

The Flood

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know if you've ever imagined, I have actually, imagine what it would be like if there was another global flood today. What would you do? What would happen?

You know, news, imagine this, imagine the news starts reporting the consistently rising sea levels. And then after a few weeks of these rising sea levels, your friends and family closest to the coast, maybe in Musenberg and Fischick, start phoning you up and saying, listen, I think we're going to have to move and stay with you for a little while because the water is starting to come up to our house.

And then a few weeks after that, the water level actually reaches Plumstead. It doesn't take long. We're pretty much on sea level. And so we here realize that we're going to have to move inland. We're going to have to move up onto the escarpment because, well, you can't exactly stop the water level from rising, can you? And so we pack our bags, we get in our cars, the traffic is chock-a-block out on the N1 and the road going up to the escarpment.

And we get up there, but the water level continues to rise. And after a few months, it actually reaches the highest levels of the escarpment. And we start to worry.

[1 : 21] And the government commissions whatever ships and oil rigs and naval vessels are available to take as many people on board. But they're soon full. And there's still millions of people who don't know what to do.

And so we decide, well, we're going to have to pack up again and move more inland. So we cross the border. We go north. We move towards Tanzania, which are some of the highest levels above sea level in Africa.

We get there. It's chaos. There's chaos at the border. There's traffic chock-a-block. People just pitching tents left, right, and center. Millions and millions of people rushing to these high points. And the same is happening all around the world. But then we get there and the water level continues to rise. And eventually we head towards Kilimanjaro, which is the highest point that we're closest to on the planet.

And billions of people end up in the heights of Kilimanjaro with shacks and tents. And there's squalor. And there's just overpopulation, overcrowding in the snow, in the cold, screaming children.

[2 : 27] Just imagine it. And the water level continues to rise. Eventually we can't go any higher. And the waters reach where our camp is.

And you wake up and you're starting to slosh around. And the next morning you're wading through the water. And the water level continues to rise. What do you do? By that point, whoever hasn't died by hypothermia, the strongest of us, eventually lose our grip in the bottom.

And we grab onto whatever flotsam and jetsam is floating around until we lose our strength and we slip below the water. Men, women, children, animals. Nobody survives.

Now, it sounds like something from some post-apocalyptic movie, doesn't it? But what I think we need to realize this morning and just re-appreciate is that that actually happened.

That stuff actually happened. There was a global flood on our planet. And it is recorded in the Bible, as we heard, in great detail to the day and the date.

[3 : 39] And all the details are there. This wasn't made up. This is not some Christian myth or story to teach us some good moral lessons. This actually happened. It's a historical event. And not only is it recorded in the Bible, but other ancient origin stories from other cultures also all mention their own versions of a great global flood story.

And we even to this day have striking geological evidence that points towards this global flood. And so it actually happened. That's the first thing we need to realize this morning.

This catastrophic event actually did happen in the history of our planet, but more shocking than the fact that it actually happened was that it was all God's idea.

The God who we credit as being full of mercy and love, that same God was the God who devised history's most effective form of mass execution that makes the Holocaust look like a picnic.

The greatest massacre humanity has ever seen was God's idea. How do we deal with that?

[4 : 46] How does that square with the idea of a loving and merciful God? Well, that's what we're going to think about this morning. And that's why we need to understand what's going on in the story.

Because not only does the story, if we understand it, tell us that the flood really happened. It tells us why the flood happened. And how that event that happened thousands and thousands of years ago should affect the way we live our lives today.

So that's what we're going to see this morning, God willing. But before we do any of that, the first thing we need to understand is the story so far in Genesis. Because what happens at the flood only makes sense if we understand what's happened before.

And so, so far Genesis has revealed to us God has good plans for his world when he made it.

That's the first thing that we realize in Genesis. God's good plans for his world.

But those good plans did not come about. And the reason was us, human beings, whose purpose it was to carry out God's plans. Remember, we looked at Genesis 2. And we saw that God actually put humans not as an afterthought, but as the pinnacle of creation.

[5 : 54] Because we were the ones that God was going to exercise his rule and his blessing over creation. But instead of being who we were meant to be, we decided to do our own thing.

Not realizing, of course, that stepping away from God's good plans for us opened the door for sin and depravity. Because when we are no longer under God's rule, then sin rules.

Which the early stories of Cain and his descendants that we saw last week and the week before showed us in graphic detail. Just how sin and depravity takes over once we step away from God's rule and God's ways.

