

A New Beginning but ...

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: 04 June 2017

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, I wonder whether you've ever had this dilemma before of having to choose between starting over or trying to salvage a situation.

So perhaps it's that yummy, moist cake in the oven that you've baked just a tad too long and now it's slightly burnt and dry. So what do you do? Do you toss it out and start over?

Or do you try and salvage it by drizzling lots and lots of caramel sauce over it? Or it could be my daughter's school project.

She's put hours and hours into it, researching, designing and then decorating the poster. And then she comes and shows it to you and you find the title, although beautifully drawn and decorated, has been misspelt like this on the slide.

How is she going to fix the spelling? Does she start over, which is heartbreaking? Or try and salvage it.

[1 : 01] So, you know, perhaps I suggest insert the I just like that. That's even like, you know, the Speaker of the Parliament sitting on his seat, maybe.

Or perhaps you're like my friend, living overseas 15 years ago, but being dissatisfied with work and relationships. Do you try and salvage the situation or start over again in a new country, like what he did by migrating to Melbourne?

It's not easy to choose sometimes, is it? Because starting over, that's a lot of effort and time, isn't it? But then salvaging, well, sometimes that just doesn't work, does it? Well, over the last few weeks, Andrew has been working through Genesis with you, and we've seen how God is faced with a similar dilemma since chapter 3.

Except his problem wasn't just burnt cakes or spelling errors. No, it was the infestation of sin and evil throughout his creation. And this was summed up last week in a verse, verse 5 of chapter 6, where the Lord, and we've got it on the slide, saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become, and that every inclination of the heart was only evil all the time.

Noah was the only exception. And so God decides, agonizing though it is, to start over. He'll judge humanity's evil, but then he'll save Noah and his family.

[2 : 32] Now the passage we're looking at today is actually the entire account of Noah and his family. So the title there is in verse 9 of chapter 6. It's one of the ten accounts, or generations, in Genesis.

And so it spans three and a half chapters, all the way to the end of chapter 9. So we're going to look at a big passage today. We only managed to read a portion of chapter 6.

So obviously we can't look at this verse by verse. Otherwise you'll be here till afternoon tea time, probably. Instead what we'll do is we'll do a flyover.

And as we do, I'll point out some of the major landmarks or highlights. But just to give you a big picture of this passage, I've done a little slide here which actually breaks down the chapters.

So here we have a brief introduction of Noah. Well then, it's followed by Noah in chapter 6 and verse 11 to 7 verse 5, receiving instructions and promises of the coming judgment.

[3 : 32] Verse 6 to 24 of chapter 7 itself describes the flood. And what it portrays, as we'll see a bit later, is a reversal of God's creation. Now, verse 1 of chapter 8 is then the pivotal or turning point in the whole account.

That is where we hear that God remembered Noah. The second half then mirrors the first, where the receding flood is portrayed as God recreating his world.

Instructions and promises of blessings follow. And then we end with Noah and his sons again. But this time, we see Noah being sinful just like everyone else.

So in your outline, we'll consider the first half of this account under the heading, A First Ending, where God judges humanity but saves Noah. And then in the second half, it's a new beginning, where humanity is blessed even though sin remains.

But before God gets underway with his judgment, we're first told in verse 9 of chapter 6, that Noah had found favor in God's eyes. Why? Because he was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

[4 : 46] So, just like Abraham a few chapters later, Noah's righteousness is credited to him because of his faith. And our reading in Hebrews today confirmed that.

Verse 7 said, Noah is an heir of righteousness, not because he's sinless, but because of his faith. And the other two qualities of being blameless and walking before God, those are also outworking of this faith.

And so together, Noah is someone who sets himself apart from the rest of humanity by shunning evil. And it is this evil that God now judges in verse 13.

He says, He's going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. God will destroy both them and the earth. And to prepare for that, he's instructed Noah to build an ark.

Now, I don't know, but it must be that the violence was incredible, isn't it? Because for God to want to destroy his very own creation for it.

[5 : 55] Remember this creation in Genesis 1 is something he called good. And at the end of six days, he said it was very good. And so the violence must be terrible for God to want to do that to his creation.

Something that he cares for. But sadly, he does because it's humans who have let him down. His image bearers, who are supposed to rule on his behalf, be fruitful and multiply, they do exactly the opposite.

Instead of filling the earth, they deplete it, don't they, when they kill. Their violence mars the very goodness of God's creation. So God's going to judge his people.

But this judgment, coming though it will be, actually took a while to be fulfilled. So as we read later on, in the next few verses, the ark would have taken many years to build.

Just imagine, this is a huge barge. It says there are 300 cubits. That's 140 meters long. So that's more than running the 100 meters and then a bit more.

