us to fill the earth. But to fill it with more divine image bearers. The creation mandate was to fill the earth with more people who reflect the glory of the image of God. **In other words, we're supposed to fill the earth with his glory. But instead, in our fallenness, humanity fills the earth with violence.** We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)

- ❖ So v5 spells out God's moral motivation behind the Flood. He has a clear reason. He has just cause. And you might not think that's a big deal, but it really is, especially when you compare the biblical flood account to other ancient primeval flood stories.
 - **Some have tried to downplay the uniqueness of the biblical Flood – or to challenge its historicity – by noting the similarities to ancient flood myths like the Epic of Gilgamesh or the Epic of Atrahasis.** These are ancient Mesopotamian flood stories where, in similar fashion, the gods send a devastating flood to cleanse the earth of humanity but, at the same time, rescue one man and his family.

- ❖ **But what is obviously different compared to the biblical Flood is that these flood myths lack a clear and moral motivation.** In the Gilgamesh epic, there is no motivation given for the flood. And in the Atrahasis epic, we're told the god Enlil is annoyed by all the noise and commotion caused by an overpopulated earth, which causes him to suffer from insomnia. So he sends a plague but that plan is thwarted. Then he sends a drought and famine but to no avail. So finally he sends a flood, which the hero Atrahasis survives by building a boat.
 - So we have a flood in all the earth and a rescue by boat. That's similar. **But the glaring difference is that the only problem in this flood account is that there are too many people making too much noise.**

- ❖ **The God of Scripture is set in stark contrast to these capricious, petty gods of the ancient near east.** The LORD's motivations are righteous. His actions and decisions are the just responses to human wickedness. And the fact that there are other flood myths out there shouldn't bother us. It should reinforce our conviction that a global flood must have occurred in the ancient past. Because it's not just the ancient Israelites recording that fact. There is attestation and corroboration from other ancient cultures and religions.

The Acuteness of God's Pain

- ❖ So v5 tells us what God sees, and now in v6, we're told how God feels about what he sees. This leads to our second observation – the acuteness of God's pain. Look at v6, "*And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*" **That word for "grieved" means to hurt or to bring pain. That's why some translations say that God's heart was filled with pain.**
 - Of course, we're not talking about a physical pain but an emotional one. Grief. Deep sorrow. I know it's surprising to speak of God this way. This same word for "grieved" shows up in **Isaiah 54:6**. There the LORD is referring to Israel's constant idolatry and comparing his emotional pain to that of a deserted wife. "*For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off.*"
 - **Therapists will tell you that being deserted by a spouse is one of the most painful and traumatic of experiences.** Which is all the more shocking when the biblical authors insist that that is the kind of pain God feels towards sinners because of our sin. That's how we grieve him.
- ❖ **Now again, I realize it's hard for many of us to picture God grieving.** So we quickly assume that this must be a case of anthropomorphism. The biblical author must be attributing a human emotion to God. He doesn't actually feel grief, right? But why do we assume that?
 - We wouldn't say that about his love. I think most of us would say that God actually feels love, in his heart, towards his covenant people. We wouldn't describe his loving feelings as anthropomorphic. So neither should we when it comes to his feelings of grief or pain. We don't need to reject the idea of a God with emotions. **We just need to guard against a depiction of God being ruled by his emotions in the way we humans are.** We can't control our feelings. We're often at the whim of our emotions. God, on the other hand, is not.
- ❖ **This distinction is also going to help us interpret what it means for the LORD to regret that he had made man on the earth.** Some translations will say that he "repented" of making man. That's not a helpful translation because it's too confusing. We usually reserve the word repent when we're speaking on moral terms. But in this case, we're talking about turning or changing one's mind. That's how it's sometimes translated in Scripture.
 - But to say that God "changed his mind" is also confusing because there places in Scripture where it says that God does not change his mind. **Numbers 23:19** says, "*God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.*"

- ❖ **So I would argue that in our case – when it says God regretted making man – it shouldn't be interpreted to mean that he originally had no plans to destroy the earth;** but then was surprised by how bad things got; which led him to regret the decision to make man in the first place; so he made a new decision to wipe them out and start all over.
 - No, that sounds like something *we* would do. That's what man's regret looks like. **1 Samuel 15:29** says "*the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.*" So when we speak of God's regret we have to distinguish that from the kind of regret we get based on the fact that we don't know the future and are surprised when things don't turn out as we planned or expected.

- ❖ **But God is all-knowing and possess all foreknowledge, so nothing catches him off guard.** The pervasiveness of humanity's sin by the time we get to Genesis 6 did not surprise the LORD. But it did sadden him. It did truly grieve him. That's why Scripture calls it regret.
 - **But God is able to regret without changing. Because his reaction to sin is always the same.** First of all, he's always hurt by it. And second, he always responds to those who persist in sin with judgment – with either discipline, correction, or punishment.

