

Sermon 6th June 2010 (Genesis 6:5-22) “And Noah found grace...”

The story of Noah is so familiar to us – we’ve sung the song, and bought the little mobile with the animals for above the cot.

Arky, arky, elephant, giraffe, two-by-two, rain, dove and rainbow – all happy.

But, actually, this story is a problem for us.

There are scientific or historical questions: did it really happen?

Now, we’ve sort of dealt with those as we’ve gone through Genesis. The question is not “is it historically true” the question is “what truth does it teach us.”

But the second problem is bigger: – what kind of God is it that kills millions of people in a flood?

Singing two-by-two arky songs about genocide seems a little strange.

When you buy the little nursery ark from Mothercare, with the Mr and Mrs Noah and the Elephants to play with, surprisingly there are no models of drowned corpses to place around the ark.

If we want to understand this story, need to read it in the context of Genesis.

We’ve spent a bit of time on this recently, and I’m unapologetic for that, this is important.

It is worth investing time here.

We started with Creation – God made the world and it is good.

Human Beings are made in his image, to reflect his creativity, and rule wisely over his Creation – and they are blessed.

But human being are fallen – they make wrong, selfish, choices.

They want to be in control, they want to be God – they grasp the apple and the result is sin.

And this sin corrupts everything:

- the human divine relationship is damaged (they can’t walk with God in Eden now)
- human relationships are corrupted (Cain kills Abel)
- ecology, economics, social justice all are distorted – the land is cursed
- work becomes toil
- harmony becomes competition

- male subjugates female
- sexual desires are twisted and the goodness of the world is polluted.

Whatever we make of 7 days of creation and the stories of Genesis, this is profoundly true demonstrably true: it is experience of all of us:

The world is good – but all of Creation is fallen, tainted by our sin.

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

There is have it – that is what theologians call the doctrine of “total depravity”.

God, who knows everything about us, our thoughts, words, desires, hearts, minds knows that every act, impulse and relationship is corrupted by sin.

Now, we have skipped over Genesis chapter 5 here.

Perhaps that was a mistake, but it is a bit boring.

It is a genealogy, lists a bunch of people – it tells us they lived, had kids, and died – and they were followed by another generation that lived, had kids, and died.

Has anyone done their genealogy here?

My uncle did ours, and discovered a dark secret, it appears that two of my ancestors got married – when they were actually first cousins (you might want to say as you look at me: “that explains a lot”.)

Here is the thing, all our genealogies are full of sin

This one in Genesis 5 five covers 1656 years – that’s chronologically half the Old Testament covered in one chapter!

We can sum it up by saying “they were born, they sinned, they had kids, they died” (rinse and repeat).

And, symbolically their lifespans get shorter and shorter- and this seems to be an indication that each generation was worse than the last one.

They were born, they sinned more than their parents, they had kids, they died.

This is interesting, because there is a pervasive modern myth that things get better with each passing generation:

that human beings evolve to a higher plane

that we get more civilised, less barbaric – less ape-like as the centuries go on,

that we progress from caves to feudalism, to liberal democracy and universal McDonalds.

It's progress.

But, it simply ignores the fact that the last hundred years have seen the bloodiest wars, the greatest atrocities, the most horrific holocausts.

Amazingly, people believe this myth of progress –they say that the Bible is incredible – but they believe this junk.

As if, having ipods that can play Abba tunes made us better people!

No, it's just that we can kill in ways Genghis Khan could only dream of.

People say "Christians need to get with it" "Church needs to modernise values"

"we've moved on". That's the myth of progress.

Please always challenge that type of sloppy thinking – there is nothing self-evidently superior about modernity.

Certainly, some things *are* better – but it does not follow that the latest is an improvement.

In fact, we live in the most selfish, individualistic, environmentally destructive, socially unequal, short-sighted, exploitative, debt-addicted, future mortgaging, generation there has ever been.

Have you ever needed to pay a window cleaner – been short of cash – borrowed from the kid's holiday money – and then felt guilty? Yes?

We have a national debt in the UK of 914 billion pounds – and we have literally borrowed that from our children's piggy banks, to subsidize our current living.

We have borrowed their money, and we can't repay it – and we've then polluted the Earth that they will inherit. And this is progress?

Genesis five is absolutely right.

We might think human history is moving in the right direction,

but actually, it is just a circle of: being born, eating breakfast, sinning, having kids and dying and without God, you just rinse and repeat on and on and on.

You think your life is significant – but historically it isn't

We just get born, sin, have kids and die.

That's the background to the story of Noah.

And, the amazing thing is *not* that God judges sin;
the amazing thing is that he is so, so patient with us.

1656 years of patience.

Things get worse, and worse, – but God, in mercy, stay his hand of judgement.

