

God Prepares You For His Coming 1) With His Cleansing

1 Peter 3:18-22 • 2020-11-29 • Advent Series: God Prepares You For His Coming



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Gal 1:3-5)

Many wake up and prepare for the day by listening to or reading the latest news. One section of the news that lets you anticipate tomorrow's news and prepare for the next day: the weather. As you scan the weather this time of year you might come across the notice or the announcement of a big snowfall. It's not out of the ordinary here in this part of Arizona at this time of year. If you know there is a storm coming you know some of the things you can do to be ready for it. The shovels come out of the shed; the ice scraper is under the seat of the car. You can do your part to get ready. No one, however, could believe the coming storm in Noah's day. Who could have properly prepared for it?

There are some things you can't prepare for without God getting us ready. That's what we'll be looking at this Advent season. Advent is about preparing for the coming of Christ. He comes again in glory, and soon. How do you get ready for this great event? A better question might be, "How does God prepare us for his coming?" We see the answer in our reading from 1 Peter this morning.

The shocking weather that came with the great flood would have taken so many off guard! Picture the raging waters. The skies opened so that the floodgates of heaven came pouring down on the earth. The springs of the deep burst open to set off the great deluge. Some might have raced up the tallest mountains. But even their best efforts would fail as the mountains were engulfed. And their cries for help would be of no avail as the waters continued to rise and silence them. The great flood came as God's reaction to a world which had turned against him. But there was more than destruction in the scene of the flood. One vessel remained afloat. It was God's provision for rescue. And it floated for months and months. God guided that vessel in the raging flood. He protected it from the rocks and battering waves. His unseen hand guaranteed it's safety. That floating refuge was also a part of God's reaction to a world which lived in opposition to him. It was his chosen means of rescue. It was his merciful means of deliverance.

God says he is coming again to judge all this world. Only the world once destroyed by water will be again destroyed by fire. How can we ever prepare for the coming judgment? Peter reminds us of the heart and core of the Christian message. God has provided his refuge as a means of escape. "*Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*" Yes, we could not save ourselves. So, Jesus the Son of God came to save us all and bring us to God. He humbled himself and took our place. In his state of humiliation, he lowered himself and was put to death in humility. He did this for us as he took our place.

Yet it didn't end there. Peter points out the other half of the rescue story. Jesus was restored to all his glory. In his state of exultation, he was made alive again in victory. The NIV struggles here to capture the Greek. Peter is not saying Jesus died as a man and rose as a spirit. The Greek expresses the idea that Jesus was "put to death in a fleshly state," that is, "in humility," and "made alive in a spiritual state," that is, "in glory." Jesus took our place on the cross in his lowliness to "bring us to God" by taking away the judgment from us. He rose to life to assure us that he completed his work. God's rescue plan centers on Jesus the Christ. In his glorified state Jesus announced his victory over those who disobeyed long ago and were in the prison of hell. All who followed Satan throughout history in turning against God, including at the time of the flood, were forced to admit eternal defeat. Christ died for us. Christ lives to show the victory is won for us. In Christ we escape the coming judgment over sin.

But the question still remains how does Christ's victory become ours? For Noah and his family God's directions were straightforward. Build an ark, a large wooden vessel. Get inside it when God indicates. And if they did, they were safe. That plan was straightforward, but it must have seemed absurd. Noah's contemporaries no doubt mocked him fiercely for his adherence to God's plan. "Build an ark?" But Noah listened to God's directions and therefore saw the need. He labored for what could have been well over one hundred years of building. By building that ark he sent a powerful message to his world. He is called "a preacher of righteousness." But you can imagine the hundred years of ridicule as he preached the coming destruction. God was patient in the days of Noah. For many years he continued to patiently allow people to live who only planned wickedness every day. But when God finished his display of great patience, there would be no escape. Peter reminds us that when God came in his wrath upon that world, only a few were saved. They rest outside that means of escape all perished. You either had God's means of rescue or perished.

Who was saved at the time of Noah? It wasn't those who tried to make up for their wrongs. It wasn't those who at the last second changed their mind as the destruction swept over them. It wasn't even the least wicked of the time. All the world perished. And only eight people were spared. Only those who trusted in God's means for escape were saved.

All along there was never any chance of surviving outside of God's grace and his covenant. If you were not trusting in his grace and in that ark, you were doomed. There was never any chance of surviving or winning without his means of saving. When God comes with his judgment you better be ready. And only his plan for refuge will be a safe plan!

