

Tell Me The Story: *Starting Over* - week 10

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Nov. 7, 2021

Read Genesis 6-9 NIV

Oh, to have the faith that Noah had. To build a magnificent boat in the middle of the desert, far from any lake or sea. He is believing a word spoken by God, trusting in a word when nothing in his environment supports it, and no one else in his culture believes it. Rightly, the author of the New Testament book we call Hebrews lifts up Noah as a hero a faith (11:7). **“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen”** (Heb 11:1). Genesis says, **“Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did”** (6:22; 7:5). Oh, to you have such faith!

In Genesis God makes a promise, a covenant that affects the whole universe and all living creatures. This morning I want to ask three questions about the flood story: *“Why did the flood happen?” “What exactly happened in the flood?” and “What does it mean for us now?”*

This story is referred to by a number of New Testament authors. You might be surprised to learn that Jesus refers to it quite a number of times. *Tell Me the Story* of the flood: How does this part of the story make sense of our stories?

First: **“Why did the flood happen?”**

The flood happens for two reasons. The first is the sin of humanity. We've seen how the author of Genesis 1-11 describes this avalanche of sin and how God's grace always outruns sin. We see now this avalanche of sin is getting worse and worse until God chooses to tolerate it no longer.

The first time we heard the words "**the LORD saw**" in Genesis was in chapter 1, when God finished making his good world. "**God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good**" (v. 31). But as the avalanche of sin continues downward, God sees, and it is not good. "**Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**" (6:5). The condition of humanity is awful - "**every,**" "**only,**" "**continually.**"

Every part of humanity has been affected by sin. Our minds, our emotions, and our wills are all affected by sin in one way or another. Again, this is why our ethics can never be built on the way things are. Saying "*This is the way I am*" proves nothing, because the way I am is not the way I am supposed to be. "What is" is not what is supposed to be, and this is why we need a new heart. As one of the most prayed Psalms of David says, Psalm 51, "**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, / And in sin my mother conceived me.... Create [bara] in me a clean heart, O God**" (Ps 51:5, 10). And good news, Jesus does give us a new heart. He heals and restores our hardened and broken

hearts, so we can live fully alive. Jesus came to “**bind up the brokenhearted.**” That’s good news we need to hear.

Now take careful note of the word “**corrupt**” in this Genesis passage: “**Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God....God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth**” (6:11-12). This word can also be translated “**destroyed,**” so it could be said that the earth was already destroyed before the flood. Destroyed by sin; destroyed by humanity. So then what God chooses to destroy (v. 13) has already destroyed itself. This is a crucially important truth about the living God: his judgment is him giving humanity the final form of our chosen self-destruction. Humanity was corrupt.

The second reason for the flood was the crossing of boundaries. “**The sons of God saw the daughters of men were beautiful [lit. “Good”]; and they took wives for themselves.**” (6:2). “**Saw... good...took.**” Where have we seen and heard those words before? We have heard them in the story of the fall of humanity: Eve “**saw that the tree was good,**” and she “**took from its fruit and ate**” (3:6). The fall took place because humans crossed a boundary, and then the avalanche of sin leads to another crossing of a boundary. This time the crossing is in the unsettling way of wayward angel to human.

Note the wording of verse 6, why doesn’t it say, “*The sons of men saw the daughters of men...*”? Who are these “**sons of God**” verse 6 is talking about? Many scholars believe verse 6 is

describing wayward angels who, like the angel who became the devil, rebel against God. In Job we hear of **“the sons of God”** coming to meet in a heavenly court. One of them is **“the Satan,”** the serpent of old (Job 1:6; Psalm 29:1). Jude speaks of angels **“abandoning their proper abode”** (Jude 6).

The angelic beings are going against the will of the Creator, blurring the line between heavenly and earthly and breaching a God-given boundary. The result is the emergence of the Nephilim. (Israel will face these giant creatures many times.) The **“sons of god”** taking **“daughters of man”** is the culmination of a chain of **“over-stepping”** of boundaries. Eve and Adam in the Garden take the fruit of the forbidden tree; Cain kills Abel; Lamech takes two wives and celebrates his vengeance after killing a boy.

Of all this crossing of boundaries we read, **“And God was sorry”** and **“grieved”**, understandably so. **“And the LORD was sorry that He had made humans on the earth, and He was grieved to His heart.”** (6:6).

And then verse 8 begins with **“But...”**. We will meet that little word again and again in the Bible. **“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord”** (v. 8). Why Noah? Grace.

Note how the author is careful to keep things in order. **“Noah found favor,”** then **“Noah walked with God”** (v. 9). The author is emphasizing the fact that Noah finds favor with

God before he walks with God. Grace enables him to walk with God.

Grace enabled Noah to walk with God and live in intimacy with him. Grace enabled Noah to believe the strange command to build a boat in the desert with no clouds in the sky. Grace enabled Noah to throw himself on a word from God his contemporaries judged to be absurd.

