

Good morning, church family! If you have your Bible, turn with me to Genesis 6. We are going to continue our study of Genesis today, looking at one of the most widely known stories in the entire Bible, the story of the flood and Noah's ark. I don't do this most weeks, but I want to lay my cards on the table for the message right up front. Today we are going to see how sin had corrupted the world, how that sin needed to be judged, and how God found a way, through water, to bring about salvation for those who believed in him and to renew hope for the world. At the end of my message today, I am going to give an invitation for anyone who wants to come forward and respond to place their faith in Jesus to come to the water and be baptized, a physical picture of having your sins washed away and entering into a life-long covenant relationship with God. You may not have come today prepared for that, but we have changes of clothes, towels, everything that is needed if you feel called by God to respond today. Let's pray and ask God to move.

The last couple of weeks we talked about the impact that sin has had on the world. Genesis 3 tells us about original sin—Adam and Eve in the garden, rebelling against God's protective commands. If Genesis 3 is the seed of sin, Genesis 4 shows us the ultimate fruit of sin—Cain murdering his brother. The Bible says, sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Genesis 3, 4, 5, and 6, show us that sin, violence, murder, and corruption spread rampantly, and God knew he had to take drastic actions to save the world.

Toward the end of his life, when his artistry skills were at their ultimate peak, Claude Monet set out to paint a collection of pieces depicting water lilies. Because his standards were at a certain place, even if he was 95% of the way through a work of art, if he realized it wasn't going to end up the right way, he would start over again, often using the same canvas, entirely painting over what was first there that wasn't turning out how he wanted. In many ways, that's what God did with the entire world. Humanity was not going in the right direction and sin had contaminated nearly everything, so God found a way to use the same canvas and begin his masterpiece over again.

We are going to see four themes in our passage today: widespread corruption, the power of a righteous life, salvation through judgment, and a new covenant with humanity.

Widespread Corruption

Just how far did humanity fall?

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...Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. (Genesis 6:5, 11, 12)

Twice in this passage we read the phrase, "The Lord saw / God saw." This is the same phrase that was used in Genesis 1. God saw what he had made, and it was good. It was very good. The Lord continues to look on his creation, but he can no longer say that it is good. Quite the opposite! On three different occasions we learn that creation has become corrupt. This is the Hebrew word *sahat* (*shahchat*), which is a word still used in modern day Hebrew to describe food that has become rotten. This isn't food expired by one or two days. Couples often have disagreements

about expiration dates. How many of you are like me—if the expiration date says October 1st, then at 12:01 on Oct 2, it's in the trash? How many of you stretch it for a couple days? How many of you stretch it a couple weeks? How many of you never even check, it's just, "No mold in sight, take a bite"? The word corrupt wasn't corrupt like bread that was a few hours past its prime; it was complete and total decay. Think about meat or fruit left to fester for weeks outside in the heat—corruption that is so comprehensive, there is nothing salvageable remaining. Look what an encompassing statement God makes in verse six: "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." The text piles words to show there's no crack of light. Humanity is beyond hope.

The Power of a Righteous Life

When the world had descended into near pitch darkness, there was one bright shining light, one exception to the corruption of the world. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God" (Genesis 6:8-9). Noah is the first person in the Bible to be given the description "righteous." Instead of following the ways of the culture around him, he followed the ways of God. He was also called "blameless," which means having complete integrity. It's the same word used to describe acceptable offerings and sacrifices made to God. It means he was living his life as an expression of worship to the one true God. Finally, "he walked faithfully with God." This is a picture of an on-going close and personal relationship. Even though everyone else in the world was walking their own path, pursuing their own interests and passions, Noah walked with God, pursued the Lord, lived a life that honored the Lord. God looked with favor on him and knew that he could use him for his plans to save the world.

Let me just pause right there for a moment. Wouldn't you want to live the sort of life that could be described that way? Young people, even when it seems like all your peers are living for the world—partying, hooking up, pursuing pleasure—don't you want to live such a life that the Lord can say you were righteous and blameless and faithfully walked with him? What a commentary! That can be true of you. Adults in the room, don't you want to live with that kind of integrity and character and intimacy with God? Yes, maybe it seems like Western society is eroding into moral decay, but don't you want to live the sort of life about which God could say from heaven that even as so many are wandering away, getting swept up in cultural corruption, you were righteous and blameless and walked faithfully with him? Noah is an inspiring example for us to look to, a role model for us to follow.

Salvation through Judgment

Because Noah lived such an exemplary life, God was able to use him to bring salvation through judgment. God didn't want to give up on his plans for humanity, so he had to find a way to appropriately respond to evil and punish it, but also to save the human race.

So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high... But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you

and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." Noah did everything just as God commanded him. (Genesis 6:13-15, 18-22)

There are some people who read this story and their first thought is, "No way! That's just a biblical fairy tale." I understand the skepticism. But in fact the account of a global flood was widespread among ancient world religions. As I was researching this week, I wanted to figure out the answer to this question: How many different ancient religions have an account of a massive flood hitting the world? I consulted numerous sources. The best answers: 200-300. Accounts of a flood are present in religions and cultural histories found throughout Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, India, China, North America, Mesoamerica, South America, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. In other words, people from the entire planet believed in a global flood. In nearly all these religions and cultures, the story has similar themes: divine judgment, a righteous person or family chosen, survival by a boat, animals saved alongside humans, birds sent out to check for receding waters, and, after the flood is over, a sacrifice made. There is of course the chance that one ancient religion came up with this idea, and somehow this story spread all over the world and people from across the planet decided to incorporate that one faith story in their religious texts. But there is also the chance that the flood actually happened, and because it happened, it became a central part of the collective memory of humanity from around that time period. I personally find the second option far more plausible, that at some point in history, the events recorded in the Bible really did happen!