Peter puts it this way (2 Peter 3): .⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

God is patient – but his patience is not inexhaustible.

Finally, reluctantly, but inevitably, God will judge.

And Genesis 6.6 gives us insight into this judgement:

“And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

God weeps over sin, just as Jesus wept of Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit is grieved by our sin

God is not a dispassionate civil servant sitting with a clip board ticking “you're a sinner”

“you're a sinner” “you're a sinner”.

He is an emotionality involved parent.

I made you, I loved you, I blessed you, I designed you to reflect my goodness

but now, I see the pain you cause, the damage you do, the lives you wreck

and I am sorry that you exist.

You cause me nothing but pain.

Sometimes, we think we are wonderful.

We think that God must delight in us.

“God? He's so lucky to have me as his friend.

He's so blessed that I choose to worship him

I wonder – does he deserve me?

Will he live up to my expectations?

Or maybe, I should dump him, and go find a more worthy God – one who has the type of values I think a God should have. One that affirms me in what I want to think and do”

No, we grieve God.

Sin breaks his heart, and sin demands his judgement.

And here, a Christian is not better than anyone else.

It is just that the Christian has realised how bad they are, and has stopped making excuses; stopped protesting their innocence.

And then, and then, grace step in.

And rainbows become possible.

Genesis 5:8. “But Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord” – or as the older translations had it: “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”.

It is a great verse – it true of every person who is a Christian.

“Alistair found favour in the sight of the Lord”

“Therese found favour in the sight of the Lord”

“Janis found favour in the sight of the Lord”

“Bill found favour in the sight of the Lord”

And, the question is, who the heck knows why!

Why did God choose Noah?

Well, a lazy reading of this passage might say “because Noah was good”:

“Bad people get flooded – Good people get saved – be a good person like Noah and here endeth the morality sermon.”

Wrong answer.

Versed 5 and 6 say all are humanity is sinful – and that all must include Noah (he’s human too).

And, if you need proof, you will find it in Genesis 9:18-28

This is a horrible story: Noah gets blind drunk, so much so that he ends up naked in front of his kids.

Noah isn't perfect – indeed, he's a candidate for a Social Work Department Child Protection investigation. He'd fail his disclosure check – you couldn't have Noah as a BB officer.

No, Noah is chosen only by grace.

God shows him favour

God forgives his sin

God makes him blameless and righteous

and (v.9) Noah walked with God.

Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden

that's what we're designed for – a walk with God – a life lived with him
sin destroys it, but grace, through Jesus Christ, makes it possible again.

And that walk, isn't just prayer and spirituality, it is an invitation to work with God in a huge big plan for salvation.

It's massive.

Noah is to build this huge boat, with aircraft-carrier dimensions
rooms and decks and floors, it's to involve animals and people and birds and whole of
Creation.

Our salvation isn't merely individual.

It isn't just about how we escape judgement – get forgiven, go to heaven and walk with
God.

It is about how we walk with God in a way that means we take a part in the God's big saving
plan.

Noah could have build a raft to save himself.

Nice, cheap and easy, do it in the backyard, and give it a little box with 40 days food.

He could have built a houseboat to save his kids – just big enough for 8.

That'd take time and money – but not ridiculous.

But he's invited to build dirty an ark,

because God's salvation is going to be as big as the effects of sin itself.

God's salvation will be zoological, ecological, environmental, big big big.

If Christians are going to be effective they need to understand what walking with God really means.

How big and crazy this vision is.

It is God's vision which is as big as Creation itself.

It is the mother of all plans – the plan to save all things.

And that has a cost.

Private religion can be done in secret and in our spare time

Noah could have his raft in the backyard and it would have taken him a week and cost him a little – no one would know – no one would laugh.

But no, he takes 120 years, and a massive investment and cost to build his Ark.

This is long-term, public, costly, ridicule-inciting, hard-graft, time-consuming ministry.

And Genesis 6:22 has these amazing words "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him." He just obeyed.

2 Peter 2:5 describes Noah as a "Preacher of righteousness"

He built his ark.

He built it in a desert.

People kept asking "why?" –and they laughed

he just kept walking, and building, and witing.

And when they asked "why?", he would say

"because we sinful and God is good,"

"because you need to repent, find God's grace, to walk with him,

and come and join me building the ark of salvation."

120 years of preaching that Gospel

and 7 people joined his little Church, and all had his surname.

Noah just kept building.

And God used Noah to save his Creation.

So, we can moan about a God of Judgement.

We can deny sin, and protest that we deserve a better God,
or we can seek grace, walk with God, and simply do as he has commanded us.

And so as we do now, as he has commanded us:

So know you are a sinner,
seek his grace,
and participate in his salvation.

Amen