

“God Will Always Preserve His People”

Genesis 7:1-24

March 19, 2023

3rd Sunday Before Easter

Pr. Josh Anderson

Our sermon text this morning is found in Genesis 7:1-24. Listen now to God’s holy and inerrant word.

It is more to be desired than gold; even much fine gold. It is sweeter also than honey; sweeter than the drippings of the honeycomb.

*Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” 5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.*

*6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9 two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.*

*13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.*

*17 The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Prayer...

In these early chapters of Genesis, God is giving us the true history of the world.

These stories are given to us not only so we can make individual applications to our lives, but also so that we will be wise in the way that we contemplate the course of history as we look back through the ages, as we consider our present moment in time today, and we look forward to the ages to come.

The great flood that God sends here during the time of Noah is a vivid and striking picture of the judgment that our Lord Jesus will bring upon the world on the last Day in his second coming, but the flood is not only a powerful picture of the last judgment — it is also a foreshadowing of all the ways in which God will judge human wickedness and evil throughout the course of all human history.

And the Scriptures are full of God enacting these kinds of large scale judgments.

God judges Egypt for her wickedness in the plagues he sends upon their nation and by drowning Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea.

God judges the city of Jericho for its evil by causing its walls to crumble, and enacts judgment against the wickedness of the Canaanites generally through the invasion of the Israelites.

Later in history, God judges the sin of the northern tribes of Israel through the Assyrian empire, only to follow that by judging the wickedness and evil of Assyria through the Babylonians.

Babylon then is used by God to judge the sin and hardheartedness of Judah as the Babylonian empire destroys Jerusalem and the temple and carries her people off into exile.

But then, as we read in the book of Daniel, God judges the wickedness of Babylon by bringing down the Medes and Persians on them and sends Judah back to the promised land.

And of course, this kind of intrusive judgment of God takes place all throughout history, as God again and again breaks in to judge human wickedness, to bring down one nation, one people, and elevate another in its place.

Cities and nations and economies which seemed to be strong, which seemed to be indestructible, turn out to be hollow and rotten and ready to collapse.

Empires which had no rival, that ruled large swaths of the world, are brought low by the hand of God.

Psalm 46, the psalm we prayed this morning, promises us that these things will take place. As the psalmist writes:

*The nations rage; the kingdoms totter; God utters his voice, the earth melts... Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth...He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariot with fire.*

God's comes in judgment again and again and again, all throughout the history of the world.

Beloved, we should not be surprised when God judges evil, even in dramatic and difficult ways. In fact, if we are wise, we should expect it. And if we are mature, we should long for it.

For the Scriptures promise us that God ordains and rules over history in this way.

And we certainly should not fall into the trap of believing that our own culture and nation, with its embrace of decadence and its approval of wickedness, is immune to God's judgment because of its economic or military power.

But how should we, as the people of God, live in a world where God is constantly bringing upheaval through his judgment, in a world where tomorrow is unknown to us, in a world where the future is unpredictable from our limited, human perspective?

Beloved, we should not be afraid.

For God has promised that he will always preserve his people, even in the midst of the judgment he brings on this world.

Listen again to Psalm 46, where the Psalmist is undoubtedly reflecting on the judgment that God brought on the world through the great flood in Noah's time, and is teaching us how we are to think about God's judgments in our time:

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*

Beloved, what the Psalmist is describing here is not a mere metaphor.

For there was indeed once a time during history when the earth gave way, and the mountains were literally moved into the heart of the sea.

And in that time, just as in ours, God was the refuge and strength of his people, a very present help in trouble.

Our passage this morning begins with the Lord instructing Noah, along with his families and the animals, to go into the Ark, the great wooden house or box that he had spent years building at the Lord's command.

The Lord tells Noah, *"In seven days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground."*

I think it's worth imagining this moment from Noah's perspective. You've been waiting for this day for years. Probably decades. Maybe even as long as a century.

Years ago, God promised that he would judge the wickedness of the world with a great flood, and now, finally the day has come.

Noah has no choice in that moment but to put himself fully into the hands of God. He hasn't had a chance to have a dry run with the Ark. There's been no chance to practice what's about to happen.

And Noah probably has a million questions that haven't been fully answered — questions like how long will exactly we be floating in this Ark? (and where's it going to land?); questions like, how do we know that we won't sink and drown? And are we sure we have enough food for the animals? And what happens if I didn't build this Ark exactly right? And so on.

