

Noah - Part 4

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Preacher: Jesse Meekins

[0 : 00] So, in his book, Who Will Deliver Us?, the Episcopal priest Paul Zoll writes of our innate imprisonment to law, law that strikes fear into our hearts.

If we know this law to be the law of God, creator of the world, whom we have failed to please, our fear is of his judgment. And for those who do not know this law to be God's, they deal with only the variety of law known to them through society, or despot, or conscience.

The force of ought, he calls it, of what they should do but don't. And their fear is of the fateful, nameless forces that dominate humanity and nature, of which idols must be built and to which tribute must be made.

His proposal, he goes on, is this. The fear beneath all fears, which in turn creates the stress, the depression, and the anger of everyday life, and indeed of human history, is fear of ultimate judgment.

Fear of ultimate judgment. It's what the religious are seeking to evade, the irreligious are seeking to elude, and everyone is seeking to escape.

[1 : 29] Fear of ultimate judgment. And that's our topic for today. If the gavel of God falls on all alike, if the floodwaters were sent, that every living thing should perish.

That everything in which the breath of life should die. That all living creatures are wiped out. How do we get on the boat? How does being on the boat ultimately make a difference?

And how do we get out of the boat and back to life? Our interest for today is God's pattern of salvation. It's in how God saves.

How God preserves his people through his judgment. And as we look at Noah and his ark, we're going to see that God saves in three simple steps.

First, we see that when God's judgment comes, God shuts God's people in God's boat.

[2 : 39] Certainly it was by faith. This is what the Bible will later describe Noah as. That it was by faith. Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen.

In reverent fear, constructed an ark for the saving of his household. Certainly it was by faith. Noah. And for the saving of the human race, no doubt. But Noah's faith wouldn't have been a thing if it had been put in anything other than the faithfulness of God.

It's not that he believed as much as it's in what he believed. And certainly more than in what he believed, it's more in whom he believed.

Noah built it. But it was God's boat. Designed by him. Commissioned by him. Provided by him. Noah believed. Noah obeyed.

But it was God's grace that distinguished Noah as his man. It's by grace we're distinguished as God's people. You can't just claim that status before God.

[3 : 50] That we're your people. It's God who makes his people. God who sees his people through the eyes of grace. Finding Noah. Finding Noah was by God's doing.

God makes his people. And by seeing them through grace, constitutes them as his people. And this is the whole theme of grace that's woven throughout this story.

And it comes to a head in the middle of chapter 7. Where though Noah entered the ark, the end of verse 16 says, It was God who shut him in.

And you better believe that if God had not shut him in, there wasn't the faintest hope that that boat was going to float.

It was God who shut him in. The only way through the judgment that we deserve is if that God who's provided a means of salvation shuts us in.

[4 : 54] And it's interesting to read those who've looked at this account through the lens of literature. What they're looking at is how the story develops and how the plot thickens.

And this is where they point to as the moment before the story climaxes. Reading that the Lord shut them in, shut Noah in, shut Noah and his family in is one of those moments you're not supposed to breathe.

Because Noah's just given up control of his destiny. It was Shakespeare who said, It's not in the stars to hold our destiny, but in ourselves.

And here's Noah, giving up control, stepping on the boat, gambling his future away. I took a class once in European history that focused on politics and economics.

And after the tests were all done in that class, there was a few more weeks to kill. And so the remainder of the class was taken up by a game where you accrued power by taking over the assets of your opponents.

[6 : 11] And their fate was then given in to your hands. And so I was, back then I was pretty good at, you know, these games. I, you know, life's another story, but I was pretty good at these games.

So by the end of the class, it was, it was, it was down to me and another guy who apparently was pretty good at these games. And so it was a face-off, right? We had even assets, no one controlled the fate of the other, but the rules of the game is that you could not end in a stalemate.

So sitting in class, long after the period ended, the rest of the class sitting around, we had to make a decision. This was the rules imposed on us by the teacher. You could not end in a stalemate.

And, and, and so, so this is what happened. Because there had to be a winner, we made a pact.

And what I said to, to, to my friend, I said, I'll give you everything I have, all of my assets, and I'll place my fate in your hands. And because he gets that, the next turn, he gets to make a new rule for the game.