And that all then led up to chapter 6. The point which you'll remember, the world is now in a right mess. The strong are abusing the weak. People are taking pride in their sin.

There's no shame anymore. All kinds of boundaries and barriers that God has put in place for order and civilization have now been broken and transgressed. And the world's just in a mess.

[6 : 52] And none of this, by Genesis chapter 6, is what God wanted for the world that he made. And so, now he decides to respond. Chapter 6, verse 11.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become. For all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, I'm going to put an end to all people.

For the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. Now Noah was one of the few, if not the only person who wasn't characteristic of the world around him.

He didn't follow in the world's ways. He was righteous. He sought after God. He put God first. And because of that, God had different plans for Noah and his family.

Lucky family, they get to tag along because of his righteousness. But for everyone else, verse 17. Look at these shocking words. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens.

[8 : 00] Every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. So God is not messing around.

He has made his mind up by this point. And the rest of the story shows us just how intentional God is in doing what he's decided to do.

Without hesitation. He tells Noah, seven days after the preparations are made, he's going to open the heavens. And sure enough, what happens? Verse 10. Have a look in your Bibles. Verse 10.

Just imagine it. Raining. Day after day after day after day.

Without end. For 40 days. Rain. The very thing that we know as Capetonians is meant to bring blessing in life. And that we need.

[9 : 26] And that we feel the problem if we don't have it. That very thing which is designed as God's way to bring us blessing in life. If it's not restrained, it also brings death.

See, God is using the instrument of blessing as an instrument of judgment and death as well. The very same thing. And so in that, he is showing us something about himself.

He is showing us that he is totally capable of both blessing and cursing. In equal measure. But people don't tend to think about God like that.

We don't tend to have that balanced view of God. You hear a lot about God wanting to bless you today. You go to many churches and the pastor will speak all about just God's blessing.

And how he wants you to have an abundant life. And how he wants you to be happy. But you don't hear much about God's judgment, do you? It's not something you'll hear often in churches.

[10:25] But let me assure you. Those preachers. Those prosperity preachers. Who were all about God's blessing. And he wants you to have a good life. Those prosperity preachers wouldn't have got far when the water level started to rise.

People wouldn't have listened to them anymore. You know, they come along. God has a wonderful plan for your life to prosper you and make you healthy. And your family has just been swept away in the latest torrent of flooding.

God doesn't have a wonderful plan for their lives. No. God's plan for almost all humanity was to destroy them in a terrifying way. And so this story forces us, first of all, to balance how we think about God.

Balance our picture of God. All those things about his love and mercy and blessings are true if he is for you. But not if he is against you. And this story here in Genesis is an example that God gave us of what it looks like when he is against you.

And it's not a pretty picture. Because look at the end result. Complete and utter destruction. Look at verse 21 to 23.

[11:37] Just look at the repetition in these words. In these sentences. Every living thing that moved on the land perished. Birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth and all mankind.

Everything on dry land that had breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out. People and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth.

You see what the author there is trying to emphasize? That is when God decides to bring destruction, it's complete and it's definitely going to happen.

When God decides that he is against someone or a group of people and he sets his heart against them, there is no hope for them. In other words, this story shows us the inevitability of God's judgment upon those he is against.

But also it shows us the inescapability of that judgment. Both the inevitability and the inescapability of the judgment of God towards the people he is against.

[12:47] It's striking there in verse 20, this little detail. Well, the waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than 15 cubits or 6 meters.

Now, that's pretty crazy if you think about it. The water had risen thousands and thousands of meters to cover the highest mountain, which was thousands of meters high.

And then it just rose 7 meters more and that was it. Just enough that no one could escape. Even the tallest Nephilim, who were maybe 7 meters high.

Not even they could survive. God made sure that it was just enough that everyone would be wiped out of all those that he had set himself against. It's a very scary thing that this passage is here to remind us of this morning.

That is, what it's here to remind us of is if God sets himself against you, there is no hope for you. There is no escape.

[13:52] And so the question we should be asking this morning is, will he do this again? Will he ever set himself against people again in this way?

Because if this really happened in history and God designed it and God made it happen, then can he do it again? And if so, that's the most important question we should be asking.

Well, the answer to that question only comes when we understand why he did what he did here.

Why he set himself against these people. And when we see this story in the context of what's already happened in Genesis, we discover that the reason he did this was more than just the violence and bloodshed.

