

Noah - Part 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2014

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] There's something quite bizarre about the story, the account of Noah's Ark. Perhaps rather than call the story or describe the story itself as bizarre, maybe more accurately, we might say the manner in which it is perceived or told or employed. Noah's Ark is possibly the iconic fun kiddies Bible story. You'd be hard-pressed to find a Bible story that more represents that genre, if you wish, of fun Bible stories for the children. Out of curiosity, I went into Amazon yesterday or the day before and discovered that Amazon stock a whopping 400 toy products on the Ark theme. That's pretty impressive, 400 toys of one kind or another related to the story that we have read this morning of Noah's Ark. Anything from money boxes to jigsaws to praise stickers and I could go on. As I did probably waste a few minutes on in this venture, my favorite toy that I came across was one that goes by the name of Holtzstiggers, Noah's Ark, with handmade animals crafted from maple and beech trees.

And it caught my eye because it comes in at a cool 539 pounds. So, there you go. And you know how it says how many are left in stock? I think it's just a devious ploy to rush you into a purchase. But anyway, you know, they tell you two left in stock or five left in stock. Well, there was just one of these left. So, if you're interested, you know, you better get a move on. Not that I'm encouraging commerce on the Sabbath and certainly not on your smartphone during the service. So, at least wait until we are back at home. 539 pounds. It's a snip at the price, I'm sure.

Now, I say this is bizarre, the manner in which Noah's Ark and the account of Noah's Ark is told, is perceived, is employed, because by any measure, Noah's Ark is anything but nice and cute. It is the account of mankind, or the results of, mankind descending to unseen levels of depravity and corruption and violence and the account of God's cataclysmic response. And I use that word cataclysmic deliberately.

It's interesting that in 2 Peter in chapter 2 and in verse 5, where reference is made to the flood, that is precisely the Greek word that is used that we derive almost directly into English, cataclysmic, and God's response can indeed be described. And even that doesn't seem to do justice to the scale of God's response to this descent of man described for us in the verses that we have read. It is a chilling and somber and sobering tale of judgment and destruction. But it is also, and I would suggest, preeminently, a story of grace, of grace in the midst of tragedy, of grace in the cataclysm. And I want us to consider the account of Noah and his Ark in this manner, as a story of God's grace. But in order to do so, we need to briefly outline the circumstances that resulted in God determining to act in grave and radical judgment. The grace of God shines more brightly against the backdrop of man's rebellion and sinfulness. And the account that we've read in Genesis, and indeed in verses that proceed our reading this morning, is vivid and detailed in describing the descent of man, if we wish to use that language. It's not extensive in terms of the quantity of words that are employed, but the words employed are employed and chosen with such care that we have really quite a detailed description of what had been going on. Now, I don't want to consider all of that description in order to launch into our consideration of how grace shines through in the midst of tragedy, in the midst of man's sin. But I do want to set the scene and to do so by limiting myself to highlighting two instances where the language used here in Genesis both describes but also contrasts in a revealing way. And in a moment, we'll see with what it contrasts. So, the two instances that I just want to draw your attention to that will allow us, that will lead us in to thinking of how God's grace shines through, the two instances are, well, the first one is in chapter 6 and in verse 5. Now, we didn't read that verse. We began our reading in verse 8. But if you just, if you have your Bible open and you just cast your eye to verse 5, we read, the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become. God saw. And what did He see?

Well, it was not a pretty sight. We're told what He 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. It's difficult to be more absolute in terms of describing man and his heart's inclinations. So, we're told what it is that God saw. We're told of the sight that grieved the very heart of God. But what I want to draw your attention to is how the language that is employed contrasts, we might say tragically, with the language that is employed at the very dawn of creation, where God also saw all that was before Him. In Genesis chapter 1 and in verse 31, we read these familiar words, God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. And so, as He has created all that there is, God looks down, God sees the work of His hands, and it is the source of delight in the heart of God, for it is very good. But now, a brief time in the grand scheme of things has elapsed, and He sees again. And you have this sobering contrast. God saw, and what did He see? Well, it was very bad. It was very bad. It had been very good, and now what He sees was very bad. But there's a second contrast that I just want you to notice. And as I say, this isn't intended to be an exhaustive description of the circumstances that we find, but really to lead us into what we want to go on to say. But the second sobering contrast is to be found, and we'll begin the contrast by looking at the original occasion in which the language is used, and then contrasting it with what we find in Noah's account, or the account of Noah. Notice in chapter 1 of Genesis, and in verse 28, we have what we might call the first command that God gives to man. We read,