[7 : 04] It's 23 meters wide. And then it's 13 and a half meters high. And so when we first meet Noah in chapter 5, it says he was 500 years old.

But guess how old he was by the time he gets into the ark. Verse 6 of chapter 7. He's 600 years old. So this is a 100 year project.

He and three sons working at it for 100 years to build this barge. But Noah, to his credit, he stuck to God's word even though it took that long. Twice we're told in the passage, first at the very end of that reading in verse 22 of chapter 6 and then again in verse 5 of chapter 7, we see that Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.

He followed God. He obeyed God in every respect. And such was his faith that even after he entered the ark, notice he still had to wait another seven days before the rain came.

So imagine being shut with all these animals and waiting a week. But God is always true to his word, isn't he? And I like this little detail. Even down to the way the animals are going to come to the ark.

[8 : 17] So you notice in the reading that we heard, verse 20 of chapter 6, God said that two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal, of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept.

God is going to prompt two of each kind to come to the ark. And then what happens? Well, verse 8 of chapter 7, exactly that happens. Pairs of every creature, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark.

just as God had commanded Noah, it says. Further, when God then says it would rain for 40 days and 40 nights, verse 4, verse 12, it did rain for 40 days and 40 nights.

So God, we see, everything that he commands comes true. God is true to his word. Now, when we read the rest of the flood, the account, there is no doubt that this is a global flood.

So verse 17, for example, says, all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. Verse 21 and 23 says that every living thing will be wiped out from the face of the earth.

[9 : 25] Only Noah was left and those with him. Now, I've often thought about how this was possible geologically. It's an interesting question. We don't have time for that now. But come up to me afterwards if you're interested.

What is more important, though, is not so much how it happened, but the theological significance of why it happened. For as I said earlier, what's being portrayed is a reversal of God's creation.

So, if you remember back in Genesis 1, when God separated the waters below the expanse from those above the expanse to create the sky, and then later gathered the waters to one place to form dry ground, there's a reversal of all that here, isn't there?

Everything is sort of being returned back to chaos, to this empty water world, which we actually read about in Genesis 1, verse 1 and 2. And whereas Genesis 1 portrays God, well, shows God blessing each creature, here, God judges by destroying what he's created.

Now, the rain stops after 40 days, we read, and then in chapter 7 and verse 24, it says, the waters flooded the earth for 150 days.

[10 : 43] So, just imagine this eerie silence, isn't it? 150 days, no sound of rain, no chirping of birds, no life except in the ark, bobbing along on this watery grave, bit like a rubber ducky in a giant bathtub.

Five long months, it was. Not a word from God. Noah waiting, praying, maybe, and then doing the job of zoo keeping.

until, on the 151st day, chapter 8 and verse 1, God remembered Noah.

He remembers all the other animals as well in the ark with him. Now, when God remembers in the Bible, many of you will know, it's always significant. It's not like, oh, God's forgotten and then he's just remembered and oops, I better do something about this.

No, it's the Bible's way of telling us that God is responding to his promises, that he's acting on the basis of his prior spoken word, even though it's taken a while to happen.

[11 : 58] God tells us that he remembers to assure us that he didn't forget in the first place. It's a bit like when a parent takes his child to her favorite ice cream store and buys her a corn and then says, Daddy remembers that you like cookies and cream.

it's that kind of remembering. And so with that, God sets about recreating his world. Second point, the wind he sends over the earth is like the spirit, if you go back again to Genesis 1, hovering over the waters.

And as the water recedes and the ground reappears, it's just as it did on the third day of creation, there is a repeat of what's happened in Genesis 1.

All these hints of Genesis 1 are actually deliberate. They are to convey that God is starting over again and recreating like he did the first time around. But so is this symmetry in this flood account.

So I've put up a flood timeline and if you read chapter 7 and chapter 8, you'll see that the days on each side of chapter 8 and verse 1, the verse which says God remembers, actually match.

[13 : 10] So you have 7 days and 7 days, 40 days of rain, 150 days of flooding and then on the reverse, 150 days when the flood recedes to the mountaintops, 40 days down to the ground and then there are 2 lots of 7 days when the dove is being sent out and then after the second day it doesn't return.

And all this is to show that God isn't creating a brand new will from scratch but rather he's restoring the old one he's restoring it back to where it should have been.

And this is also why this recreating is different from Genesis 1. If you recall Genesis 1 and you read it, what you get is a sense of glorious fanfare, isn't it?

God speaks and things happen, you know, live activity just bursts forth everywhere. It's very exuberant, isn't it? Here, however, when you read it, the recreating is more subdued, isn't it?

It's a sort of sober acknowledgement of the judgment that went before. And it takes place without God's authoritative voice, even though we know that God is still in control.

