

Genesis 8-9

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[0 : 0 0] So we sung there just your majestic love and authority. And as I just start now and maybe give you a little bit of a background as to why I'm speaking on on this particular passage in Genesis, it's that word authority that I think I want to to start with and come back to. So I've preached on and off at Gilk over the past few years and I've, I'm doing one of the world's slowest sermon series ever working through Genesis. So I started with Genesis 1 and gradually worked my way and this is, this is where I'm at at the moment.

And the reason that I chose Genesis and I think one of the reasons Genesis has had such a big effect on me as a Christian is just how foundational it is to our whole faith and how foundational it is to the gospel. As we think, we might ask ourselves the question of where does the gospel start? Does the gospel start when Jesus raises from the dead? Does the gospel start when Jesus was crucified? Does the gospel start when Jesus came to earth as a child? Does the gospel start in the prophets when God foretold what would happen? Does the gospel start somewhere in the garden of Eden?

And the truth is that the gospel starts right on page one of our, of our Bibles. If God is not the creator, if God did not create everything, then the gospel has absolutely no foundation at all.

And Genesis is such, such an important foundational book for us as Christians. And that is why it has been so much attacked by the devil over the past hundreds of years in Western culture and in Western civilization. And as Christians, we should really be looking to get back to Genesis and really understand the heart and the roots of our faith and everything that leans upon Genesis. So that's why I have a real passion to preach on Genesis. And so as we come now, I've worked my way through and we've come through a bit of a roller coaster in Genesis so far to the points where we look in, in Genesis chapter six and verse five, and it says, the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil at the time. And this sad state of affairs is what brought God to bring that catastrophic global flood, which destroyed all life on earth. And what we're looking at here is the, is the new start as Noah and his family come out the other side and come out into God's new promises and new blessings. And so that's what we're going to be looking at today.

So just to start, I want to talk about uncertainty. Now, many of us may either work in oil and gas or know people who work in the oil and gas industry, and we might well know and understand the uncertainty that there is at the moment. And we know how uncertainty in your job and not knowing whether your job is secure for the next six months, for the next year, can really hold back progress and can really make you just want to hold on to and protect what you have rather than actually going out and developing and making progress. Similarly, relationships. I don't know how many of you are in relationships prior to marriage at the moment, where you're maybe going out with someone.

[4 : 11] And just a lack of certainty or the lack of clarity in that relationship, while it is an exciting time to be going out with someone and exploring the possibility of marriage, you can see how the uncertainty in those relationships can often, you know, it can often be a sort of, you know, just something that holds you back from making the progress that maybe you can do when you have that commitment of knowing that you're going to get married. And just what I want us to think about is how often uncertainty in different areas of our lives can really stop us from making progress.

And what I hope to bring out from this passage here is, is how the certainty that God gives us can really help us to make progress. So that's just a little introduction. And so what I want to start with is just a first heading on, on the subject of chaos. And we see the chaos that is currently, currently in place over all the earth. We've had the glories of creation week, when God has created everything and said with his own, his own mouth, it is good. There were so many good things that God has created. The wonderful array of design. I don't know how many of you watch these David Attenborough wildlife documentaries, but the wonderful array of design that our God has poured out on this earth.

The richness of our landscape. Then God, on top of all of that, has made people, and the depth that we have as people, just this amazing creation. And God has made marriage that, I guess, foundational building block for the rest of society. And so we start the whole Bible, the whole story of humanity on a real high. But then in our rollercoaster story, we take a dip, as we have individual sin, where Adam and Eve choose to take the crown from on God's head, and put it on their own head, and decide to do what they want to do, thinking they know better than God. So we have individual sin, and the death that that brings, or has brought to us as people. Then things go even further down, and that verse I read to you from chapter 6, and verse 5, about God just being grieved in his heart, that man's heart is nothing but evil. And so we've gone from the heights of creation, to individual sin creeping in, and man saying, well actually I'm going to put myself on the throne instead of God. To God actually saying that, actually, the whole of man is nothing but evil.

And for God to then actually take the step of destroying the whole of creation. We can just see what a rollercoaster ride this has been, in what is ultimately a relationship between God and man. And we see the instability in that relationship.

And can we imagine if that was where we were at as a people just now, not knowing where we stood in our rollercoaster relationship with God, not knowing what God was going to do next. But we don't have a God who leaves us in the dark. And if I can just turn your eyes to chapter 6, verse 18, we see the start of this handle that God so graciously gives out for us to hold on to, for mankind to hold on to in this rollercoaster relationship.

[8 : 06] So 6, verse 18, But, I will establish my covenant with you. A very simple set of words, but it says so much about God and his foundation in this relationship between us and him.

And that's what I want to look at, is this theme of a God of covenants, and what that actually means for us as Christians.

So we see the chaos, we see the rollercoaster, we see the ups and downs, but now we see the first clue of what God's going to do in leading this relationship. Now, you may have been a Christian for a long time, you may have recently become a Christian, or you may not be a Christian.

But in this relationship between us and God, it is God who is the leader, God who makes the moves, and God who really cares and wants this relationship to work.

