

SERMON – 3/9/23**'Noah and the Flood'**

Genesis 6:9-22

God said to Noah, "I will make a covenant with you. Go into the boat with your wife, your sons, and their wives." (Genesis 6:18)

If you were to ask churchgoers what their favourite Bible story is there would of course be many examples given. Many from the life of Jesus and perhaps some from the life of the early church in the Book of Acts but I venture to suggest that quite a number would be drawn from the pages of the Old Testament – Daniel in the lion's den, Joseph and his coat of many colours, David and Goliath to name but three and today's story of Noah and the ark probably right up there vying for top place.

Yet there have always been those in the Church who have been dismissive of the Old Testament, suggesting that here we meet a tyrannical God, a violent God, an unreasonable God, a God who has somehow been consigned to irrelevance by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Some may say such things but I am not one of them. I believe we have an enormous amount to learn from all of the Scriptures and while it is certainly the case that we have to put more effort into reading and interpreting the Old Testament than the New because it has to be read as a product of its age and with Gospel spectacles on - the rewards are great for those who are willing to dig deeply.

In particular it is important that we recognise and acknowledge that the God whom we are introduced to in the pages of the Old Testament is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and today I want to look beneath the story of Noah and the Flood focus on three wonderful things that we discover here about the character of God that are vital for us to grasp.

First of all, we read that the Lord is the God of compassion. The earth was corrupt in God's eyes and full of violence, and God was *grieved* that He had made humankind – the good creation has been spoiled. Think of a child's reaction when one of their friends tears up or scribbles all over a drawing they have just completed;

think how you yourself feel if you have carefully finished doing something and someone else comes along and ruins it. It grieves us and we feel pain because of it. Well, such was the all-encompassing evil on the beautiful earth that God had created that His heart was broken. Somehow we are not surprised to read in the Gospels of *Jesus* grieving as He looked out over Jerusalem – we are touched by His compassion – He truly cares for people and loves them so much that His heart breaks for them when all is not as it should be. But that's just the point – Jesus acted like that because He is the image of the invisible God, and that is what God Himself is like. Here in the story of Noah is the Lord God Almighty Himself aching with pain because all is not as it should be in the world, and weeping over the creation He had made. And this is not an isolated example – we see it again from Moses to the prophets. When the people of Israel are enslaved in Egypt, the Lord says to Moses, 'I have indeed seen the suffering of my people... I have heard them crying... and I am concerned about their suffering.' (Exodus 3:7). Or again, through the prophet Hosea, God says, 'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused,' says the Lord. (Hosea 11:8) From the very beginning and throughout history God has winced in pain and, with grief in His heart, has reached out with compassion to those who suffer. This is the God of the Old Testament, the God of compassion, the same God whom we meet face to face in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we read that the Lord is the God of justice. As a result of human wickedness, God decides to judge the world, to put an end to all people and to destroy the earth. Ah, maybe this is where people get their picture of the angry, judgemental God of the Old Testament – our gentle Jesus is not like that, is He? Oh yes He is, though! Whenever Christ sees wrong being perpetrated, His righteous anger is aroused and He speaks with justice and with judgement. Think of Jesus after His arrival in Jerusalem, entering the Temple and finding it little more than a market place of dodgy stalls purporting to offer a service to pilgrims as they come to worship. He drives out all those who were buying and selling there and overturns the tables of the money changers. Or again, when He comes upon the summary

trial of a woman caught in adultery and she is about to be stoned to death, He turns the finger of judgement upon her self-righteous accusers: 'If any one of you is without sin let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' And when they all melt away, He dismisses the woman too, charging her to leave her life of sin. These are firm words from the mouth of the Lamb of God, and I don't think for a moment that any of those who heard Him speak went away without having their consciences utterly seared by what He said - Jesus will not tolerate wrongdoing. He is His Father's Son. From the very beginning and throughout history, God has spoken words of perfect justice and judgement. This is the God of the Old Testament, the God of justice, and we meet Him still in Jesus Christ our Lord.

But thirdly, we read that the Lord is the God of all grace. God resolved to make a covenant with Noah and his family and to save them from the destruction that was coming. Noah was a good man, it is true, 'blameless among the people of His time,' says the Book of Genesis, but he wasn't without fault, as we will discover later in the story. However, he had faith and he sought to walk with God. In the beginning and throughout history, God has taken people like Noah, and Abraham, and Joseph, and David, and Daniel and ordinary folk too, people like you and me, and He has worked *with* us, not over our heads. We are not perfect, we know that only too well (or at least we should), because we are part of this fallen world, but if we are prepared to acknowledge our faults and to confess our sin, God *will* save us; He will enter into a covenant with us; and He will use even us in the fulfilment of His purposes. He has graciously set us apart from those around us in the world as a people for Himself, not because we have attained to perfection or *earned* His favour but because He has looked mercifully upon us and we have responded to His call by choosing to walk with Him by faith. Supremely, we see that in Jesus who came and lived among the tax collectors and the prostitutes and commissioned *them* in preference to the proud and self-satisfied religious people of the day to take the Good News to all creation. This is the God of the Old Testament, the God of grace, the God who, while we were yet sinners, in rebellion against Him, gave His own Son to die for us.

The compassion of God gives us hope. Because we know that He is interested and concerned, we know that he is not distant but listens to all our cries. The justice of God also gives us hope. Because we know that He is incomparably fair, we know that evil will not be allowed to prevail. And the grace of God gives us hope. Because we know that He is wonderfully gracious, we know that even though we are utterly unworthy, yet He is willing to receive us as we turn to Him, and even to use us in the accomplishment of His will. It has been written, and it is something that bears some reflection, that justice means getting what I deserve, that mercy means *not* getting what I deserve, and that grace means getting what I *don't* deserve.

Today's world, like the world of Noah's time, is corrupt and full of violence – if God were to judge us in righteousness we would all be liable for just condemnation in precisely the same way as the people of Noah's day were. But not only does God in His mercy hold back from pouring the full force of His judgment upon us, He has unleashed the full flood of His grace into the world in Jesus Christ, who was crucified to bear the punishment for our sin so that we, undeserving as we are, might receive the fulness of His life. We are saved not through a wooden ark but through a wooden cross. The sign of the covenant made with us in Jesus Christ is not the rainbow in the sky, wonderful though that is, but the Bread and the Wine here on the Table before us and soon to be shared among us, symbols that we may touch and take and taste and feed upon as we seek to grow in our knowledge and love of God. The hope that is held out for us is not merely a new start here in the physical world, but a new beginning now in the eternal dimension that endures beyond the grave.

Don't let anybody tell you that the God of the Old Testament has had His day. The God with whom Noah walked is the same yesterday and today and forever. His heart grieves with compassion for a world that is broken and in pain; in His justice He determines that evil will not prevail; and in His grace He brings hope and new life out of the very darkest of circumstances. This is our God. Through Jesus Christ, He is our Abba, and He calls us to walk closely with Him. He says to us as He said to Noah at the dawn of history, 'I will establish my

covenant with you and you will be saved.' And so it is over to us. Will we enter into that covenant and go with Him?

Take and eat.