[8 : 28] God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. So, God has created man, perfect, and He gives this command, this task to man, and included and central and integral to the task is that He would fill the earth, fill the earth, fill the earth with men and women who would worship a God, and who would serve a God, and who would care for His creation. This is what they were to do. But what is it that they are now doing?

Well, in the chapter that we read, we read there in verse 11, Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. We have the same language of the earth being filled. Adam and Eve and those who were to follow, they were to fill the earth with worshipers of God, but rather they had filled the earth with mockers of God with violence and corruption and depravity. And so, there is there also this sobering contrast. And I wonder, we are casting our eyes back to times long ago, but is it so different today? You know, we read the account in Genesis of how things were in the days of Noah, and we might conclude, well, things are bad today, but not that bad. But notice if that is our conclusion, the language that Jesus uses to describe the times before the flood. In Matthew chapter 24 and in verse 38, Jesus gives His description of how things were before the flood. And we read, for in the days before the flood, the very days that we've read of, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. And the language that Jesus uses is language that speaks of a scene of normality. And so, you have corruption, you have violence, but you have these things cohabiting, as it were, with an almost timeless normality. And when we consider that seeming contradiction, maybe we can see that things really aren't so different for us today. So, this is the somber backdrop, or the gruesome stage, if you wish, upon which we look for glimmers of grace. The question that we have and that we'll be seeking to answer is, will we find grace in a hopeless place? Will we find love in a hopeless place? This hopeless place described in our passage? The grace of God appears or becomes evident in the story of Noah and his ark in a number of ways that I want to briefly identify and comment on. And we will discover as we do that the grace of God preserves, the grace of God enables, the grace of God invites, the grace of God provides, and the grace of God keeps. Now, the manner in which we're going to be considering this and the scope of what we seek to cover is such that this isn't going to be a detailed sermon on any given text, but rather an overview of this chapter, this very pivotal chapter in the account of Noah. Grace preserves. And we return to the verse that we began our reading with, but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. The first mention of grace or favor is in this verse where we read that Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. And to explore the significance of this pivotal statement in the account, we can ask the question, why? Why Noah? Why did God find favor in

Noah? And it's understandable and at one level reasonable to point to the glowing description of Noah that we have in the following verse as the obvious and reasonable answer to the question, why Noah? Because we're told in the following verse that Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. So, what better explanation could we have, or what better answer could we have to the question, why Noah? And I would recognize and accept

that at one level it is a reasonable and legitimate answer to the question.

But if we were to leave it there and think that that was the totality of the answer, that would be to ignore the bigger picture of God's preserving grace, which we can better understand by anchoring this description of Noah in verse 9 in three realities that we need to bring to bear on what we find here in the verse. The first reality we need to bring to bear, looking at the big picture, is a promise given.

And here we need to go right back again to the beginning. With Noah, we think we are at the beginning, but we need to go right back to the beginning. And in chapter 3 of Genesis and in verse 15, we have this promise, sometimes known as the proto-evangelium, the first announcement of the gospel.

[14:04] In chapter 3 of Genesis and verse 15, and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. This promise that from the seed of the woman there would come one who would crush the head of the evil one, who would win this decisive victory over sin. And so, you have this promise that was given in the midst of the tragedy of the fall. God made a promise of a coming Savior from the seed of the woman. And for the promise to be kept, for God to keep His promise as He must and as He always does, it is necessary that faith in God be preserved and so passed on to succeeding generations that will, in due course and in God's time, lead to the coming of this promised one. And this is what God is doing in preserving faith in and through Noah. And so, yes, we look to the description of Noah as righteous and blameless, as one who walked with God, and it seems to be something that ties in reasonably with what we're told, that he found favor in the eyes of God. But we do need to go beyond that and to recognize that behind it you have that reality of Noah's life anchored in this promise that was given by God, a promise given. But following on from that and intrinsically linked to that, you have what we might call a line preserved. The means by which God preserves faith is through a faithful line or a faithful genealogy where the righteous are maintained, a righteous remnant, however small, ever present on God's earth.

