Part A

**Genesis 8: 1-4, 15-22**

To recap, we saw that mankind was created to be in harmony with God, but our first parents decided to live out of harmony with him, bringing destruction and death. Cain was the first person we know of who totally abandoned a relationship with the Lord. Instead of living to glorify God, he lived to glorify himself, and his descendants followed after him. Soon even people who had been raised in faithful households were abandoning the Lord and joining with the wicked people, until almost no one was left. So God stepped in and sent the flood in order to save Noah and his family from being killed or corrupted and the true faith and knowledge of God from disappearing. He saved them to preserve the line of the savior who was yet to be born.

When we last left Noah, he was in the ark after 150 days. It must have been dark, unsure, and lonely. Yet Noah and his family surely had enough to do to keep them busy. God had promised to do this great, unimaginable thing, and now it was happening. It must have been disorienting. Last week we focused on how the flood was a sign of judgement, and today we also await a judgement day. But this week I want to look at Noah’s faith.

**But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.**

So after 150 days, about 5 months later, the water finally started to go down. Imagine 5 months inside an ark filled with all these different animals. It must have been a difficult experience.

*5 The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible. 6 After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark 7 and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. 9 But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. 10 He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. 11 When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. 12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.*

*13 By the first day of the first month of Noah’s six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. 14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.*

When Noah entered the ark, it started raining and flooding from the storehouses of the deep for 40 days. The waters continued to stay high for 150 days. Then for another 150 days the waters receded while the ark was resting on Mt. Ararat. Then the earth dried for 70 days. The total time in the ark was 370 days.

It’s interesting to me how God did not communicate with Noah all that much. We might think to ourselves, well, it would be easier for me to believe back in ancient times, because God was always doing miracles and things like that, and God communicated directly with people so they knew it was true. But apparently Noah was not sure if God even would speak to him, so he sent out those birds in order to see for himself when it would be okay to leave the ark.

It was not the direct communication with God that led Noah to be faithful. Remember that Adam and Eve had more direct communication from God than any other people had ever experienced, yet they disobeyed him. Cain had experienced a direct dialogue with God, and yet he disobeyed and rejected God. Many Pharisees and others communicated with God directly through Jesus, and yet they doubted God. It was not communicating with God directly that led to Noah’s great faith. Rather, his faith was simply a confidence that God would do what he said. And look what God did through Noah and his family’s faith. The world was saved, and creation was restored:

**(15) Then God said to Noah, “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.”**

**So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another.**

**Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.**

If this is not remarkable faith, I’m not sure what is. Remember, God had told Noah to take 7 pairs of clean animals. Clean animals do not refer to animals that have been washed. It refers to animals that are suitable for sacrifice like cows and goats. But snakes, monkeys, and other animals are not clean because they are not suitable for sacrifice. And the first thing Noah does when he gets out of the ark is not to build a house. He built an altar and killed some of those animals, offering them up to the Lord. What a statement this made to the Lord. What a statement this made to Noah’s family.

Would this be yours or my first reaction. When we go through a great time of trial, we might be more likely to complain to the Lord than to ramp up our service to him. Hey God, you’re lucky I’m following you at all, with all this crazy stuff going on in my life right now. This ark you sent me is a lot of work, that ought to be enough for you, don’t you think? But no, Noah recognizes that God had been gracious to him and blessed him. Remember, he walked with God. Every step he took, he took in light of the Lord. God deserved this sacrifice, and Noah was mature enough to see it and to pass this insight on to his family.

What does God deserve from us? When we compare the way we use our finances, our time, our energy for the things of God, and we compare it with Noah, do we possibly find ourselves coming up short? Could we show more fruits of faith and thanksgiving in our lives? God loves it when we do. Hear his reaction to Noah’s offering:

**The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.**

**“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”**

 And he goes on to say that the rainbow is the sign of all this. It is remarkable. Nothing has changed in the heart of mankind. The LORD recognizes that every inclination of his heart is still evil from childhood. Think about it. Who was still alive at this time? Just Noah and his family. Even the most pious people are inclined towards evil. If you come to Bible study next week we will read about the sinful thing Noah did, that involved getting drunk, that shows his heart was as corrupted as anyone else’s. Yet God was so pleased with this one act of dedication that he then promises never to destroy the earth again in the same way.