- ❖ Imagine you try to ride your bike from point A to point B. And you start off with a boost from the wind blowing at your back. But at some point along the way, you start to feel strong resistance. You feel the wind blowing in your face, blowing against you. To you, it feels like the winds have changed. But what if I told you the wind has been blowing just as before. That it's been blowing in the same direction. **The logical conclusion you should draw is that you've gone off course.** You've turned back, and you're going the wrong direction! So the wind didn't change – you did.
 - Well, that's the logical conclusion people should've drawn in Genesis 6. **When God begins to move against them in judgment, they had no reason to assume God had changed.** No, it was they who changed. They who went off course.
 - And God predictably responds with judgment. He afflicts them with the flood. But, as it says in **Lamentations 3:33**, the LORD does not afflict *from his heart*. That means he takes no pleasure in it. His heart is grieved when he sends the flood. It pains him to do it.

The Extensiveness of the Flood's Destruction

- ❖ So again v5 tells us what God saw; v6 tells us what God felt; and now in v7 we see what God does. He makes it rain. This leads to our third observation – the extensiveness of the flood's destruction. This is where we need to take off the kid gloves and deal with the text with all of its uncomfortable aspects and difficult details. So let's take a good look at v7, "*So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.*""
 - God's plan is to wipe the earth clean of all humans along with all land animals, bugs, and birds. It's because of man's moral corruption, but even morally-neutral animals are impacted. Because the curse of sin is that pervasive. **The animal kingdom is negatively effected by humanity's poor choices.** As it was then so it still is now.

- ❖ **The language of blotting out refers to erasing something by washing, by the application of water.** Typically in Scripture, it was used to describe the washing out of ink from a scroll, usually in reference to blotting out someone’s name from a book (Ex 32:32-33; Ps 69:28). It was also used figuratively to describe the washing away of sin (Isa 43:25; Jer 28:33; Ps 51:3). But here in v7, God plans to wash away the sinners themselves.
 - His plan is reiterated in vv11-13, *“¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”*

- ❖ **There’s a key word in these three verses repeated four times.** The word corrupt. It could also be translated as ruined or spoiled. We’re told the earth was corrupt (ruined) . . . Behold, it was corrupt (ruined), for all flesh has corrupted (ruined) their way on the earth . . . Behold, I will *destroy* them. It’s actually the same Hebrew word. To translate it as “corrupt” would’ve been confusing, so they used “destroy”. But the LORD is saying, “Just as they ruined the earth, I will ruin them with the earth.”
 - I think using the same word to describe the earth’s condition and God’s action is deliberate. **God is going to ruin what has already been ruined.** To destroy what has already been destroyed by man’s sin. This places the blame for the flood squarely on humanity. We caused the ruin. God responds, as he always does, with justice.

- ❖ Look over at chapter 7 starting in v17. *“¹⁷The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. . . . ²¹And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. ²²Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. ²³He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.”*
 - It’s hard to imagine how many people and how many living creatures must have died during the flood. Those are visuals we’d rather not have. **And no one wants to think about God sending this flood to destroy, to blot out people.** We’d much rather focus on God working with Noah to build an ark, to rescue man and beast. That seems more like God.

- ❖ But Scripture paints a fuller picture – an honest picture – of God as both the God who judges and the God who rescues. **If you think about it, what actually needs more justification is to explain how God could rescue anyone – considering how everyone on earth is fallen, including Noah.** We have difficulty accepting the fact that God sent a flood. But the ancients would’ve had difficulty accepting the fact that God provided an ark.
 - That’s why space is given to explain this. To justify why one man and his family are spared. Look with me back at chapter 6:8. *“But Noah found favor in the eyes of God.”* That word for “*favor*” could also be translated as grace.

- ❖ Notice how it says Noah *found* favor. He found grace. He didn't earn it. He didn't win it. **Favor was something freely given, and he simply found it.** Noah found favor in God's eyes. And notice how his righteous character is not even mentioned until the next verse. I think it intentionally comes afterwards, so as not to confuse anyone. **So no one assumes that his good character is why God showed him favor.** If that was the case, then v9 would've come before v8. But instead, the text is deliberately written to emphasize that God's favor (his grace) is freely given because of *his* lovingkindness – not because of anything in us.
- ❖ Now so far, in v5-8, the focus has been on the LORD, the principal character in this story. **But now in v9, the focus shifts to the most prominent secondary character – Noah.** *“⁹These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”*
 - Now to call Noah “*blameless*” is not to imply that he was sinless. That word is used elsewhere to describe sacrificial animals that are free from defect. The word could also mean “whole”, as in all the parts are there and working. **So we could say Noah was a wholesome man.** He was a good man, a righteous man.
- ❖ And likewise, that doesn't mean Noah was a perfect man. **According to Scripture, to be a righteous man – as we learn later in Genesis 15 regarding the righteousness of Abraham (15:6) – means to be a man of faith.** One who believes God and takes him at his Word. This interpretation of what it means to be called a righteous man is reinforced in **Hebrews 11:7**, *“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”*
 - Noah, like his descendant Abraham, is an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By believing. **Which we're told will inevitably express itself through good works, through faithful obedience to God's commands.** And that's what we see evident in our text. Look at chapter 6:22, *“Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.”* That same sentiment is repeated in chapter 7:5.
- ❖ Look back at Genesis 6:9, and notice how it says, *“Noah walked with God.”* That same phrase appeared a couple chapters earlier in **Genesis 5:24** where we're told that Noah's great-grandfather, *“Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”* That's usually taken to mean that he didn't die. Everyone else in chapter 5 has their synopsis conclude with the phrase *“and he died”*, but not Enoch. Enoch was delivered from death. Well, in the same way as Enoch, Noah walked with God and was also delivered from death.
- ❖ Let's bring this home for a moment. Like we said earlier, until we come to grips with the bad news of universal judgment that extends all the way to you and I – because we are sinners who have contributed to the corruption and ruin of this world – **until we recognize the bleakness of our predicament, we won't appreciate the good news of the gospel of grace.**
 - The message that says you are *not* doomed for destruction. That says you *can* find favor in God's eyes. If you believe in him. If you take him at his Word.