Those were actually just symptoms of the real reason, which in light of Genesis 1 and 2 becomes clear. The real reason was that mankind was no longer doing what God had made it to do. That's as simple as it gets. Mankind was no longer doing what God made it to do, which was manage and care for the earth under God's direction.

[15:03] And in fact, they were doing the opposite. They were actively ruining God's purposes for the world. And so if they weren't doing what they were made to do, then surely their maker has every right to recall them.

You know, like a company, if it sends out a product and the product is malfunctioning and it's not doing what it's meant to do, the company will recall the product and destroy their products. They have not only a right to do that, but a responsibility to do that if they send a product that isn't working properly. What's the point of it being out in circulation if it's not doing what it's been made to do?

There is no point. All it's meant to do is be destroyed from that point onwards. Well, it turns out that's what God is doing with humanity here. He has every right to destroy us if we're not doing what we were made to do.

Let's just get that straight. Everybody who thinks that they can say that God is unfair to wipe out people. I mean, you see, throughout the Bible, God is judging and wiping out the Canaanites, the Egyptians.

[16:08] And it's funny, people take exception to wiping out Canaanite villages in Joshua, and yet they forget he wiped out the whole population of the world in Genesis.

God can do that because he made us, and if we're no longer doing what he made us to do, he has every right to destroy us. And that's what's happening here. And so the only people who can object to these stories of God bringing mass destruction are those who don't believe that he made us for a purpose.

And those are the people who tend to get their back up and call God unfair. Those who believe that we were randomly created for no purpose and we've got no destiny. But when you realize that we exist for a purpose, not our purpose, but God's purpose, each and every one of us that God made exist for his purposes.

When you realize that, then it makes sense when God decides to remove people who don't meet his purpose, who don't achieve that purpose, who have no interest in that purpose for which God made us.

And so the fact that God killed all these people isn't actually the problem here. That's expected. No, there's another problem in this passage.

[17:26] The real problem, the real question of the story is actually, how is God going to fulfill his good plans for the world now, given that humans were key ingredients in those plans?

See, that's the real tension of the story when we get to this point in Genesis. Because we learn in Genesis 2 that God's good plans for his world require humans.

He put us here for a reason and his good plans are only fulfilled through humanity. And so how does God carry out his purposes for his world when the very things necessary to carry out those purposes are the ones who are ruining everything?

Do you see the problem? That's the real problem. That's the real problem of this part of the story. And the solution to that problem is actually what the story is all about.

And it's a word that appears in this passage for the first time in the Bible. I wonder if you spotted it. It's God's solution from here on out for the problem of humanity not fulfilling its purpose.

[18:34] And that word is the word covenant. Covenant. Everything in this story looks bleak, even for Noah, until the point that God says, verse 18, But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark.

Before that point, there was no hope. Until God said covenant. And so the whole reason Noah escapes judgment is not primarily because he was a good guy, but it's because God established a covenant with him.

And that's also why there can be hope. Even after everything is destroyed and the world has, by the end of chapter 7, returned to the watery chaos it began with. Remember, that's how Genesis 1 started.

The world in watery chaos. Now it's back to that point at the end of chapter 7. But there can be hope because God made a covenant. And only because God made a covenant with Noah.

And so we get to chapter 8. In the beginning of chapter 8, first verse says, But God remembered Noah. Now, that word remembered is different.

[19 : 48] It's got a different use in the Hebrew than in our English. It's not like God was looking at the world and then he spotted Noah. Oh, yeah. I forgot about him. What's he doing in a boat?

Okay, it's not like that. Remembered doesn't mean to recall something that had been forgotten. God doesn't forget. But in Hebrew, it actually means to do what one had previously committed to do. That's what the word remembered means. So whenever you come across that word remembered in the Old Testament, it's not God remembering something he had forgotten. It's God doing what he had previously committed himself to do.

And it's used that way in the rest of Scripture. Just God acting on behalf of the people that he has made a covenant with. It's all about, from this point onwards, it's all about who has God made a covenant with and is God going to remember that covenant.

But of course now we've been talking about this word, this very important word, covenant. You should have noticed when we had communion, Jesus used that word in the Last Supper.

[20 : 53] Because he also, Jesus himself, looked at everything that God was doing and the salvation of people through this idea of covenant. But what is a covenant? What does it actually mean?

It's not a word we often use today. And who does God make covenants with? Well, before we understand that, we're jumping the gun a bit.