[14 : 22] It's only when we get to verse 15 that God speaks again. And what he does is calls Noah out of the ark. And when he does, and Noah steps out, he's almost like stepping out as a second Adam or another Adam.

He's called to bring out the animals with him, and the animals are then to multiply and be fruitful and increase. Those very same words that were used in Genesis. And then when we move on to chapter 9, God gives Noah the same mandate of being fruitful and multiplying the same ones that he gave to Adam.

But again here, if we read closely, there are differences with Genesis 1. So, he may say to Noah in verse 1, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

But because creation is now marred by sin, he no longer commands Noah to rule over the animals like he said to Adam. Instead, if we read verse 2, that the fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky on every creature that moves along the ground and all the fish in the sea, they are given into your hands.

Everything that lives and moves will be food for you as well. So, there is now a fear in the animals of human rule because of sin.

[15 : 45] And animals can be killed for food. Likewise, conversely, animals also threaten the life of humans. So, we read in verse 3 and 4, although there will be accounting for that shedding of blood.

In fact, it goes on to say in verse 5, all life is accountable to God because He's the giver of it. And this is especially true in verse 6 for humans because why?

They are made in God's image. And so, what we see here is that notwithstanding the flood, sin unfortunately is still alive and kicking. It's a bit like cleaning your house or my house, although I don't get to it much.

You know, no sooner have you finished vacuuming, taking away all the dust and storing away the vacuum cleaner, that the dust comes back again, doesn't it? It never ends.

And so, it's the same here with the Lord. He's just washed away, as it were, all the sin with the flood. but no sooner has the flood receded that we see sin flourishing and flouting, multiplying again.

[16 : 57] And the Lord Himself actually laments this very fact. We skipped over it, but back in chapter 8 and verse 21, when Noah came out, he actually offered a sacrifice to the Lord. And the Lord was pleased with that sacrifice, so much so that He promised not to curse the ground again, which I take it to mean that He's not going to add to the curse of Genesis 3.

Nevertheless, this is a concession by God because He then says He knows that every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

He will not curse the ground anymore, even though He knows that there is evil in the human heart from childhood. And so sadly, nothing has really changed.

The human heart is still the same. And even as we go on to chapter 9, many of you are familiar with this covenant of the rainbow. And I've always, when I was growing up, took it to be good news.

And it is good news because God will never again flood the earth or destroy it because of that. But if you think about it, it's actually an implicit acknowledgement that were it not for God's promise and God's covenant, then actually the world may well be judged again by flood because of human sin.

[18 : 13] It's actually acknowledgement that there is sin. There is sin so grievous that another flood would have been justified. But, God in His kindness and mercy says, no, I'm not going to do it.

And so God enters into this unilateral, universal, and eternal covenant. Eight times it's in that passage the word covenant is mentioned. It's almost God is saying, this world deserves judgment but I am going to restrain myself.

And whenever God sees a rainbow in the sky, He reminds Himself, see that word again, remember, He remembers not to destroy the earth by flood again.

It's like the world deserves judgment but, no, He's going to step back and He's going to remind Himself that He's promised not to do it. And then finally, in our flyover, as if to prove God's point about human sinfulness, the account ends with Noah and his family.

So this is the very one, this righteous hero that God saves. Well, we read that at the end of his life, it turns out that he's sinful just like everyone else.

[19 : 29] Now this is not to say that Noah did not continue to be a man of faith. No, I think he continued to be a man of faith, as the Bible says in Hebrews 11, but here we see him in his final years.

He plants a vineyard, he gets drunk, and then he lies naked in disgrace in his tent. And it's not that Noah didn't know any better because verse 20 says that he's a man of the soil.

He knows how to grow things. And, I don't know, some of you have made wine before. It's not something you can just do without any knowledge, is it? You can only make wine if you know how to do it.

So, Noah actually, I think, knew exactly what he was doing. And yet, in a moment of callousness, maybe, of moral failure, he gets drunk and he's naked. Now, Ham, his son, is probably worse because he finds his dad like that and then he, you know, reports it to his two brothers, probably gleefully.

And what that does is that it brings on Noah's curse on not him, but his son, Canaan. And I think here, the Bible is just giving us an inkling of what's going to happen later on when we see Israel entering the promised land and God judging the Canaanites, descendants of Ham.

[20 : 45] And so, when we get to the end of this very account, that sad but repeatable, predictable refrain is repeated again, isn't it? See what it says there? Noah lived 350 years after the flood.

He lived a total of 950 years and then he died. Just like all his predecessors before him except for Enoch.

All right, so that's our really quick flyover of the flood, three and a half chapters. But it's now time to maybe land and try and work out what this passage has for us today.

