

Stories of the Promise 1) Noah – “Watch”

Genesis 6:9-22, 7:11-23 • December 1, 2019 • Sermon Series for Advent



Christmas manger scenes are often depicted as overly cute. And I get it. For the sake of creating children’s books and marketable shelf decorations artists create a comfy and clean maternity ward in Bethlehem, staffed by neatly dressed shepherds and angels. What is perhaps worse is when this same technique is applied to the great flood. Noah is depicted as smiling with his puffy white beard and the animals peeking out of little windows. The ark looks like a toy boat that you could just plop into the toddler’s bathtub or stick on the shelf as a cute decoration. But the scene was nothing like that. It was devastating and frightening. That’s why Jesus refers to the event of the flood as a warning to watch and be ready for his coming. It won’t be cute, cheery, or clean. The judgment to come will be shocking, swift, and surreal. This morning we turn to Genesis 6 and 7 and consider how the story of Noah teaches us to be watchful for the coming judgment.

First of all, the story of Noah is no myth. Some might try to push aside this account as just a cute story for children. Even Christian scholars will try to dismiss this part of the Bible to simply a story passed on by Hebrews like some fairy tale. But this story doesn’t belong to the Hebrews, nor the fairy tale books. It is recorded in the sacred text of Scripture and presented as real history. To deny that the flood is a real event is as bad as denying the fact that God created this world and his Son walked on water and rose from the dead. You cannot just wash the account of the flood off the pages of Scripture. Moses testifies to it. The Psalm writers testify to it. The apostle Peter testifies to it. And as if that wasn’t enough Jesus refers to it as real. And as real history it’s meant for more than the nursery or a play set. It is recorded for all people, adults, young, old, all humanity. So, brothers and sisters, let’s take a look at how this real history still has real meaning for us.

Noah’s story takes place a few centuries after the world was created. It didn’t take long for everything to succumb to sin’s curse. Genesis accounts for us the line of Adam, fallen from holiness into sin. Things after his fall into steadily worsened. From Adam and the very beginning of time to Noah spans at least 1600 years. We read about some godly men who from ancient times called on the name of the Lord. These people were like their father, grandfather, and great grandfather Seth, son of Adam. They had faith in the Lord. But even though the world was not far from creation it was for the most part far from its creator. We read in early history of men who boasted in their own strength. They avenged their pride with great boasts of violence. The world had split into two types of people: the children of Cain and the children of Seth, generally speaking. They are given the titles: sons of God and daughters of men, that is, believers and unbelievers.

What happened? The “sons of God” plummeted their families into corruption. They began to intermarry with the unbelievers. They didn’t look for wives who had a heart of faith. That didn’t matter to them. They only sought outward beauty. And it wasn’t long before the outward attraction became the world’s downfall. In the all-important choice of who they married, believing men carelessly tossed aside the most important thing in life: The Word of God. Their children were renowned --not as heroes of faith but as warriors and tyrants. God was very aware of what had happened to his creation. The crown of creation, mankind, had turned altogether to wickedness. It doesn’t say, “The people around Noah were corrupt.” It says, “all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.” In great contrast to Noah who walked with God, the rest of the world walked away from God. They weren’t watchful for God’s plans, only their own.

But someone was watchful for God’s plans. Genesis 6 is not “the account of the flood” or “the story of how the world changed.” It is titled by the Holy Spirit as “the account of Noah.” Listed as a great-grandson of Enoch, who walked with God, Noah also walked with God, meaning he lived a God-fearing life. He is called a righteous man because he trusted in the promise of the Savior to come. The writer to the Hebrews calls Noah righteous through faith: belief in the promised coming Savior of the world. By faith Noah, along with his wife and children were watching for God’s plans.

God did make his plans known to Noah. Only 120 years remained for the people of the earth. Suddenly Noah’s life became full of watchfulness and preparations. All of Noah’s acquaintances had to run through his mind; his neighbors and those who lived in his country, his wife’s family, his family. He knew the end was coming!

God’s directions to Noah were generally quite simple. Build an ark. It was essentially to be a large box, like a barge. It wasn’t a boat with mast or sail. It wouldn’t have a rudder to steer or a hull to direct its path. It was a box that spanned the length of over one and a half football fields and stood four stories high. God made his plan clear for Noah: “I’m going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life.” God also chose to spare the creatures of the earth. Some have estimated that each creature “according to its kind” meant between 1500 and 2400 different species or pairs of animals altogether. God’s plan: they would be spared the flood in a floating barge, which he would guide and protect through all the destruction.

Scripture doesn’t record Noah’s words with God. It doesn’t have to. It only records, “Noah did everything the Lord had commanded him.” In complete silence throughout these chapters Noah is the obedient and faithful servant of the Lord. And don’t think it was easy for him to remain watchful and faithful. The apostle Peter and Jesus mentions the reaction he received from the world. Might some ridicule you for believing in the account of Noah? How much did they laugh at Noah for actually building the ark?! He had up to 120 years to build it. It is during this time that he preached to the world around

him. To “walk with God.” Means not only to live a godly life but to live a life that speaks about God. Peter says that he was preaching to the world around him.