We've got to read the rest of the story. Because if we read the rest of the story, it'll become quite clear what a covenant is. I think part of what this story does in Scripture is that it sets up and defines this idea of covenant for us so that we know when we read covenant in future, this is what's going on.

So, to understand that, we need to read the rest of the story because something fascinating happens in chapter 8. I wonder if you noticed when Penny read through chapter 8 for us, how much of what happened sounded just like Genesis chapter 1.

Did you notice that? So, from the moment God acts upon his covenant with Noah in verse 1, look what happens. I'll just list a few things. Verse 1, God's wind blows over the surface of the water.

[22 : 05] You've heard that somewhere before? Verse 2, then mentions the waters above and the waters below. Verse 5, dry land appears. Verse 7, onwards, birds begin to fly over the surface of the deep.

You heard that before? Verse 17, God says, bring out every kind of living creature that is with you, the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground, so that they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.

Just what he said in Genesis 1. And so, do you see what's happening here? Creation is restarting again. And the language is clear.

With all these repetitions of Genesis 1 themes. God has basically done a factory reset. Of the world. You know what I mean? You've got a device. And it's just malfunctioning.

And all the software has got corrupted. And it's not starting properly. And you type. And it's not doing anything. Sometimes you know the only thing that you can do is do a factory reset.

[23 : 05] Where you've got to go to settings. And if you can't go to settings, sometimes you've got to take the battery out. And there's this little button that you've got to press with a pin. You know what I'm talking about? With a device. And you've got to find that little hole.

Press it with a pin. And then it does a total wipe. And a clean. And a factory reset. And it restarts from scratch. Well, that's what God does for the whole planet. In Genesis 7.

He does a factory reset. And then chapter 8 is the startup process happening again. The files being reinstalled. But what's absolutely essential to realize about this restart that God initiates for the world is what was necessary for it to happen.

And for the world not to just stay in a state of uncreation. Was God's covenant with Noah. That's what starts the whole process in chapter 8.

This restart. This reboot. Starts when God remembers Noah. Noah. And he remembers his covenant with Noah. And that tells us why this flood story is really here in the Bible.

[24 : 09] It's to teach us what a covenant is and the place of this idea of covenant in the rest of Scripture. And it's to show us how important covenant really is and what it is.

And what it is, according to this story, is that a covenant is a special arrangement that God makes with a specific person or a group of people who he preserves from his judgment in order to continue his purposes for the world.

And the rest of the Bible is about just that. It's about God establishing covenants with people from out of a broken humanity and through those people continuing his plan for the world.

Because he's got a plan for this world and nothing's going to stop it. But the way he has chosen to carry out that plan is through making covenants with particular people.

And he continues through his covenants, throughout the Bible story, the covenants he makes with people. With Noah. With Abraham.

[25 : 15] With David. With Abraham. Onwards. Through all those covenants, he's continuing to recreate. Just like he did here.

So, for example, in his covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel, he recreates a new society out of the old corrupt one. He takes this bunch of raggedy slaves out of Egypt and he creates a new society based on his laws.

And so, he is doing an act of recreation when he makes that covenant with Moses. Just like he recreated through his covenant with Noah.

Although, we read on in the Old Testament and we realize that that new society didn't last long because, and this was key, the individuals in that society themselves needed to be recreated from the inside out for that society to work and be effective.

And so, through the prophets, God promises another covenant, which he calls a new covenant, where he will actually recreate not just human society, but he will recreate people's hearts from the inside out.

[26 : 25] To be the people through whom he will continue his good plans for the world. And those people are us, Christians. The people he has made the new covenant with, who he has chosen to be the ones in this age, who are the ones who continue his good plans and good purposes for the world.

Because that new covenant was only made possible when Jesus came to earth and died for our sins. And that's why, at the Last Supper, the night before he died, he takes that wine and he says, this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for you for the remission of sins.

You see, what Jesus is saying here is that what I'm going to do tomorrow, when I die, on behalf of others, is that I'm going to make a way to rescue you from judgment.

Because God's covenant always includes a way to rescue people from judgment. Well, Jesus is saying that God has now made a way to rescue people from his judgment in the new covenant.

And that is, in essence, his death on the cross is the new ark that God uses to save his covenant people and to preserve them from judgment to continue his plans for the world.

[27 : 46] And it's, of course, no mistake that the way we come into that covenant, visibly, is also, surprise, surprise, through water, through baptism.