And of course, this is something that we find that God had done in and through Noah and those who had come before him. There is a faithful line that we can detect in the genealogy. Now, the character who we note very evidently in the generations that had preceded Noah was mentioned last Sunday evening, and I mentioned him only in the passing this morning, is Enoch. Then in chapter 5 and verse 24, Enoch walked with God. Enoch walked with God. Then he was no more because God took him away. And Enoch was the great grandfather of Noah. And so, we see there how the promise that was given is kept alive.

The spark, as it were, still shines as it goes through from generation to generation. But then, immediately preceding Noah, his own father, Lamech, in chapter 5 and in verse 28, we read, when Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.

And in these verses and in the name that Lamech gives to his son Noah, we have evidence of Lamech's faith in God. We don't know much about Lamech. Indeed, this is all that we know, but it is enough to detect in him a faith in God that's reflected in the name that he gives to his son. And this is the man who raised and instructed Noah in the faith. And so, grace preserves. Grace preserves. It's grounded in the promise given. It's by the means of this line of the righteous. But then it comes to a head, as it were, at least up to this point in history, in a man favored in Noah. The form of the statement there in verse 8 is such as to present Noah as being in what we might call a state of grace or favor.

To maybe explain that a little more, it's not that Noah one fine day woke up to discover his good fortune, that God was looking down with favor upon him. That's not the way it was. Rather, God embraced Noah with grace from his mother's womb. Indeed, we can say that grace embraced Noah from before the foundation of the world. And grace that embraces is grace that preserves. And so, in this description of Noah, we can see and detect how grace, the grace of God, is a grace that preserves.

[18:50] But the second thing I want you to notice is that grace enables. And that takes us to the second verse, verse 9, that speaks of Noah and describes Noah. Noah is highly commended by God. And we can do no other than enthusiastically echo God's commendation. He was a righteous man. He was blameless among the people of his time. He walked with God. Now, this is a verse like some others in the Bible where sometimes the concern of many seems to be to make clear what is

not being said. Namely, in this case, to make clear that what is not being said is that Noah was perfect. And so, much effort is made in making that clear, that the language doesn't imply moral perfection or sinlessness. And of course, that's true in the light of the overall teaching of the Bible, we do reasonably come to that conclusion that whatever this means, it doesn't mean that Noah was perfect, that he was sinless. But while that is true, that is not to lessen the merit, if you wish, or the volume of Noah's exemplary character as described by God. He was righteous. He conformed in great measure to God's standard. He was blameless in the sight of his contemporaries. And here the language would seem, at least in part, to be intended to contrast Noah with others. Others were blameworthy. He was blameless. Others were wicked while he was righteous. Others took no interest in God. He walked with God and enjoyed close fellowship and communion with God. But why do I say all this concerning Noah under the heading of grace enables? Well, I say that because grace enabled Noah to live a righteous and blameless life.

John Calvin, the Reformer, comments on this reality in the life of Noah in this language. Whence, however, did he attain this integrity that is spoken of in verse 9, but from the enabling grace of God. The commencement of the matter was gratuitous grace, and the Lord, having once embraced Noah, retained him under his own hand. And this is confirmed by the language of Hebrews 11. It's not that we're seeking to impose on the text a doctrinal framework that we've already decided upon, but listen to what is said of Noah in Hebrews chapter 11. By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear, built an ark to save his family. Noah's obedience, Noah's holiness, Noah's righteousness were the fruit of faith. By faith. By faith, Noah did these things, and faith, as the Bible makes very clear to us, is the gracious gift of God. Grace enabled Noah to be the man he was, and grace enabled obedience to God in two distinct but connected tasks that I just want to notice. First of all, grace enabled Noah to obey

