

Genesis 6:9-7:5

A Sermon

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We are continuing this morning in our study of the Book of Genesis, the first eleven chapters, picking up where we left off, with verse 9 of chapter 6 and working through to verse 5 of chapter seven. In our study of this very important first book of the Bible, we have seen the outworking of God's plans and purposes for the world and all of its inhabitants. Those plans and purposes have included not only the creation of the world, but also, in ways which we cannot fully grasp, the fall of mankind into a state of sin and misery, the subsequent spread and downward spiral of sin in the descendants of Adam and Eve, and now include an impending judgment that is, in essence, an act of "un-creation", and which comes about in the form of a catastrophic flood.

As a precursor to the account of the flood, we looked last week at the first 8 verses of chapter 6, where we saw that the progression of sin and evil which began in chapter 3 had escalated to the point where the sin of humankind reached new depths with the inter-mingling of angelic and human beings - according to one view, or else, at the very least, with illegitimate marriages taking place between the godly "seed of the woman" and the ungodly "seed of the serpent." The net result of these events was the Lord's devastating conclusion found in verses 5- 7:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.

In those words we saw both, the Lord's very real grief and sorrow over his wayward creation. At the same time, we saw His full intention to go ahead with a world-wrecking judgment.

And yet, just as with the first sin – in Genesis 3 – so too is it the case here that it is not *only* judgment that we see coming from God. In Genesis 3, there was, as you will remember, the banishment from the garden and the pronouncement of the curse upon humankind. And yet there was also the promise of deliverance, one day, through the woman's seed, as well as other examples of God's mercy, including the provision of clothing.

Likewise, in the account of the flood, as devastating as it is, there is also the very clear picture of God's mercy amidst judgment. And so these two themes – judgment and mercy – are the ones with which we will be preoccupied this morning. However, before we look more closely at how these things manifest themselves in the passage before us, let's pray together.

Now, as the account of Noah is a rather large section, it is worth noting at the outset that we will not be dealing with it all at once but will break things up into at least three parts: 6:9-7:5; 7:6-8:22; and 9:1-17. At least that is the plan, so far. So, without any further delay, let's listen now to the passage (read 6:9-7:5).

Judgment

Now, in thinking about the first of our two themes (the theme of judgment), at least as it is presented in these verses, the first thing I want you to see is that the judgment which is discussed here is *one which is well deserved*. The situation which has called forth such a devastating response from God is not a trivial situation, it is not just a temporary glitch in the program, it is not something which is out of the ordinary but is, sadly, something which has become common-place among humankind. The progression of sin has grown to the stage where extreme wickedness is the rule, not the exception. What started with just Adam and Eve, has now become this all-encompassing characteristic of the created order.

Now, that this IS the case is seen not only in the verses already read to you (vs 5-7) but also in the recapitulation of those truths in verses 11-13:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

And so, the conclusion which God had previously reached on his own, is repeated here and communicated, for the first time, to Noah. Now, as some commentators have pointed out, the language used by God to describe his plans to destroy the world. Those words, in Hebrew, are very similar to the words used in describing the *corrupting* activity of the people themselves. See vs 12 again, "...for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth..." In other words, there is a very real sense in which the destruction which God is going to bring about is simply the eventual, logical end of their own self-destructive tendencies. So, even if God *hadn't* intervened with a flood, the people would have eventually destroyed themselves through their own violence and corruption. If anything, the flood simply moved up the time table by a number of centuries.

So, the judgment that comes upon humankind is neither inappropriate nor is it disproportionate in any way but it is, in fact, completely in line with a path of self-destruction and self-corruption which humanity had already chosen.

These truths would have been deeply significant for the people who first received these texts - the people of God with Moses in the wilderness, just prior to entering the promised land. Here they were, about to go into a land full of godless peoples. Their mission would be to completely drive out the peoples before them (i.e., to be God's instrument of judgment upon these pagan peoples).

In hearing again the accounts of Noah and the flood, and what the world was like in those days, the people of God in Moses' day would have been reminded again of God's holiness. Alongside that they would have been reminded of the wickedness of humanity and, therefore, they would have been reminded of how perfectly justified God was in blotting out an entire world once before. And so, for them to be a part of God's doing such a thing again - although on a much smaller scale - was no injustice, and, as a result, they ought not shrink back from the task which God had set before them as the agents of His severe providence.

The second thing I want you to see as we consider this theme of judgment is not only the fact that the impending judgment was well-deserved but that, in spite of its being well deserved, it was, nevertheless, also a judgment that was *deferred*. That is, although God had certainly determined to put an end to all flesh, he also determined that this would not happen straight away but, instead, after a set period of time.

Last week we saw how in 6:3, God's statement that mankind's days "*shall be 120 years*" was not a statement about the number of years an individual person might live but was, instead, a statement of how long God would allow things to continue as they were before he visited the world with judgment.