And this is our first sign of God wanting this relationship to work, that he leads this relationship, and he makes it real with these covenants that he gives to Noah and his family when they come off the earth, when they come out of the ark and onto the earth again.

[9 : 31] So I'm just going to read through chapter 9, verses 8 to 11. Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you, the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you, every living creature on earth.

I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

And you can just imagine if you were in the position of Noah and his family. I mean, Noah was around 600 years old at this point.

You can imagine that he will have seen a lot in terms of life on earth and the relationship between God and man. He will have seen ups and downs.

He will have seen people turning away from God. And then finally, he has to go through the trauma of seeing this flood. You can just imagine how shell-shocked he and his family might be stepping off that ark.

[10 : 50] And imagine what it would be to be one of those people stepping off the ark, starting again, if God hadn't graciously given these words and these promises here.

You would have been bewildered. You wouldn't have known what was happening. You wouldn't have known what was next. Where do we stand with God? Is God okay with us? Is God happy with us? Is God going to get angry and destroy the world again next week?

You can just see how God reaches out in this relationship relationship and gives that foundational promise that Noah and his family can then rely on and use that as a springboard to go off and enjoy the blessings that God gives them.

The two things about this covenant that God makes, the grace that he removes the chaos, that he removes the destruction which hung over the whole earth and which was a burden to them, and God removes that, that gracious act, that merciful act, and then on top of that, God doesn't just let them off the hook.

God blesses and encourages and gives them all that they need to be fruitful and to increase in number upon the earth. And so, what may just seem here as, okay, God's anger has subsided, the floodwaters have gone down, and now Noah and his family are off the ark.

[12 : 28] We can easily limit that to just being a human story, whereas actually the real importance of what's happening here is what God is doing in leading this relationship between himself and between humankind.

and so, it's not just the case that God removes his judgment, it's God removes his judgment and God pours out his blessing and aims this foundation at flourishing.

We see from the earlier verses in chapter 9, God blessing his Noah and his sons, encouraging them to be fruitful, increase in number, giving them the responsibility to look after the other creatures, the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air, encouraging them to have dominion, giving them everything that lives and moves for food.

And we can see how so often God just doesn't leave us floundering or in a neutral situation. God gives us his covenants, God gives us his promises so that we can move on and be fruitful.

And so when we think about God being a covenantal God and we think of the examples that we've seen here, God takes the lead, God speaks to Noah and his family, God makes real this relationship by actually putting some firm conditions in place.

[14 : 06] Now I don't know, again going back to the illustration of being in a relationship. One terminology I've heard for it is the RDM, the relationship defining moment, when you have that conversation that takes you from, well what are we doing, are we just going out for cups of coffee or are we actually going out, are we actually looking to see whether this could work as a marriage?

it's that kind of certainty that actually is the foundation that you can build on in any relationship and that certainty in a relationship grows as you make that commitment to marriage and to lifelong commitment and we can see here how much God values the relationship that he has with us, that he doesn't just passively sit by in this relationship, he steps in, he gives us his covenants, his promises and his conditions on the relationship, he makes it real, he gives us a foundation to move on and we can see unlike so many of our relationships where it's a bit of give and take and where we're trying to, I guess, share things evenly between the two of us, we can see in this relationship that God is the one who is pouring out grace and mercy in bucket loads and we are the undeserving, recipients.

So leading, making real, giving a foundation, displaying grace and mercy, aimed at flourishing and also with responsibilities.

These are all some of the factors that really come together to describe our God, a God of covenants and this is one of the earlier covenants that we see here in the Bible.

people. And when we think about the Bible, we think about the Old and the New Testaments as we have called them.

[16 : 10] Now we often just skirt over what it means that we've decided to call them the Old and the New Testaments but that word Testament is actually related to covenants and so the very titles that we give to God's words indicate that this is such a key part of God's nature, of God's character, that he is a covenantal God.

This is our God, a God of covenants. We see this right from the first pages of Genesis Genesis and it continues right on to where we are at the moment and it's something we can so often overlook but this is God's foundation for us, that he himself is a God of covenants, a God of promises, a God that we can trust.

God of Christ. And so as we just looked briefly and seen the chaos, the roller coaster relationship that has come before this point and we see God's grace and mercy in giving this foundation of this covenant which he gives out to Noah and to all the creatures on the earth, we can see what a gracious and merciful God our God is and how foundational these covenants are.

for us. And just now to develop this and almost to say well so what, what does that mean for us? What does that mean for us going into the start of a new year?

I'd like to just finally close by saying something about God's prerogative or the prerogative on us to now take these covenants and to flourish.

[17 : 59] I've read through some of the blessings that God poured out and the responsibilities that God gave to Noah and his family and just say that with these covenants, these covenants are not there just for us to bask in, they're not there just for us to sit on and maybe occasionally think about, they're for us to stand on, they're for us to really stand on and move forward and make progress.

God blessing Noah and his sons and giving them his foundational covenant, he tells them to be fruitful and increase in number. And so one of the challenges for us as Christians now is to actually ask ourselves this year, do we understand the covenants of God?