It's the way God designed it. But the reason this covenant is so necessary, and so necessary for us to make known to others the importance of this covenant, is because, just like in the days of Noah, God's judgment is as scary as it was back then.

Many people don't realize that. And I think the flood story is here just to shock us into realizing how scary God's judgment actually is. But just like in the days of Noah, today as well, God's judgment is inevitable, and it is inescapable, and it is coming.

The Bible assures us of that. Not through water, though, but through fire, the Bible says. The same shocking real judgment is coming.

Not through water, but through fire. Peter shows us this in his letter to Peter chapter 3. Turn there in your Bibles. To Peter chapter 3.

[29 : 01] Because that's exactly what he's trying to shock us into realizing about the age we're living in today. And basically what he's saying in this passage is that the global destruction by water in Genesis is proof that God is going to do that again.

But by fire. The fact that he's already done it on a global scale is actually a foreshadowing of the ultimate time he's going to do that.

That's still coming. And that's what he says in this letter to the churches. So 2 Peter 3 from verse 1. Look what he says. I'm going to read the passage in its entirety just because it's pretty heavy and you need to hear what it says.

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Above all, you must understand that in the last days, that's the days we're now in, scoffers will come. Scoffing and following their own evil desires, they will say, where is this coming he promised?

[30 : 20] 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. Verse 7, 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.

Verse 8, but do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises.

Some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But, verse 10, listen to this, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. That is going to happen.

[31 : 33] Just as sure as the flood happened and just as historical and real was the flood, so real and historical in this world will the judgment by fire be.

All the pride of men, all the fancy things that we have, the most powerful people in their high towers in New York Stock Exchange will be burnt up. The White House will be burnt up.

All the fancy Maseratis and Ferraris that people have used all their wealth to acquire will be melted in God's judgment. And it will mean nothing when that judgment comes.

And just as with the flood, the only people who will escape it are those in God's covenant. Those who are in the ark, the way of salvation that he has made, which is through faith in Jesus Christ.

And so in all seriousness, if you have not this morning put your trust in Christ and entered yet into his people, then God is still against you.

[32 : 40] And his very real judgment is coming. So don't be one of those people who think, oh, it's not coming, I'm safe. Because Peter says that's exactly what people think and that is to their doom.

Because when it comes, like a thief, at a moment that no one expects, it will be too late to change your mind. In fact, Peter says the only reason God is still delaying it is to give you a chance to enter into salvation before it's too late.

But if you have put your faith in Christ, then how should you live in light of what's coming? In light of the fact that God is bringing judgment, but he has also saved you through his covenant to carry on his good plans for the world.

If that's what's going on here through covenant, if it's not just about, you know, saving your hide, but it's actually about God has saved us to carry on his good purposes for the world, that means we've got something to do.

Well, then how should we live in light of all of that? Well, Peter tells us from verse 11 into Peter 3. Have a look. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

[33 : 55] Well, you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. And then verse 14. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.

And then verse 17. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. So realizing this, realizing that the flood was a warning to us of what is still to come, and realizing that the reason God saved us is to continue his purposes for the world, our response must be to make every effort to now live those holy lives that he saved us to live and enables us to live through the inner transformation of the Holy Spirit.

And, Peter also says, to be on our guard. Not to fall away from the security we have in the ark, in the covenant. And we do that by how?

[35 : 33] He tells us. By watching for error and by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is what the church is here to help you to do. Do not neglect the means of grace God has made available to you in his church.

And if you don't neglect those means of grace, then one day you too will pass through the flood of death and judgment and come out on the other side in the new heaven and the new earth, where righteousness will dwell forever.

Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for this account of the flood that has been recorded for us as a warning of the day of judgment to come when you will consume the earth with fire.

We thank you also that in the flood you have shown us the way of rescue, the way of escape out of your judgment through the covenant you have made in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord, for making this clear to us, for showing us the importance of covenant and why we need all to listen to Christ, to trust him, to submit to him, and to follow him.

[36 : 51] He is our only way of salvation. And so I pray for those who have not yet bowed their knee to Christ and submitted to him that they would stop their resistant ways, that they would stop resisting their creator and that you would bring them to new life with the hope of resurrection and a new creation one day.

And I pray for those of us who have that hope through faith in Christ that you would help us to live holy lives, to be on our guard, and to grow in our knowledge of our Savior Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.