Of course, we live 4 or 5000 years later, and this is obvious to us. It’s not comforting because we take it for granted. Of course God isn’t going to send another flood. Yet this would not be so obvious to Noah. They knew that they were prone to evil. They could just imagine that the world would return to its wicked state and require another flood. And so God told them, after they made a sacrifice to him, that despite their wickedness he would never send another flood, even though mankind might still deserve it.

But that shows us how much God loves it when we walk with him. God is so completely thrilled when we are thankful to him for all that he does for us. It’s a pleasing aroma to him. Even though we are sinful, or as it says here, inclined towards evil from youth. But whenever he awakens even a spark of faith in us, a spark of thanksgiving, God is so pleased. He is so happy to see even one act of obedience or sacrifice that we make for him. The faith, even the faltering, weak faith in our hearts is so pleasing to God that he let’s this wicked world keep going just so that he can enjoy the few times that we few people who still follow him express our faith. It is humbling when you start to realize how much God treasures you and how precious you are to him in Christ.

Part B: Genesis 9:1-7

This middle reading is dealing with societal issues. It is tempting to skip because to some people it might seem a little dry. Probably neither of the following issues seems particularly pressing to your personal life. But the Bible was not just written to help you deal with your personal life. It was written to help you understand why we are the way we are, and what is right and wrong. Vegetarianism is a big thing today, so is veganism. God actually has something to say about that:

**Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.**

This is essentially a re-creation. The world is begun anew, and mankind is begun anew. But there are some differences. Humans were evidently closer to animals before the great rebellion. But they began killing and eating animals sometime after the fall, and now God makes it official. So it’s okay to eat animals. But as a consequence, animals are afraid of us. In the garden of Eden, evidently we would have been close with animals, but now, less so. We go out into the woods, and they run and hide, whether we are there to hunt them or not. So it is okay to kill animals for food, provided you treat them humanely. It would be wrong to eat something alive, which is practiced rarely in some cultures. But aside from that meat is okay. This is good news for me.

But it is still quite clear that there is a great difference between the humans and the animals. Animals should be properly killed before they are eaten, while humans should not be killed in any way at all:

 **“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.“ Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”**

 Here is where God institutes the government. He now gives man the authority to take the life of another man, but what is the condition? If someone murders another person. It seems like this was a big part of the problem in the pre-flood world. In Genesis 4 we saw that Lamech was particularly proud of his violence in murdering people who injured him. In Genesis 6 it points out that the earth was filled with violence. And so God gave mankind a new tool to keep this violence in check: the death penalty. Now today this is a very controversial topic. And you could argue that in our modern society we have the means to keep people alive for a relatively low cost, and that it is better to do so than to execute people. But if you believe the Bible as God’s word than you cannot say that the death penalty is absolutely wrong if it is applied to murderers, because that is exactly what God gave it for. It is to be a curb on violence. It prevents violence from escalating and deters people from committing murder because they know that if they get caught they will be next.

Fortunately we do not live in a society where murder is common, but the death penalty is highly debated, and it is good to see what God says. If a person chooses to commit murder, our government is authorized to punish that murder by taking the person’s life. It’s really not pleasant to think about. You have to take off your rose-colored glasses to deal with issues like these. And for most of us, we live in cozy little cocoons. We are able to shelter ourselves from this kind of thing and so we’re troubled by it. You might even be troubled by this being in the Bible at all. And if that’s so, I would just remind you. The Bible wasn’t written only for you. It is written for you. But it’s also written for all people of all time. It is still true, and as we mature in our faith, as we learn to serve others and engage in the world, we need our bearings on issues like this too.