Now, I think it is fascinating to stop and think about all this for a moment. Imagine what it might have been like for Noah all those years when the steady, but slow, construction of the Ark was taking place. I mean, we're talking about a massive structure here. If you convert the descriptions of verses 14-16 into modern day terms, you get this enormous wooden box which looked more like a floating coffin than any kind of sailing ship. Its length was about 440 feet or 1 and a half football fields - roughly the length of Tiger stadium from end to end. It was about 75 feet wide and 45 feet high, with three decks that created about 95,700 square feet of living space, or 1.4 million cubic feet, capable of supporting almost 14,000 tons. This is a BIG box.

Imagine having something like that in your front yard. Now imagine having something like that in your front yard for 120 years. Imagine the reactions of your neighbors - your godless neighbors, mind you, or of the local homeowner's association. Surely you would be the talk of the town. Surely you would be passed off as the local nut-case.

And so, given the physical dimensions and design requirements of the Ark, you can see at least one reason why the judgment of God is deferred - because it would take quite some time for four men to build such a ship on their own. They didn't have power tools, or bulldozers, or chain saws. Every tree had to be cut down by hand, transported using livestock, and then stripped and milled into specific shapes and lengths, all by hand, all with primitive tools. And as they were doing all of this they would, of course, have to be working on the side to provide for their families at the same time, growing crops, raising livestock, tending to the affairs of daily life.

So, it is understandable that creating the Ark would have taken quite some time to complete. And that is one very practical reason for the deferred judgment of God. But as we think about these things in the light of what the *rest* of the Bible has to say on this subject, we find that while these sorts of pragmatic reasons might be the obvious reason for a deferred judgment, there are other, more foundational reasons given for God's taking this path of judgment, when he might have chosen another.

However, before we take a look at those things and try and draw some conclusions about it all, let's spend a few minutes thinking about the OTHER main theme to be found in these verses: the theme of MERCY.

Mercy

Amidst all the words about judgment and destruction in 6:11-13; 6:17; and 7:4, woven into the account alongside these things are other words which evidence God's mercy. We see this, for example, in 6:9,

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.

And then we see it in the descriptions of the Ark and how it is to be made so that it will withstand the flood and serve God's purposes. We see it again in chapter 6, verse 18,

But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you.

We see it again in 7:1, after the Ark has been completed, and before the flood came upon the earth,

Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation....'

Now, at this point you might be saying, "Wait a minute. You're talking about these things as indicators of God's *mercy*, but what I see is a picture of *merit*. It says here that Noah was a righteous man, that he was blameless. Doesn't that mean that God's treatment of him was a kind of reward, something he earned because he was so righteous?"

The short answer is, No, this is not a picture of merit or reward. As one commentator (John Currid, *Genesis*, vol. 1, Publisher, Evangelical Press) explains, the word used for "righteous" here means to conform to a moral standard and is simply saying that this was the overall pattern of Noah's life. He was a man who recognized and observed his responsibilities to God and others. The word does not imply any sort of *sinlessness* on the part of the person to whom it refers.

The same sort of thing could be said about the word *blameless*, especially when it is coupled, as it is here, with the qualifying phrase "in his generation". In other words, Noah was an exception, he stood out among his generation as a God-fearing man. And yet, just as with the word "righteous", the word "blameless" does not require or even imply the notion of sinlessness.

And so, to read these words about Noah as indicating some sort of meritorious righteousness cuts across the grain of the entire Bible's teaching on these things. Further, it contradicts the Apostle Paul's own inspired reading and commentary on the book of Genesis, found within the pages of his letter to the Romans, and which indicates quite clearly that with the fall of Adam, sinlessness and perfect righteousness became a human impossibility since all of Adam's descendants fell in him and with him, in that first sin. This includes Noah.

And so, Noah certainly *was* a righteous and blameless man *in his generation*. But he was not a sinless man - as chapter 9 will make painfully and deliberately obvious. And so, as we saw last week, we have to read things like verse 9 in the light of verse 8, not the other way around. God showers his favor and blessing upon Noah, addressing his depraved and wicked heart and so verses like 6:9 and 7:1 are seen as a consequence of God's prior decision to bless and favor Noah, in spite of himself.

As a result, whenever you read verses like 6:9, 6:18, and 7:1 and you read them in the context of a world in which every intention of every heart is only evil all the time, when you read about a righteous person in the midst of a world like that, you know you are witnessing a miracle of God's mercy toward the undeserving. To put it another way, when you see a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't get there by itself. Or, as Steve Brown likes to say, if you see a dog playing chess, you don't criticize his game. You simply marvel that he can play at all!

Such is the reality of Noah - a marvel of righteousness in an un-ending sea of wickedness and sin - God's "turtle", so to speak, lifted up on the fencepost of creation - a trophy of grace and mercy.

So, God's favor exhibited TOWARD and manifested IN Noah is the first and most immediate indicator of his mercy. A second sign of his mercy is, in fact, something which we have already looked at – the deferred judgment of God – and brings us to the intersection of these two themes of judgment and mercy.

As we saw earlier, while there is an immediate and practical explanation for the deferred judgment of God – the sheer difficulty of making such a tremendously large “ship” – there is more going on here. After all, there are all kinds of ways that God could have rendered judgment immediately, spared Noah, and done away with the tedious necessity of making an Ark – and yet God chooses none of these other ways. Why is that?