- ❖ **By faith, you can be a righteous person.** A blameless, wholesome person. And how do you know if this is true of you? How do you know if you have God's favor? It's simple really. Ask yourself: **Am I walking with God?** Am I walking in obedience? Not perfectly; but faithfully. Do I have a walk with God?
 - Now I'm not saying that's simple to do. But I am saying it's simple to know. You will know them by their fruits (Mt 7:20). **So how's your walk with God?** If it's non-existent, then you should be concerned. I hope this flood serves as a dire warning of coming judgment. I hope you turn around and start walking with him again.
 - **But if you *are* walking – even if it's slowed down to a crawl – the important thing is that it's happening *with* God.** You're crawling *with* God. That's still a sign of spiritual life. That's still evidence of grace – that you still have favor in God's eyes. And I hope that good news motivates you to pick up the pace and start walking again in full stride.

The Incompleteness of the Flood's Effect

- ❖ Now if we look back at that section we read in chapter 7, at vv17-24, you'll notice how extensive the flood's destruction was. We're told it rained for forty days; and the waters increased greatly on the earth; that the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. **So that the flood had the intended effect of blotting out sinful humanity. But what we'll soon discover is that the flood did not fundamentally change human nature.** This leads to our fourth and final observation – the incompleteness of the flood's effect.
- ❖ Think back to when we studied chapters 3-4. **We saw how after the Fall of Man there arose two lines of offspring interlocked in a perpetual, generational conflict.** There would be this ever present enmity between the offspring of the serpent (fallen humanity opposed to God and his will) and the offspring of the woman (fallen humanity redeemed by God and serving according to his will). In Genesis 4, we saw how Cain and his descendants were representative of the offspring of the serpent and how they increased in wickedness.
 - Now Abel was of the offspring of the woman, but his life was cut short. So Seth, another son of Adam and Eve, appears at the end of chapter 4, and he and his descendants perpetuate the offspring of the woman (cf. Genesis 5).
- ❖ Remember, the flood account began when the LORD saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (6:5). **So God sends the flood to blot out the offspring of the serpent and preserve the offspring of the woman by saving Noah and his family.** The plan is effective in wiping out all traces of Cain's descendants. The flood cleansed the earth of the serpent's offspring.
 - But after the waters subside and after Noah and family (along with all the animals) leave the ark, we read, in **Genesis 8:21**, the LORD drawing the same conclusion about humanity, *“for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.”*

- ❖ **Alas, it appears that, even after the flood, sin still pollutes the human heart.** We come to discover that the serpent's venom and sin's effects have penetrated and spread so deeply and so widely throughout the human race – that even the offspring of the woman has been corrupted. So that even Noah and his family give birth to both the offspring of the serpent and of the woman.
 - **In other words, the flood was effective in cleansing the surface of the earth, but it was incapable of cleansing the heart of man.** And by the time we get to Genesis 11, the world and humanity in it are all back in the same state – with the wickedness of man is great on the earth and every intention of his heart is evil continually.

- ❖ But redemption was never God's goal in sending the flood. It was a form of divine judgment. **And according to 2 Peter 3, the Genesis flood foreshadows a future coming judgment. Not by water. But by fire.** *“The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”* (2 Pet 3:7)
 - **But in the middle of human history, another judgment was carried out.** Another righteous and blameless man was called out. But this time he wasn't given a way out. **This time this man of God was thrown into the flood.** He was cast into the stormy waters of God's judgment. And accomplished what the Flood could not complete. He secured our redemption.
 - **Because he bore our judgment, this man – this Jesus whom we call Christ – has become for us an ark of salvation.** So that anyone who calls upon the name of Jesus will be saved. **All who hide themselves in Christ will survive the storm of coming judgment.** I urge any of you who have yet to find refuge in Christ – flee to Jesus. Make him your hiding place; your shelter from the storm; your ark of salvation.