This leads us to the second question: **"What happened in the flood?"**

The Message paraphrase of Genesis 6:11 says it well, **"As far as God was concerned, the Earth had become a sewer; there was violence everywhere."** So what do you wash a sewer with? Water! The flood involved lots and lots of water: that much is clear!

Then the phrase **"Blot out"** helps us understand what the author wants us to know. **"Blot out"** is repeated three times in the story: **"I will blot out man whom I have created"** (6:7), **"I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made"** (7:4), and **"Thus he blotted out..."** (7:23). God is starting over. The same verb is also used in Psalm 51: **"blot out my transgressions"** (v. 1); **"blot out all my iniquities"** (v. 9). It is a cry for cleansing so we can make a clean start. **"I will blot out"** means **"I will cleanse my creation and start anew."**

Note the cleansing is to be accomplished by removing a protective barrier. **“On that same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky [heavens] were opened”** (7:11). After the flood subsides, we read, **“The fountains of the deep and the floodgate of the sky were closed”** (8:2). What is going on here? Humans have made anti-creation choices, and now they get anti-creation. God is undoing the land of creation (Gen 1:9). The earth is going back to Genesis 1:2, when waters covered its face.

Boundaries have been broken by humans and angels, and judgment comes in, removing boundaries. It is awful. The earth has become a sewer, but it’s getting cleaned.

Humanity is given the full implications of our desire for no boundaries. You want no boundaries then you will have none. The boundary is removed, and the waters break loose. Creation is allowed to sink into chaos. What happened in the flood? Humanity is getting what we deserve: the full implication of our desire for no boundaries.

We come now to the third question: **“What does it mean for us now?”**

We can start to answer this question by asking, *“Now what? What happens after the flood?”* Grace, that is what! Unexpected, undeserved, unmerited grace, in spite of nothing changing in the human heart. Genesis 8:21, **“I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the**

intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.” This is grace! God restores creation even though nothing in us has changed. The waters recede as God puts the boundary back in place simply by grace.

Grace is seen in a number of ways in Genesis 8. Verse 1 says, **"but God remembered Noah."** **"God remembered to save Noah"** is the sense of the verb **"save"**. God is not giving up on humans. God removes the water in verse 2 as **"God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided."** Note this is reminiscent of what God did **"In the beginning,"** and what God will do again at the Red Sea, allowing his people to escape captivity in Exodus 14.

Then in verse 17 God renews the original creative blessing, **"Be fruitful and multiply"** and again at the beginning of chapter 9, **"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."** This, once again, is grace.

God, giving grace upon grace (compare with John 1:16) makes a covenant, an unconditional covenant - not *"I will do this for you, if you do this for me,"* just **"I will."** No expectations placed on humanity; it is a purely unilateral covenant. This is the point of **"the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth"** (8:21). The covenant is not dependent on us doing something. **"...the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth," even so,** the covenant God makes is not determined by anything in us. It is not bound to anything we do. It is all by grace!

A new covenant is made. Genesis 9:9, **“Now behold...”** In the face of human sin (for Noah too is a sinner), God makes a covenant, an agreement. God makes a binding agreement with us and with every living creature, *“from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poor, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.”* God makes a covenant with us while we were still sinners. Again, this is grace.

Take note of this covenant. God promises to keep the world spinning so to speak, **“Seedtime and harvest,... And summer and winter...”**, God affirms the dignity of human life, and the heart of the covenant is 9:11, **“All flesh shall never again be cut off by the waters of the flood, never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”** This is pure grace. God will keep the boundaries intact. Yes, as the story unfolds we realize that there is another cleansing to come when Jesus brings in his new heavens and new earth. But never again will God let the earth be destroyed by flood.

“This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you.... I set My bow in the cloud” (9:12-13). In the Old Testament, the word **“bow”** almost always refers to a **“bow of war.”** **“I set my bow in the cloud”** in the midst of what looks like the flood coming again. In spite of human sin, God puts aside his bow, making the weapon a symbol of peace. Indeed, it has become a sign of a covenant. Every time we see the bow, the rainbow, it is God saying, **“Never again.”**

This then is the beginning of a series of covenants God makes with humanity. We have been referring to Genesis 1-11 as the first half of the Bible and thus Genesis 12 - Revelation 22 is the second half. The second half begins with another covenant, given to Abram, **"I will bless you.... And in you [your seed] all the families of the earth will be blessed"** (vv. 2-3).

God continues to covenant with Israel and then we come to the new covenant, as God calls it in Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34,

"Days are coming... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.... I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be there God, and they will be My people. They will not teach again... saying, "Know the LORD," for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them... for I will forgive their iniquity, and they're sin I will remember no more."

Go to the Lord's Table.

What is the sign of this New Covenant: a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. Jesus, son of Noah, son of Abraham, son of David, seed of the woman, the new Adam, holds up a loaf of bread and cup of wine and institutes this New Covenant He fulfills saying, **"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."** ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."** ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the

Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Because of God's lovingkindness, God keeps His covenant and says, "I will remember my covenant." "I will be Your God, and You shall be my people."

Jesus invites all to the Table to enter into this covenant with Him.

(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's book *The Story of All Stories*.)