Is it just a great Bible story to be telling to children or are there lessons for us? Well, I guess the first and main thing to realize is that as with many things in Genesis, the flood represents a pattern or model of how God works in the world.

And in the case of the flood, it's a picture of what God's judgment looks like. It's what judgment looks like in the face of sin and wickedness.

[21 : 54] Evil grieves the Lord greatly and it prompts him to act even against his very own creation. But the other thing we see is that God still saves in the midst of judgment.

In fact, whenever God judges, he never judges without allowing a way of escape or rescue. He rescues Noah. He rescues a remnant.

He rescues those who are counted righteous by faith. And so if you thumb through the Bible, we see this pattern repeating itself. First, remember when Israel's first generation rebelled as they about to enter the promised land?

God judged them, didn't they? And yet, in the midst of all that, God brought Joshua and Caleb, two men of faith, into the land, leading the young ones with them.

Likewise, when God judged the divided kingdoms of Israel and destroyed both the north and the south, a remnant was deported, wasn't it, to Babylon, so that they could return and start again in the future.

[23 : 11] And so Jesus too, when he was on the earth, he had this message. He said, many are cold, but few are chosen. Wide is the road that leads to destruction, and narrow the road to life, and only a few find it.

And so it shouldn't surprise us that even today, the Bible speaks of another coming judgment. Sin and evil is still in this world, and God has to judge.

And the judgment that comes is going to be on an even bigger scale than the flood. But just as God provided the ark, God has also provided a way of escape for us today.

And all of us who have believed in Jesus, we know that that way is Jesus. God has dealt with our sin on the cross by pouring his judgment not on us, but on Jesus instead.

And because of that, we too are like Noah and his family, right? We are safe in God's ark. We are safe in Jesus. Jesus. But for the rest of humanity, well, sadly there is another day of judgment coming.

[24 : 23] And it may seem like a long time, probably longer than a hundred years or more, that Noah had to wait. But let's not be deceived of its reality. I've got another verse on the slide now.

Jesus himself warned of that coming day in Matthew chapter 24. In fact, it was the flood that formed his view of what was going to come.

And he says, 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.

And they knew nothing 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. Friends, we know this, but I have to say this, life is more than just eating and drinking, marrying, having children and seeing them grow up.

It's more than just getting from one holiday to the next. None of these things are bad in themselves. God has given them to us to bless us. But if that's the only things that occupy our lives, that form the focus of our lives, and we are oblivious to the coming judgment, then Jesus says, we're no better than the people at the flood, are we?

[25 : 48] So friends, if there is anyone here today, if you've not taken refuge in the ark by faith in Jesus, then let me urge you to do so. You know, the day before the rains came, I'm sure it was a clear and sunny day.

it was a good day for drinking, it was a good day for marrying, until the flood came. And so friends, even if your life looks good right now, don't take it that that means judgment's not coming.

Don't put off placing your trust in Jesus just because you think life is good at the moment. But if however, you've already sought refuge in Jesus, then I think the encouragement today is to wait patiently for the Lord's salvation, to trust in God's word, just as Noah did.

You may feel like you're in the fiercest storms in your life, you know, you're being buffeted by these winds and waves from every direction. But let me tell you, when you're in Christ Jesus, you're in the safest place possible.

God remembered Noah just as he promised, and God remembers those who are his. And then one day, just as his promise, his son will return and he will call us out into his glory.

[27 : 14] Just like Noah was called out of the ark, we will be called out as well into this new day that is his creation, new creation, into his new heavens and the new earth.

So, hang in there, even if life is difficult at the moment. Wait patiently for the Lord and do not lose heart. I'm going to just conclude now by reading a portion from Peter's second letter and I haven't got it on the screen, so I just ask that you turn to it with me.

Chapter 3, so page 1227. 2 Peter chapter 3, 1227.

2 Peter chapter 3, 1, 2, 2, 2, 7. Now, I think that the apostle Peter as he was writing this letter was much influenced like Jesus was by the flood as a picture of God's coming judgment.

And so he writes here from verse 3 of chapter 3, and I read a few verses. He says this, above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

[28 : 26] They will say, where is this coming he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Then jumping down to verse 11, since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

My friends, let me pray that we will do just that, live holy and godly lives. Even though we don't know when the day is, we will look forward to that day and speed its coming.

Let's pray. Father, we want to thank you that you've provided for us an ark in the person of your son Jesus. Thank you that we can be in Christ and be saved from the coming judgment.

[29 : 48] Father, if there are those we love and those we know who are yet not in this ark, help us, give us the courage to pray for them, to encourage them, to talk to them about this coming judgment and open their eyes to it.

And as for us who are in the ark, help us to trust in the word that you've given to us. Help us to wait patiently as we speed the coming of the day of the Lord.

We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.