Well, to find an answer to that question, we need to turn to the other end of the Bible, to 2nd Peter, chapter 3, where we encounter a passage which is also talking about an impending judgment. But not just *any* judgment, the final and greatest judgment of all - the judgment that will happen when the Lord Jesus returns as the Righteous Ruler of all the earth. Peter is writing to encourage discouraged believers who, after enduring a great deal of hardship are looking around and wondering if the taunts of their detractors might be true after all. They are being tempted to doubt that God will ever come and carry out the things He has promised. Listen, then, to what Peter writes,

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new

heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Now, there is a great deal to be said about these verses, but what I want you to notice for now are simply the words in vs 9, “... *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance....*”

With these words Peter is revealing something about the *character* of God – that he does not delight in destruction and judgment, that he is not some sort of trigger – happy deity just waiting for someone to “make His day” – as Clint Eastwood used to say. Our God is a patient God and will not bring about judgment until the full number of His elect have come in. When that is accomplished, then we will see the final judgment come – a judgment TO WHICH the Genesis flood points and OF WHICH the Genesis flood was a type or shadow.

As has already been said, God could have brought about the judgment in Noah’s day in the blink of an eye. But instead he chose a manner and method that was slow, and deliberately so. He chose a means which was congruent with His patient and long-suffering character and which, as Peter makes plain, is simply the outworking of his plan and purpose, and his determination not to render judgment a moment too soon.

And understanding these things about the judgment that is yet to come helps us to understand even better the significance of the flood in Noah’s day. Looking back on the flood from *this side* of the cross, through the words and perspective of Peter, and across the landscape of the Old Testament, we see *why* the flood was so devastating and yet, at the same time, we see *why it was not final*, why it was not the ultimate judgment: Because God’s purposes were not yet fulfilled. Because the promised seed, the deliverer of Genesis 3:15 had not yet come, because God was not willing to wrap things up until all of his children, all of those for whom Christ died, had come to repentance.

Indeed, as I think about these things, it takes me back to an earlier passage – the account of Enoch in chapter 5 – and it makes me wonder if this is not the more significant reason why we have that account as we do in the book of Genesis. Do you remember this? In chapter 5 we have this genealogy of the line of Seth and who begat whom and it is all very patterned and repetitious when suddenly, out of the blue, there is this story about Enoch who was a righteous man and who never saw death and instead was whisked away by God. Do you remember all that?

What was the purpose of all that? Why include this strange little story which doesn’t really go with everything else around it and sticks out like a sore thumb. What’s the point of all that? Well, look again at verse 9 of chapter 6. There we have this description of Noah as a righteous and blameless man, in his generation, followed by the statement that “*Noah walked with God*”.

Now where is the last place you’ve heard that description? Genesis 5:22,

“...*Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years....*” The account of Enoch is there, and is written as it is so that, when you get to the account of Noah, you are drawn back in your mind TO Enoch to see the similarities with Noah, but more importantly, *to see the difference.*

Both Enoch and Noah are described as “walking with God” and yet, while Enoch gets whisked away, taken out of God’s fractured creation without experiencing death – nothing of the sort happens to Noah. And you are driven to ask the question: *Why not?* Why doesn’t God just whisk Noah away, as he did Enoch, and be done with it? Wouldn’t that have been simpler? Easier?

Well, its not really an issue of simpler or easier. The reality is that God doesn’t whisk Noah away, as he did Enoch, because his purposes were bigger than just Enoch. His purposes were bigger than just Noah and his descendants. His purposes included a whole multitude of descendants – a people as numerous as the stars in the skies, a people from every tribe and tongue and nation, as the life of Abraham will soon reveal. But then it’s not just *people* that are part of God’s plan and purpose but *the creation* as well, the world, the cosmos.

So, Enoch’s story is important because it stands there as an eternal signpost of what God *might have done* but *did not do*. And it pushes us to see and remember that God’s purposes are bigger and wider than we know, and it reminds us that God *didn’t* treat Noah as he did Enoch because, if he had, then the one upon whom Enoch’s gracious standing was dependent would have never come. Noah’s deliverer would have never come. Nor Abraham’s, nor Moses’ nor David’s, nor yours or mine. The promised seed would have never materialized.

So God doesn’t take Noah out of the picture. He doesn’t shield him from the judgment but, instead, shelters and preserves him *through* the judgment. And here, in this account, we see clearly the Gospel. As one writer (Gage) puts it,

Peter [in 1 Peter 3:18-21] preaches the gospel from this story, for as they were safe with Noah in the ark, we may be safe with Christ in the church. Those for whom Christ is “Captain” will sail safely through the waters of wrath, finding everlasting rest in the new heavens and new earth.

In other words, if it were not for Christ, we would be like the people in Noah’s day who were outside the ark when the floods came. But in his mercy, Christ goes “outside the Ark”, as it were, enduring the wrath of God, facing sin and death and receiving the full judgment of God in our place while we, although un-deserving - nevertheless rest safely in the “ark” which is the Body of Christ – the Church – and which will one day see us safely home.