God in the matter of the very obvious matter of the construction of the ark. The manner in which he did so is such as to describe an obedience that is of the highest order. In verse 22 of chapter 6, we read, we have the whole description of what he's meant to do, and then the summary statement, Noah did everything just as God commanded. We're going to come back to that statement on another occasion, but for our purposes here, we simply have this very clear description of Noah's obedience in this matter of the construction of the ark. This was one of the tasks that he was obedient in performing, but he was also obedient in the matter of preaching to his generation. Now, that's not something that we have given to us or told us explicitly in Genesis, but in 2 Peter and chapter 5, we are told of this task that Noah performed. In 2 Peter and in chapter 2 and in verse 5, we read of Noah that he was a preacher of righteousness. We don't need to read the whole of the passage. One of the reasons we avoid reading the whole of the passage is an extremely difficult passage, but my interest in this text is simply the description that we find within it of Noah as a preacher of righteousness.

So, he was obedient in the construction of the ark and in preaching to his generation. And these two tasks, of course, were very connected. Indeed, the text that we've read in Hebrews hints that the very construction of the ark served as a visual sermon condemning Noah's contemporaries. That's not to say that it wasn't accompanied by a verbal proclamation of truth in the preaching of God's Word and of God's demands, but that it was accompanied by this visible sign for all who cared to see and take notice.

Now, our highlighting of Noah's obedience, obedience enabled by the grace of God in the matter of preaching, leads us into the next aspect of grace in the account that I want you to notice, and it is this that grace that grace invites. Grace invites. Grace preserves, grace enables, but also grace invites.

[25 : 08] And in what sense does grace invite? Well, here I'm thinking of all of Noah's contemporaries, all those who lived in his day, who were tragically, ultimately destroying. And I want to think of these contemporaries of Noah in the light of the truth that Noah preached. And as we will see in a moment, God waited. Noah preached, and God waited. Noah preached righteousness. That's how he is described in 2 Peter. And in doing so, he was inviting a wicked generation to examine themselves, and in the light of such examination to repent of their sin, to repent and be saved. You can be sure that even if a single soul had repented in response to Noah's message, room would have been found for them in the ark.

But as Noah preached, God waited. In chapter 6 and verse 3, we're told, Then the Lord said, My spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal. His days will be a hundred and twenty

years. Now, this verse is understood in one of two ways, and both ways could be correct. In this occasion, it's unlikely that both are correct. But the two ways in which it's understood is that this is a reference to man's life expectancy. And the way in which the verse is presented here pushes in that direction in some sense. But the other way in which it can be understood, and I would suggest is the more likely meaning, is that it's a reference to the time between God announcing that He will judge the world for its wickedness to the actual execution of that judgment in the flood. A hundred and twenty years. And this was a hundred and twenty years when there was opportunity for those who were living as they were living to, in the light of

Noah's preaching, in the night, in the light of the ark being built, to examine themselves, to recognize their sin, and to repent of it, and to trust in God. God waited.

We might ask, why so long? Why so long? A hundred and twenty years. And we're not told when Noah began to build the ark, if he employed all the time given for the construction of the ark. The account doesn't allow us to know with that level of detail. It seems an awful long time to build an ark. I think even the trams in Edinburgh aren't going to take quite as long as that. Rather, this time is a hundred and twenty years is a time of God's patience and of God's invitation to repent.

And if this was in any doubt, or if this may seem somewhat speculative, we can have that doubt dispelled by a passage that we have in the New Testament that sheds further light on the account of Noah. And in 1 Peter 3, verse 20, another difficult passage, but drawing from it the truth that is of value to us for our purposes, we read, "...when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." Peter there very explicitly speaks of God waiting patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. This patience of God was a time of God's invitation that those who were living lives that were bringing upon themselves the judgment of God could turn from their sin, turn from their wicked ways, and trust in God.

[29 : 08] Grace invites, grace waits, grace is patient, but even the gracious patience of God is not eternal. And again, we turn to the New Testament where there are many references to Noah that shed light on the account.