[7 : 24] This is how it progressed. So I'll give you all of my assets if you promise that the next rule you make is to grant me immunity from all of the punishments that go with losing.

And so my friend, he, he, well, I thought he was my friend. He granted me this, right? He said, okay, give in to my possession all of your assets and I will grant you immunity from everything, from all the punishments of defeat.

And so I gave up. And I handed over my assets, I entrusted myself into his hands, into the hands of my enemy, and was immediately betrayed.

The hammer came down. All of the guilt, all of the punishment of losing came down, heavier than it had done on anybody else, on me.

You know, when our destinies are at stake, when our futures are on the line, entrusting ourselves into the hands of our enemies is an unthinkable alternative.

- [8 : 35] For me, it was just a game. Fifteen minutes later, I was out of the class, on my way, summer vacation. But for us, it's not. For Noah, it wasn't.
- And in every significant sense, for us, it's so much more than just a game. It's not just a game. It's life. It's not just some classroom opponent.
- It's the God of the universe. The one who set this whole thing spinning. The one who makes the world go round and could bring it to a standstill without as much as a twitch of his little finger.
- A God that we've offended in many, many real ways for us before he finds us our greatest enemy.
- To hand our lives, to entrust ourselves into his hands can be and should be one of the scariest things we ever do.
- [9 : 45] But the only way through the judgment that we deserve is if we do entrust ourselves to this enemy that we've made.
- For good, for bad, the way the story progresses, hold your breath. You don't know at this point. But the only way through is to entrust ourselves to God.
- When God's judgment comes, the only hope for God's people is if God shuts them in. Total abandonment. Absolute resignation. Fully entrusted into the hands of God.
- And I want to ask you before we move on, have you done that? Have you entrusted yourself into God's hands? You know, we've each been burned in life.
- I believe that. I believe life is about being burned by others. We've been burned in life. We know what it's like to trust and be disappointed.
- [10 : 52] At this level, you can't ratchet up the stakes any further. But you've got to see that the problem here isn't God. God is not our enemy because God stepped out of line.
- We made God our enemy when we made life a game of thrones. But in this game, the die is weighted and we can't win.
- In this game, it's not like the classroom I described. In this game, we can't possess God's assets and leverage him into the position we want.
- The only option, if you want to make it through the judgment that we cannot escape, is if we're entrusted into the hands of God absolutely, totally, without resignation.
- Have you done that? the question becomes, though, what will happen to those who abandon themselves into the hands of God? And the tension is heightened in verse 17.
- [11 : 56] Look at verse 17. For 40 days, the flood kept coming on the earth. And as the waters increased, they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters increased and they rose, verse 20, and covered the mountains to a depth of more than 20 feet.
- Every living thing that moved on the earth perished, birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth and all mankind. There is no option there. You cannot not entrust yourself into the hands of God.
- Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Everything living on the face of the earth was wiped out. Men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped out from the earth.
- Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark. And yet at this point in the story, it's as good as driftwood, as good as a casket made of driftwood.
- They're as good as dead in the ark in and of themselves, a planet covered with water, no hope of being sustained again on its own. But.
- [13 : 11] And this is a great thing about the Bible, that it is riddled with these buts. These statements that change and turn the story.

But, in the opening of the next chapter, everything changes. Two words in Hebrew, that's three in English, and everything changes. is, but God remembered.

God remembered. You see, in the face of God's judgment, not only does God shut God's people in God's boat, but God remembers them.

This is the second step in how God saves in God's pattern of salvation, that God remembers the people that God shut in God's boat.

One person reflecting on Noah's entering the ark says, Noah and his companions did their part, and the covenant Lord does his, sealing the door, shutting them in, which could result in either their doom or their salvation, but God remembers.

[14 : 26] It's a wonderful thing to be remembered. remembered. There's a thread here. If we were to pick it up and take it and pull on it, it would lead us all the way to the other end of this book, the end of the book of Genesis.