But there's no alternative for Noah. He doesn't get to have all his questions answered first.

Rather, in that moment, Noah must place himself and his wife and his sons and their wives, along with all the animals, directly into the hands of God.

We read about this in verses 13 and following. And we shouldn't miss the drama of this moment.

This, beloved, is what faith and obedience look like in this world. Trusting that what God says is true, trusting that God will be faithful to his promise, even when we don't know all the details about how he's going to work it out.

We're called to embrace this kind of faith and obedience in a hundred different ways in our lives - often in small ways, but sometimes in dramatic moments as well.

This is what faith and obedience looked like for Noah:

*13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him.*

And then we get to what I think is one of the most powerful phrases in all of the narratives that we read in the Scriptures.

At the end of verse 16, after Noah and his family and the animals have all entered the Ark, the narrator comments: *And the LORD shut him in.*

Noah didn't close the door behind him. God closed it. Noah went into the Ark, and God sealed him in. There was no going back. Only forward into whatever future God had prepared for him and his family and the human race as a whole.

At this point, Noah has completely surrendered control to God — or rather, God has stripped Noah of any control he might once have had.

He's there, in the Ark, with his family and the animals, waiting for the rain to fall. And there's no going back. Because God has shut them in.

And the effect of God shutting the door of the Ark is not only that the way out is now closed. It's also a sign of God's blessing, God's presence with Noah as he waits in the Ark for the flood to come.

It's impossible for me when I read that verse to not think about how, all of our lives, all of our years as believers we say: "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

We confess, again and again, for decades, that we believe in the resurrection of the body.

But when the day of our death comes, we have to commit ourselves to that belief without any reservations. For after we die, it is God who seals our bodies in the ground.

We articulate with our mouths all our lives that we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, but in the end, we have fully give up control, we can't hedge any of our bets, we must, in the end, give ourselves fully into God's hands.

In our death, God shuts us in, God seals us in the ground — and we must trust that, like Noah had to trust as he waited in the Ark — that this too is a place where Jesus remains united to us and that God will one day raise us from the dead.

What happens after God shuts Noah into the Ark is extraordinary.

It's impossible to even fully understand the scale and power of what this means in physical terms, but Genesis tells us that "On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights."

It seems that water came both from under the earth, as well as from the sky.

It must have been overwhelming and awesome and terrifying to behold.

The waters rose and rose and rose until all the earth was covered.

And not only the low lying places, not just the valleys and the coastal areas, but even the highest mountains were eventually covered with water.

That's remarkable to think about.

Imagine a mountain scene that you're familiar with, and looking out over those peaks, and the rain falling and the water rising and rising and rising until those mountains are completely covered, buried under the waves.

I mean that's overwhelming to consider. But it must have been terrifying as well.

As verses 21 and 22 tells us, the flood meant death for all living creatures:

*And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.*

But the Ark, Genesis tells us, was safe.

God's flood, which brings death for all living creatures, actually lift the Ark and the waters support almost and almost cradle the Ark in the narrator's description.

As we read in verses 17 and 18: *"The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters."*

The waters destroyed all those outside the Ark, but as the waters rose and rose and rose, those waters actually bore the Ark up, they made it soar, they lifted the Ark above the highest mountains, those waters lifted Noah and his family and the animals up to the heavens, and held them there, floating, safe and sound — completely secure, completely protected — and in this way, the Ark truly became a temple, a place of God's special presence and protection and a demonstration of him being with his people — even in the midst of the worst judgment that our world has ever seen.

As we close this morning, I just want you to think about that picture, beloved, this picture of salvation that Genesis gives us. Think of the world, turned into one giant ocean.

Think of the waters covering even the mountain ranges.

Think of the waves, think of the darkness, as the rain falls without interruption for days and days and days.

And think of the Ark, floating, being cradled by those waters, safe and dry and warm and secure.

Think of those waters lifting the Ark and its inhabitants up to the heavens, soaring over the mountains, being lifted up to God.

Think of the Ark — the only place of safety, the only place of protection, the only place of refuge — because the Ark is where God is, the Ark is where Living God is dwelling with his people.

And then hear again the words of Psalm 46:

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.  
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

*Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.*

*“Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Indeed, beloved, no matter what upheavals come in the details of our lives, no matter what changes take place on the grand stage of history, no matter what judgment God pours out on the earth, this is the promise that he has made to us:

*God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.*

*For the LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.