And we listen to Jesus and what Jesus had to say in this regard. In Matthew chapter 24, reading from verse 37, "...as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 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, Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing about that, 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." Grace invites, grace is patient, but Jesus here in very solemn but realistic language recognizes that the time of waiting comes to an end. The story is told of Robert Murray McChain, who was a famous preacher in the 19th century in St. Peter's in Dundee. And the church where he was ministered is the free church today in Dundee, the building. And the story is told of Robert Murray McChain, who was in conversation with some friends and was inquiring of them concerning their views on the Lord's return in glory and judgment. And the question that he posed to his friends was, do you think Christ will come tonight?

And he asked each of them. And they each replied in turn, perhaps after some thought, I don't know, I think not. I think not. To which McChain responded, the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

And of course, what we have reminded there for us is that yes, grace waits, grace invites, grace is patient, but there is a time coming when that patience comes to an end. There comes a time when the Son of Man comes and He will come in glory, but He will come also in judgment. And for us, the matter of great importance is that we would be ready for the day when He will come. Grace invites, but you must respond to the invitation. Grace invites, but also, penultimately, grace provides. In our chapter, we have, of course, this description of the ark that God provides. Judgment has been announced, and in the absence of repentance, judgment will be executed. The earth will be consumed by the flood, but what of righteous Noah and his family? Well, grace provides a way of escape. Grace provides redemption in the shape of an ark. And notice that the ark is not only God's idea, but that God provides every detail concerning its construction. We've read the passage. We don't need to spend time emphasizing that or going into the details of it. God determines that an ark will be built, and God determines how that will be done to the most minute detail. This really is God's ark built by Noah. God is the one who provides salvation for His people. What did Noah have to do? Well, the obvious answer is build it.

That's what he had to do. He had to build the ark, and that's what he did. But at a deeper or more basic level, what Noah had to do was believe or trust in God. His building of the ark is evidence of his belief.

[33 : 09] And as we've already mentioned, that faith enabled Noah to believe, and that that faith that enabled Noah was a gift from God. And as we bring things to ourselves and to today and to each one of us, it is not so different today. Indeed, it is not different at all today. Grace, the God of grace, provides a way of salvation. God has provided in the person of His Son a Savior. And what we must do, what you must do, is believe in the one God has provided. You must put your trust in Jesus as your Savior, as the one who has provided a way of salvation for you, as the one who has died for your sins, as the one who died on Calvary's tree in your place. You must put your trust in Him, in the one provided by God for you. Have you done that? Have you put your trust in Jesus? And if you have not, will you do that?

Of course, for most today, and perhaps it has ever been so, the notion of believing in Jesus is as foolish as building an ark. In that sense, there's a rather, what might we call it, a somber parallel. Just as in Noah's day, those who saw what he was doing would have mocked mercilessly this man building an ark as an act of utter folly. So, today, so many would see believing in Jesus and trusting in Jesus as a similar act of folly. Noah's neighbors no doubt thought that he had completely lost the plot, and many think likewise in this matter of believing in Jesus. But though that be so, this is God's way, and it has ever been God's way. And we're reminded of that in what Paul writes as he addresses the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1 and reading from verse 20, Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar?

Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. God provides a way of salvation for His people. But the final thing that I want you to notice as we identify aspects of God's grace in this account is that God keeps. Our reading ended with the words that we find in verse 16 of chapter 7, Then the Lord shut him in. The ark had been built. Noah and his family had been instructed to enter the ark with all the animals. And then we read, The Lord shut him in. And the language is both simple and stunning. It speaks loud and clear of safety and security. If the Lord shuts in Noah, then that is where Noah will remain. Noah is safe. Noah is secure. Noah is kept by God. And so, too, with us as believers in Jesus Christ, in the language of our Savior, no one can snatch us from our Father's hand, shut in with

[37 : 04] Christ, shut in for eternity. Grace preserves. Grace enables. Grace invites. Grace provides. Grace keeps.

And in the story of Noah, we find grace. We find love in a hopeless place. And so, an ancient story becomes a story of hope for today, for the many living in a hopeless place as part of a hopeless generation. And this is a story to be told. Let us pray.