The only other characters in Genesis ever mentioned in relationship to remembering, the idea of remembering, the only other character is Joseph. And if you know the story, you'll know that Joseph, at the end of a long line of mishaps, ends up imprisoned in Egypt, wrongly accused for a crime he never committed.

And while there, an opportunity came to be pardoned. He interpreted the dream of a certain cupbearer that he would be released in a few days once more to serve the Pharaoh.

And Joseph said to him, this is what he says to him, only remember me when it is well with you and please do me the kindness of remembering me before the Pharaoh and so get me out of this place.

And the chapter ends with this chilling reminder, yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

[15 : 48] And friend, I want you to know, I want to remind you today that wherever you are, abandoned by friends, wrongly accused, disowned by your family, alone in the dark.

Though the cupbearers we meet along the way might forget us, there is a God who will not. God does not forget his own.

For those who put their faith in God and abandon themselves into his hands and look like Joseph and Noah to him to save them from the judgment they deserve.

Having shut them up, he will not forget. God remembers his own. You see, when we're called to entrust ourselves into God's hands, it's not a gamble like putting your trust in just another cupbearer.

When they forget, he doesn't. He's kept his own from the beginning and we're called to trust that as they look forward to someone who would fulfill their hopes, we look back to the same someone as the guarantee of ours.

[17 : 07] A way through judgment. Someone provided by God. Something, or rather someone, that will put the rest, our ultimate fear, to rest.

rest. And if that's taken care of, what's keeping you? What's keeping me? What's keeping us from ultimate abandonment, absolute abandonment, total resignation into the hands of God?

One of my favorite quotes, perhaps, who says it best is, it was the missionary martyr, Jim Elliott, who penned in his journal a few years before he was stripped of everything, including his life down in Ecuador as a missionary to the Alkins.

He said this, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. What are you holding on to? Why?

If a flood's coming, it's going to wash the world away, why do we care about our 401ks, our retirement plans, our homes in the country?

[18 : 24] Why do we care? And if this isn't the end of life, when we're looking forward to something much greater, what are we doing?

What are we doing? God remembering Noah cues the reversal of the flood, and this is a great piece of the story, how it's written.

If you were to look at the story and really take some time to dissect it, you can do this. If you were to go home with the story of Noah and look at this section between the middle of chapter 7 and about three quarters of the way through chapter 8, and even if you were just to take the numbers, right, if you were just to take the numbers of seven days and I will destroy the earth, 40 days the rain is falling, 150 days the water stayed on the earth, you'll then find that you're working your way backwards.

Oh, then 150 days the water was still on the earth, 40 days more it took to dry up, seven days more until they came out of the ark. You'll find right, there's a beautiful thing right in the middle of it is God remembering Noah.

God's remembering Noah cues the reversal of the flood. And so in verse 2 we see that as God remembers Noah the springs of the deep and the floodgates of heaven had been closed.

[19 : 57] The rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of 150 days the water had gone. All because God remembered Noah on the 17th day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

All because God remembered Noah the waters continued to recede and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible again.

All because God remembered Noah. In verse 13 we would read by the first day of the first month of Noah's 601st year the water had dried up from the earth.

Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the earth was dry. By the 27th day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

God remembered Noah. But not only does God shut, seal, secure God's people in God's boat, in God's way, and remember the people God's shut in God's way, finally God calls the people, he's shut up in his way, he calls them out.

[21 : 09] Look at verse 15, then God said to Noah, come out, come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives, bring out every kind of living creature that is with you, the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move on along the ground, so they can multiply on the earth, and be fruitful, and increase in number upon it.

You see, God doesn't simply dry up the ground, work everything out, provide a way through judgment, and let his people go on their merry way.

If he just lets us go on our merry way, it's not worth it, right? If you hear, this is echoed in the story of Moses, when Moses, finally God says, I'm not going to destroy my people after they had created this idol, and said, this is the God who brought us out of Israel.

God says, I'm not going to destroy my people. He says, I'll let you go into the land, but I'm not going with you. And what does Moses say? It's not worth it, destroy us, just destroy us, it's not worth it.

It's not worth on the other side if God just remembers us, brings us through, and lets us go. That's not the story. God on the other side, calls us out.