God is very patient. The story of Noah shows that. God gave the world 120 more years to repent. He was grieved, the scriptures state in human terms, over the corruption of mankind. But he desired that every single soul heed his Word and walk with him. But every single soul, save eight, turned to darkness instead. And God said to the world the worst thing that he can say to any unbeliever, “Have it your way.” He left them alone under his wrath over sin.

On the very same day that the flood waters began, Noah and seven others entered the ark, along with all the creatures which God had chosen to accompany him. It says that the waters of the deep opened up. This wasn't a monsoon flood. The earth itself was convulsing and exploding the great reservoirs which God had on the third day of creation pushed back and contained in the deep. Picture the crust splitting, gushing steam, volcanoes and massive pressure from fissures. On the second day of creation God separated the waters above from the waters below. Now the waters above began a 40 day pour down back upon the land –until there was no land. This wasn't just some regional flood like some will speculate. It was a universal deluge. The world used for it in Scripture only occurs here and in one Psalm which describes God's control over it. “All the face of the earth was covered.” Even what was then the highest peak, was covered by over 20 feet. It is clear: everything that breathes, died. All the life outside the ark was destroyed and drowned.

But remember. This isn't the account of the flood. It is the account of Noah. The first thing that is described is that the waters lifted up the ark. God sealed them in, and they floated above the waters. He and all with him in the ark were safe.

The waters rose and the rains continued. After forty days the rains stopped and the fountains of the deep were sealed. For 150 days the flood held. Then they began to quickly recede. Five months of flooding were followed by several months receding waters. Then the ark's inhabitants stopped feeling the swaying of the seas. The ark came rest in the middle of three continents on the mountains in eastern Turkey. Eventually they stopped hearing the water pounding on the sides. Soon after a raven was sent out and find land. It returned empty. When a dove returns with signs of life Noah realizes the time to leave the ark will eventually come. After one year and ten days, they step out onto the ground. God had carried out his judgment. But more importantly, he had carried out his mercy and spared Noah, his family, and the creatures with him.

The implications for us? Our world is not only perfectly capable of turning aside from God but has altogether done it. This is the history of mankind. And the Sons of God, who walk with him in faith, can lose faith. And God is truly serious about his wrath over evil hearts. He is patient. But an end comes, and it comes unexpectedly for many. Jesus points out that just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days leading up to his return. People will not in the least be expecting the terrible fate that awaits this world. They will act like nothing is going to happen. They will eat and drink and celebrate as if the world will just go on and on and there is no God whom they are accountable to. But just we recall and destroy corrupted meat, or products, the creator is going to make another recall of his creation. The stagnant waters of everyone's sin will be up for judgment. With a suddenness that is altogether unexpected Jesus will come in the glory of heaven with his angels and will destroy this world of sin. The manger scene shows a lowly child, but the returning Christ will be judge of all.

Could God's people today unite with the unbelievers and cease to live as if the end is near? Would the generation of believers today dwindle until nearly all the world could care less about the one true God? Is the promised Savior of little consequence to a growing number of people? Is the watchfulness in your life becoming stagnant? Look at the world today and you see many parallels to Noah's world. How would you answer Jesus when he asks, “When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?” So, he says to us “watch!” It is only by faith that any will escape the judgment of God.

In mercy there are still those who will be spared. They are those who trust in his Word, walk with their Lord, and who have the promise that he will never leave them. Sadly some of them chase after the daughters of men and the things of this world and they and their offspring forget that the end is coming. But by his grace God spared Noah.

The Bible says that with the same grace he has spared all who are baptized and believe. In the waters of baptism you were spared as God drowned and washed out all sin. Peter says those waters save you by the power of Jesus' resurrection. Through baptism and faith in Jesus you are saved from the coming judgment. And like Noah you are righteous in God's sight through faith in the promised Savior. It wasn't a pretty picture, but the Christmas manger is a pretty sight. It is God himself coming to bring rescue to a world doomed to destruction. Jesus is our Savior from the coming destruction. He came to build more than an ark; he built his church. And it didn't take him 120 years. He did it in a single day as he took the price of our sin and faced the wrath of God in our place. We are secure. By the washing of water and the Word the Spirit has given us a place of refuge in Jesus' church. Trust in him. As part of his holy church you are in a refuge that will never fail. All who are found safely in his holy church will be spared the fire of hell and the fire which will destroy this world.

It's not a pretty picture for those who lose watchfulness. In unbelief, the whole world was taken by surprise and perished. Many more than eight were told that the flood was coming. But only eight believed and were spared in the judgment. For those who kept watch the story did end with a pretty picture. It ended with a bright rainbow and the promise of a gracious God. He is your Savior God. And the God of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, will take us all to a new heaven and earth, the home of the righteous. That will be a sight! So, he tells you today to remember the story of Noah: watch.