God's directions for today's world are equally straightforward. Peter once shared it with a crowd looking to escape God's judgment. *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call."* (Acts 2:38-39)

The world still will mock God's appointed means of rescue. Baptism is looked down on by many as empty and without power to save. They see it as merely washing some dirt from the body. But it is God's chosen means of salvation. That's how he operates. Those who are not under his protection and care are doomed to judgment. Those who trust in him will be saved.

Noah by faith was convinced God would do as promised. Someone might have mocked Noah saying, "You really mean to say you need an ark?" But Noah could respond in confidence, "No, God himself says I need the ark." Noah was trusting in God's direction and his plan. And you can't say that Noah was saved because he obeyed God and did a good job building the ark. Noah and his family didn't survive the raging waters in a vessel made securely by his own design. God gave the design. Noah just followed what God had directed. God's protecting and providing hand kept everyone and everything in the ark alive. God would never let his plan of rescue fail those who trusted in him.

His plan for you will not fail you as you trust in him. God saves you through baptism. Just as his promise was good for Noah and his whole household his promise of rescue through baptism is good for you and your whole household. Someone might argue, "You really mean to say that everyone needs baptism?" But you can respond in full confidence, "No, God himself says we need baptism." Jesus said, *"No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again of water and the Spirit."* (John 3) We need it because it saves. Peter writes twice in his letter, *"baptism saves you...it saves you."* Imagine the ridicule faced by Noah, "This vessel is going to save you?" Noah's response would have been: "God will use it to save me, just as he told me." Peter points to the flood waters and the ark as something which is a picture leading to what God does in baptism! *"And this water corresponds to baptism that now saves you."* And you can't argue that it is a good work by which we make ourselves clean. We follow God's direction, his provision. He makes us clean. It is his plan and his promise which we trust. God himself gives the directions and design for this washing. He saves. He chose the method.

Baptism's rescue is the "guarantee" a word meaning "a legal claim, an assurance" of a good conscience before God. All the wrongs and evils which we have committed, and which stand against us are washed clean. Our very conscience is clean before God through baptism. You have a legal claim in the court of our God that you are cleansed from every sin.

Some might still try to object, "But still, how can our baptism save us?" Peter explains its power. Remember the heart and core of the Christian faith? *"Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* It saves us because Jesus forever won the victory. We share in Christ's victory through baptism! Christ died for sins, once for all. He took the destruction and pain of all sin for all people of all time. He suffered on the cross the wrath of God. He died and faced the destruction in our place. He was righteous, the innocent one. But he willingly died in the place of the unrighteous, the guilty. He died for you and me. That death is ours through baptism. *"We were buried with him by baptism into his death."*^(Ro 6)

And his death is powerful because he now lives in victory. We confess in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus descended into hell. It is a confession of victory. Jesus announced his victory to the spirits in the prison of hell. *"Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand -with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him."* Our exalted Christ speaks with authority and gives us direction for the means of rescue. *"Make disciples of all people by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them."* (Mt 28)

Remember that desperate image of the flood. There is a greater judgment coming which we never could escape by our own means. God will judge all this world with fire and with hell because of sin. This is God's reaction to a world which lived in opposition to him. There will be many who will cry out in the judgment at the door to salvation, "let us in." But when God shuts the door it remains shut. We can never prepare ourselves to face God's judgment over our sin. He must prepare us. So, he cleanses us. And we will see something stand out in the judgment: all those who are washed by water and the Spirit in baptism. They have a legal claim, God's guarantee of cleansing. Neither the devil, nor demons, nor any of God's enemies can speak otherwise. *Baptism now saves you also -by the resurrection of Jesus Christ!* This means of grace is God's reaction to a world which lived in opposition to him. It is his merciful deliverance.

No one could believe the coming storm in Noah's day. Who could have properly prepared for it? Only those who use and trust God's means of rescue. You won't find a warning of his coming again in the news. It will bring far worse than a storm, far worse than the great flood. It will bring his just holy and fiery wrath. But God has provided a means of rescue. His instructions are straightforward. *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."* (Mk 16) Under the water of baptism, you will stand unharmed in the flames of judgment. You share with Christ in his death and his resurrection. You share in his victory. His cleansing gets you ready for his coming.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind. (Luke 2:14)