[22 : 30] He guides them and directs his people. He commands them and meets them with his word. He brings them into new life, reborn under his word, calls them out personally and intimately, by name, by his word.

He enters into relationship once again and meets them on the other side. The God who shuts us in, receives us in his way. The God who watches over us and will not forget us is the God who calls us out and calls us forth.

He's the one who cradles us at birth and ushers us into new life. I don't know about you, but some of the saddest stories to come across the news to me are those about babies who are born into the world and abandoned at birth.

No love, no care, no concern, no relationship with those who carried them and ushered them in either to adoption or foster care or something sometimes much heinously worse.

It's the saddest thing, I think. And God's not like that. He doesn't birth us to forget about us.

[23 : 52] When He enlivens our hearts, He meets us and takes up residence, not just next door. The Bible describes it that He moves in so close to home that He takes up residence right inside of us.

That's an incredible picture. He cannot get closer, more caring, more concerned with the life of those He births or brings through judgment.

And you know, both the story of Noah and the experience of those who have God in some profound sense living inside of them, these stories, both of these, should instill in us such courage and such hope regarding our future that we can face life's greatest challenges without being perturbed.

And it's not because of us. The boat didn't make it through because Noah built it. The boat made it through because God carried it from beginning to end, because God was there to get them in and call them out on the other side, and it's no different.

It will be no different for us. God shuts His people in His way. He secures them. He seals them up.

[25 : 15] There's no other way through judgment. This is how God saves. An absolute abandonment into the hands of a loving God.

You can't build a raft, you can't find another boat, because if it isn't God's boat, if it isn't God's way, it's not going through total resignation into God's hands.

God's love. The only way through judgment, the only way to rest, our ultimate fear of ultimate judgment is to put ourselves in the hands of the God we've offended.

Find the boat. Find the one who's better than Noah and put yourself in Him. Find Christ. That's who Noah was pointing to.

you've got to be shut up in Christ. The only way through the judgment of the future is faith in the one who bore the judgment in the past, and that's the only way to start living in the present.

[26 : 22] This is why, as much as we want you to take serious the times when we, like last week, when we celebrate at the Lord's Supper, when we celebrate Jesus dying on the cross, as much as we want you to take that seriously and take the bread and the wine that we use to celebrate that seriously, we want you up here.

We want you throwing yourself at God's grace. It's a table for sinners, and for some of us, I think we're not coming because we're somehow waiting until we're good enough, and that's completely backwards.

It's a table that's been set because we're not good enough. It's a table for sinners. So throw yourself at God. And on the other hand, some of us don't come because we're not ready to give ourselves up.

We're not ready to let go of certain things in life. We're not ready to let go of control or pleasure or power or whatever we're accruing for ourselves in this world.

We're not ready to lose control. We're stuck somewhere on the fence between eat, drink, and be merry in the here and now and whatever's on the other side of the curtain that we can't see.

[27 : 41] So we're holding on to life and it's still a crapshoot for us. So we're biding our time. We're getting as much as we can out of life and we'll make that decision later, right?

We push it off. But it's not a crapshoot. It's not a gamble. God remembers his own. Because the judgment Jesus faced wasn't just another flood.

And more than Noah and some big flood, we look to him. If the hell that broke, if the hell that broke loose on that day Jesus died on the cross is even the slightest glimpse of the judgment he went through, we don't have to look to Noah anymore.

God remembers his own. He watches over them and calls them out. Death doesn't have the final victory. God remembered Jesus. So why on earth would we still be holding on to the things of this world?

Getting so upset when things don't go according to plan. So devastated when we don't make partner or when somebody else does make partner. So unwilling still to abandon ourselves into his hands.

[29 : 09] Not that we're choosing a different way, it's just we don't want that way. What's wrong with us? God remembers his own. He will remember you in Jesus.

Throw yourself at him. nothing else is worth holding on to when it goes, when it gets in the way of having him. And as you entrust yourself into his hands, lastly, what you do, you know, abandon yourself, don't choose another way, don't let anything get in the way of this way, but lastly, as you entrust yourself into his hands, walk with courage.

Walk with a courage and a hope that you can't know outside of this, that better days are ahead. Though he shuts in, he will not forget, and he'll be there to meet us on the other side, to call us out into life everlasting.