Do we understand the very promises that God has given us that makes him the God who he is? God has given us these covenants, these promises in his word for a reason, that we might move forward, that we might have the security to know where we stand with him and to be able to go into the world and like we had in the children's address to not be looking over our shoulder and worrying about what's going on behind us.

We can learn from Noah and see how in this instance God gives Noah and his family the confidence that he's not going to destroy the world again, that they can go forward with his blessing into the world and be fruitful.

And we have to ask ourselves, what covenants, what promises has God given us? And are we really taking those seriously as a foundation to go forward into the world?

[19 : 49] world? The ultimate context that we come to as we go through the Bible and go through our God who is a God of covenants, comes to a head through Jesus Christ.

And I just want us to turn to Hebrews and just look at a few words from Hebrews. So in Hebrews chapter 9. So Hebrews chapter 9 and I'll just read verse 15.

For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

covenant. And so we can see just at the heart, at the core of the Bible, the same message runs through and it culminates in Jesus Christ being the mediator of God's new covenant and that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

And what's interesting about this verse is what accompanies it and what so often accompanies God's covenants and God's promises.

[21 : 35] And we only have to look at the verse before to see what accompanies that. How much more, so this is verse 14, how much more then will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.

And this is the important few words, so that we may serve the living God. God's covenants and God's blessings are given to us so that we may be released, that we may be freed from that which holds us back to serve him.

God's God's acting in this way time and time again. We look at the story of Noah and we see how God gives them the foundation to go forth and to be fruitful.

We see from the time when the Israelites were freed from Egypt, freed from slavery, and along with that so many times was accompanied God's message that they are now free, but not free full stop, free to go and serve him.

And now so it is with the new covenant with Christ, that we are not just free from sin, full stop, we are free from sin so that we may go and serve God.

[23 : 03] And so at the start of a new year, I think we just want to take this on board and just to really think about whether we are really making the most and really coming to our covenantal God and using the foundations that he has given us.

We thought at the start of our service with the children and at the start of this sermon about how uncertainty in so many areas can block progress.

And just want to ask us all as individuals and ask us as a church, are there any areas in our life where uncertainty is blocking progress? Are we wondering about whether we can be going forward but having to constantly look over our shoulder because we're looking back at something, we're not sure about something?

And the two ways that this can, I guess, play out is one, we're looking back because we're actually not sure about what we have in Christ.

And that is, I guess, it is perfectly natural for us as people to doubt. But I want to assure you here and reinforce that our God, the God who speaks through his word, is a God of covenants, a God of promises.

[24 : 30] And what he has promised, and what he has promised ultimately through Christ, in terms of an internal inheritance that we gain through faith and through faith alone, that is secure.

It is truth. So if that's something that's a struggle for us, then we just need to help each other with that and just to keep on reminding each other to be able to take our steps forward in faith, knowing that our inheritance is secure.

secure. The other way that we can look at this, and the other way that this can play out, is actually we're looking back over our shoulder at things that are actually perishable, and things that don't actually matter.

And my suspicion for the church in this country at the moment is that's probably more of a hindrance to us.

That we've actually, like when we had Yoshi at the front, although he wasn't particularly interested in guarding his sweets, we can look back and we can be guarding and sitting on things that are actually perishable and of no eternal value.

[25 : 52] And we can have the covenants of God which give us that foundation to move forward. But surrounding the covenants of God, we also have lots of other things, lots of other areas that we're comfortable in, that we enjoy, whether it's our material standard of living, whether it's our security in our finances, whether it's any number of things that we can be looking back at.

And while it's not a bad thing to be looking at these things, if these things are holding us back and stopping us taking steps forward in faith, then this is what we really need to come back to now, is a God of covenants.

He gives us these covenants as what we should stand on in our lives. People who don't stand on God's covenants have to stand and base their lives on so many other things and they have to guard them and they have to devote all their energy to guarding these things which are actually of no eternal value.

But what we have been given in God is so valuable and as with Noah and his family, he gives us them so that we can move forward in confidence. And so this is the encouragement I really want to leave with you this morning.

I don't know your circumstances here as a church fellowship. But I want to encourage you from God's word that he wants you to move forward in the security of the promises that he has given to you.

[27 : 30] And I'm sure that there will be all sorts of different gifts that there are in all kinds of different areas in this fellowship and God gives us these covenants and this security.

God gives us the gifts that we go on and use and release those gifts for his glory. We think about so many parables that Jesus told about the coins, about the man who went away and then gave these different amounts to different servants and the servants who invested their coins and who used them to make growth and to produce fruits.

Those were the ones that the master was happy with. And the one who just buried, buried his coin underneath the ground and just sat on it. That is the one who had the wrath of the master.

And just as a church, as a church here, but also as a church in this city, a church in this land, we just need to really come back to God's covenants and make sure that we are standing on those and those alone and that we are trusting God and we are really, really progressing the way he wants us to progress and bearing fruit as he wants us to bear.

So we're going to just close there and move on to singing our next psalm.