After the ark is built and all the animals have been brought in, "All the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights" (Genesis 7:11-12). Water comes from the great deep, as well as from the heavens. In Genesis 1, the creation of life on land was able to happen because God held back the waters, pushing the oceans to their proper place. Now, instead of holding the water back, God opens the floodgates and water comes up from the ground, perhaps like a tidal wave or massive storm surge. Water comes from the sky with forty days and nights of rain, so much water that the entire world is covered. "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark" (Genesis 7:23). This is a catastrophic act of both judgment and salvation. Evil had to be eradicated to preserve humanity. It seems extreme! But think about a surgeon who had to amputate a patient's leg. That is an extreme action. This is a doctor, someone who has taken the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. How could he saw off a leg? Because he is an immoral doctor? Because he is capricious? Of course not. He takes such an extreme action because he looks at the patient and sees that gangrene has set in. That part of the body is irrecoverable. If it's not removed, the rest of the body will die, too. The sawing off of the leg is an act of judgment against the disease and an act of mercy for the salvation of the patient. That's what God does in the flood. It's a catastrophic judgment, but for the sake of salvation.

A New Covenant with Humanity

When the flood waters finally recede, God makes a new covenant with humanity. God makes a promise, a binding agreement between him and this new expression of creation.

I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Genesis 9:11-13)

God says he will never again destroy the world in this way. He provided the rainbow as a sign, a reminder of his promise. He says that every storm from now on will come to an end and we will see the rainbow after the storm. When the clouds clear and we see those beautiful colors, we should remember his promise, his grace, mercy and love. That is a promise that God has kept to this day.

This is an incredible story by itself, but this story, on the opening pages of the Bible, points beyond itself, anticipating another event that would happen much later, when God would look at the sin of the world, realize that something drastic had to be done, and chose one righteous man to bring salvation to all humanity. Noah’s story is powerful, but the most powerful aspect of Noah’s story is this: Noah’s story prepares the way for Jesus’ story. Let’s look through the four themes again.

Widespread Corruption.

God removed evil from the world with the flood, but that was only a temporary solution to a permanent problem. Cutting off a massive weed right at the ground takes away the weed on the surface, but the roots are there, waiting to send up new sprouts. Noah was saved, but sin was still in his veins—his and his family’s. Generation after generation following the flood only brought more and more darkness, to the point that God’s word says about human sin in Romans 3:10-12, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” As history continued, the downward slide into sin and depravity grew worse. Read historical accounts from before the time of Christ—whoever had the most power trampled on everyone else, there was widespread destruction and death. It looked hopeless. It looked irredeemable. But as in the days of Noah, God rescued the world through the power of a righteous life.

The Power of a Righteous Life

When all hope seemed lost, as Galatians 4:4 says, “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman.” God himself came into this world, as a human being, to rescue us out of darkness. Right before the days of Christ, the world was so dark, it seemed pitch black. But when Jesus came the words spoken through the prophet were fulfilled: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matthew 4:16). Here’s the best way I’ve been able to express it: this time to save the world, rather than using a comparatively righteous person (Noah), God used a completely righteous person (Jesus Christ). Throughout the Bible, Jesus is called “the righteous one,” the only person without sin or defect. He is called the true light. In him there is no darkness, and because there is no darkness in him, he is the one who can bring light to everyone.

Salvation through Judgment

But how will God use this righteous life of his son to lead the world out of darkness? Salvation through judgment. In Noah's day, the entire world had turned away, so God brought judgment on the sinners and saved the world through sparing the one righteous person. This makes sense: the guilty are punished and the innocent are saved. But in Jesus, God inverted that pattern and turned it on its head. This time, rather than punishing the entire world and saving the righteous man (Noah), the righteous man (Jesus) was punished so the entire world could be saved. The flood of judgment doesn't flow to those who have committed the sins. The flood of judgment is poured out not on the world, but on one person, on Jesus Christ, on the cross. The torrent and tidal wave of punishment that you deserved because of your sin, and I deserved because of my sin, and the world deserved because of all our sin, was unleashed on Jesus, when he hung on that tree. Yet again, God brought salvation for the world through a wooden vessel. Rather than the righteous man living and the guilty dying, the righteous man dies so the guilty can live. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is how much God loves you!

A New Covenant with Humanity

Not only do we see salvation through judgment, but we also see a new covenant with humanity, which means a new way for God to relate to and interact with the world. God entered a new covenant with Noah and gave him the sign of a rainbow, meaning he will never again destroy the world by a flood. But Jesus initiates an even better covenant. After Jesus rose from the dead, rather than giving us a rainbow to shine above us, he sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of us.

For by one sacrifice (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says, "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds...Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." (Hebrews 10:14-17)

After Jesus dies in our place to make us holy, he says he will forget our sins and literally write his law on our hearts and minds so we desire to live a new way.

This is the invitation that is being made today! The Bible tells us that we are all sinners and that our sin warrants justice and punishment. The wages of sin is death. Jesus took that death on the cross so you could be saved. While he was hanging there, he called out to God and said, "Father, forgive them." Today, you can choose to accept the salvation that comes through Jesus. You can come and place your faith in him and be baptized. Listen to what 1 Peter 3:20-21 tells us:

God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all [Noah and his family], were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Emphasis added.)

As the flood waters washed away the sin in the world, the waters of baptism symbolize that God will wash away your sins and make you new. There is nothing magical about the water; the water doesn't save anyone, but it's a pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It's your way of saying to

God, “God, I am done with my sin. I am done with anything that would grieve your heart, I want to live my life for you. I want to be like Noah, a righteous man or woman in my generation. I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That he died and rose again. I want to live my life for him.” If you’re ready to make that decision—to turn from sin and trust Jesus—I want to invite you to come forward today and be baptized.