Live with courage. Live with courage that God is at work. Live with great hope. It doesn't matter if your days are going according to plan.

Life, ultimate life, doesn't depend on whether we are the greatest dads or the greatest moms, whether we're the greatest at doing anything.

[30 : 34] Because our hope, our courage doesn't come from us. It doesn't. It doesn't have to. We press on because of what God's done, not because our coming out the other side, is about what we do.

Now, the Apostle Peter would speak about this courage in the face of life's last enemy, death. And he'd say that the saving of Noah and his family from the flood was a picture of baptism.

He describes the flood as a picture of baptism. This transition from death to life, as the ones baptized, are identified with Christ, who died for our sins and was raised to life in the resurrection.

We identify with him in the judgment that he faced in hope that he takes us through that, and that we one day will share in his resurrection, in the resurrection that he experienced.

And Peter says, what's left for us to fear? He asked, what's left for us to fear? He says, now, who is there to harm you? If you are zealous for what is good, who is there to harm you?

[31 : 59] Even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, even if you should suffer death, you will be blessed. Have no fear, nor be troubled.

Judgment means nothing anymore for those who are in Christ, but in your hearts set apart him as Lord. For it is better to suffer for doing good if the world should kill you, than to suffer for doing evil and to put yourself before God who will judge you justly.

Our identifying with Jesus in his life, we do it through baptism, is a picture that points beyond itself to the life he attained in resurrection.

And anything left for us to face is merely a shadow to pass through. This is what Donald Gray Barnhouse, if you know that name, he was a preacher at 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and this is what he said, he was driving along the road, right, last enemy before any of us is death, and he's driving along the road on the way to his wife's funeral.

So his wife had just passed through this, and he's trying to think of how to explain this to his kids. He's about to preach the sermon at his wife's funeral, and this is what he says, as we came into one small town, there strode down in front of us a truck that came to stop before a red light.

[33 : 35] It was the biggest truck I have ever seen in my entire life, and the sun was shining on it at just the right angle that took its shadow and spread it across the snow on the field beside it.

As the shadow covered that field, I said, look, children, at that truck, and look at its shadow. If you had to be run over, which would you rather be run over by? Would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow?

My youngest child said the shadow couldn't hurt anybody. That's right, I continued. And death is a truck, but the shadow is all that ever touches the Christian.

The truck ran over the Lord Jesus. Only the shadow has gone over your mother. Only the shadow is left for us. The sting has been taken out of judgment because it fell hardest on Jesus.

And because of that, we can abandon ourselves into his hands. We need not look for another answer. Being good or giving up.

[34 : 49] And because of that, we can abandon ourselves into his hands without clinging to the things of this world. We don't need to put our stock in our job or how nice our family looks.

We can be wrecked. because this table was set for us. And because of Jesus, we can walk with courage and hope for the rest of our days without being perturbed.

Because the only thing that lies ahead is a shadow to pass through. And on the other side, we have a God who will meet us there. God who will be here.

We are going to conclude our time by singing together from one of the most wonderful psalms ever written. Psalm 23, which speaks of our Lord leading us through the valley of the shadow of death.

And it's found on the beginning of your blue books on page, if I was to guess, I'd say 28. Page 28 in the blue book, and we'll sing to the tune of Tarawathi.

[36 : 08] Psalm 23, would you stand and sing? The Lord is my shepherd, no one shall I know.

He makes me hide on weather in pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow.

By wandering steps he brings back to his way. His strength has all righteousness made in his state.

And this he has done this great thing to display. Lord, walk in death's valley where darkness is near.

Because you are with me, though evil I fear. Your God and your staff with me comforts I fear.

[37 : 44] In the sight of my envy, subtle you spread.

The oil of rejoicing you pour on my head. My couple were close and ungraciously fed.

Though surely your covenant, mercy and grace, will follow me closely in all of my ways.

I will dwell in the hearts of the Lord Almighty. May you look to the one who Noah looked to and pointed to and abandoned himself into his arms.

May you do that as well and walk with courage and hope all the days of your life. Amen.