But notice how God began and ended with a call for Noah and his family to “increase in number and fill the earth.” This was mankind’s original mission. You can see how deformed that mission has become, yet it is still our job. But notice that the command to “subdue” the earth is not repeated. Because of our sinful state, God takes some of that away from us. The animals largely take care of themselves. When we try to take care of the earth, often we end up making it worse. Simply spreading humanity and remaining faithful to God is a big enough challenge for us today.

Part C: **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**

 Noah had faith. Like Noah, we want to be faithful to God. So what does that look like? Well, just like Noah, faith is a certainty, confidence, or you might say a strong trust in something we hope for but we do not see. In fact, the word “trust” is a good synonym for “faith.” And just to add to it, the word “believe” in the Bible, in Hebrew and Greek, is the same word that means “faith” or “trust” as a noun. In other words, to believe, to have faith, to trust, these are all the same thing in the Bible.

How many of you have ever bought something on the Internet? If you do, perhaps you remember the first time that you bought something with a credit card on the Internet. It was scary. It took faith. Faith that these people were who they said they were. Faith that our systems of laws would protect you if they stole your money. If you ever got married, you said wedding vows. It requires faith in the other person. You have to trust them. You believe them when they make the promises.

This is what God wants from us, and in fact he works faith in us through the power of his Holy Spirit. He makes us promises and then melts our hard hearts so that we believe them. Faith is not just “well, I think, kinda maybe sorta.” When God told Noah that the flood would come, Noah didn’t mess around. He built the ark. He would not do that if he were not convinced it was true. We all live on faith. We all trust something. Maybe you trust your retirement account. Maybe you trust a family member you have always been able to rely on. Maybe you have faith in a government program or a pension. Many people today have faith in all kinds of religions as well. Many people are convinced that the false God Allah will take care of them. Many people have faith that humans evolved from other animals. It’s something they cannot see, but it is something they are certain of. Its faith.

You might have heard this before. I assume that there are lakes that freeze over here in the winter. If you are going ice fishing, would you rather go out and have a lot of faith in thin ice, or a little faith in 2 foot thick ice? A little bit of faith in the thick ice will keep you alive, a lot of faith in the thin ice could get you killed. You see, whether your faith is strong or weak, what really matters is what your faith is in.

**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

It is our faith that pleases God, not the actions we do themselves. All of our actions are marred by sin. Nothing we do measures up to God’s standards of perfection. But when we trust God, we are connected to him. We are his. This means we are connected to Jesus, whose blood washes our sins away and makes us pure and holy in God’s sight. And so even though the things we do for God are still filled with sin, and even though our faith might be very weak at times, it still saves us, because it connects us to Jesus. So our faith, which is a gift from God, is pleasing to God. So pleasing that God even rewards it, like we saw in the first reading.

I think it’s very important for us to recognize this. If you don’t believe that God could ever actually be pleased with you, you will find it hard to trust him or to enjoy serving him. You will look at God as a task master who is never satisfied. But God is satisfied, and he is very pleased with you through faith. He loves it when we seek him. He is even eager to reward us. Noah is a good example:

**By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**

Noah’s faith led him to do something that looked ridiculous to the rest of the world. But his faith connected him to God, and therefore to Christ, and in that sense his faith made him righteous, when means right with God. And this saved him.

The same situation applies to us today. Do you trust God when he says that you are his child by faith? Do you trust what he says when he says that Jesus died for you? Do you believe you will be given eternal life in Christ? That is how God has made you right with him. And so since this is true, we live differently from people in this world. We know about treasures in heaven. Jesus said to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven rather than on earth. This requires us to trust in something we have not yet seen and live in a way that people of this world will see and think, “What a weirdo.” But it will be worth it, because even if the world rejects us, God will accept us through Christ. God will give an eternal reward. God will save you and your family through trusting his promises. There is no better reward than that.