

GOD REMEMBERS HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS

I think most people are familiar with what is sometimes called the "domino effect." How one domino knocks over another and sets off a chain reaction. I read something amazing about that this week. A physicist named Lorne Whitehead published an article and was featured in Smithsonian magazine demonstrating the results of his research. What he demonstrated is that a domino is capable of knocking over another domino that is one-and-a-half times its size. So a two-inch domino can topple a three-inch domino. A three-inch domino can topple a four-and-a-half-inch domino. Here's where it becomes mind-blowing: The twenty-third domino could knock over the Eiffel Tower. Starting with a domino just 5 millimeters tall, it would only take 29 progressively-larger dominoes to wipe out the Empire State Building.¹

I thought about this as I studied the story of the flood this week because the Bible teaches us that spiritual decisions create a kind of chain reaction that increases dramatically as we walk through history. It's how spiritual life works. You see it in the early stories in Scripture, and it is wise to bank on it in your life. Curtis talked about this in the sermon last week on Cain and Abel. He pointed out that that story pictures sin as a predatory spiritual force. We don't just commit a sin and move on unaffected. *"For every act of disobedience motivated by pride, idolatry and distrust of God sin gains more ground in the human heart and in God's good world."* That's sobering but what if every act of trusting faith and obedience, also gains more ground in the human heart and in God's good world? That's part of the story about Noah.

In the domino example, the reasons dominos have that kind of power is because of the laws of physics. Do you realize there are also spiritual laws of life? The reason our decisions are so powerful is because of those spiritual laws and ultimately because of who God is and how he governs his relationship to our world. That's what is revealed in the famous story of the flood. It takes up four chapters of the book of Genesis. **Genesis 6-9. *What it shows us is that no matter how corrupt the world becomes to walk with God is wisdom because God graciously remembers his faithful servants even when he is dramatically judging human corruption.***

I. THE STORY OF THE FLOOD SHOWS US GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD.

To understand it correctly we need to place it in the larger story of which it is a part. Genesis, the first book in the Bible can be divided into two major sections. I use the words “Old Testament” to help me remember the storyline of the Old Testament. So it begins with “O” for Origins. This is the first section of Genesis, chapters 1-11. It focuses on four major stories or events: the creation, The fall, The flood, and the tower of Babel. Then the “L” stands for leading men. This is the second, longer section of Genesis, chapters 12-50. It tells the story of four leading men Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and Joseph.

In the “Origins” section there is also a fourfold pattern that emerges and lays a foundation for the rest of the Bible. Think of four key ideas: 1.) Rule, 2.) Rebellion, 3.) Righteous judgment, 4.) Redemption. In the creation account, God is not only creator but ruler. Adam and Eve rebel against God because they do not trust him and they believe the lie that they can be *like* God deciding for themselves what is good and evil. God brings righteous judgment in the curse but also a promise of redemption in that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. That same pattern repeats itself in the story of the flood.

God’s relationship to the world is revealed four ways in the flood!

A. First, God cares about this world. He is not indifferent.

Genesis 6:5 says, *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Then **verse 6** says *the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart.* These human comparisons express the depth of God’s involvement. He sees – he is paying attention. He *grieves*. Sometimes good people are grieved by the evil in the world, and they wonder, *does God care?* The story of the flood shows us that God cares. God grieves.

B. Second, God is patient. He is not impulsive.

If the story of Cain showed us that sin is a predatory force that can worm it’s way deep inside us. *The background for the story of the flood shows us that sin can also be a contagious epidemic that spreads so widely it infects a whole culture over a long period of history.* God is not a volatile, impatient God with a hair-trigger temper. In **2 Peter 2:5** Peter says Noah was a preacher of righteousness. So year in and year out Noah preached, and people did not listen. **1 Peter 3** tells us God was *patient* in the days of Noah. God waited and waited,

and everyone mistook his patience for indulgence and continually dismissed his warnings. The story of the flood shows reveals the reality. God is not indifferent or impulsive. God is patient

C. Third, God is Righteous. He does not overlook evil forever.

Some people misread the patience of God. When things seem to go on unchanged, they think God isn't going to do anything ever. That's a mistake. Jesus talked about this. **Matthew 24:37-39** *For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

This ancient story of the flood is given to us early in the Bible to show us the truth about God's relationship to our world. God cares, He is patient, but he is righteous. He will bring judgment. And...

D. Fourth, God remembers those who walk with him. He does not forget.

The heart of the story begins in **Genesis 6:13**. God tells Noah he is going to bring judgment and God commands Noah to build an Ark. So Noah does what God says. He built the ark, which is a huge ship with three levels and separate rooms. All the animals came two by two, male and female. When Noah and his family and the animals get in the ark, and the rains begin to fall. **Genesis 7:17-18** says, *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.* The last verse of Genesis 7 says the waters prevailed for 150 days. And then **Genesis 8** begins with the words, *But God remembered Noah.* When we're told that God remembered Noah it does not just mean that God recalled his existence. It means God acted for him. God acted on behalf of him and blessed him, provided for him, protected him.

The water had prevailed for 150 days! When the flood first began the ark shuddered free of its supports and began to float on the waters. Before too long the earth was underwater. Days went by while the ark drifted. God, who had been guiding and directing Noah seems to go silent. The last time God had spoken was seven days before the flood. That was on the 10th day in the month of *Iyar* the second month, which

corresponds to our April-May. The next time God speaks is on the 27th day of the same month but one year and 17 days later! Imagine, after the initial drama, terror, excitement falls away you are floating and waiting and wondering. Sometimes we wonder: has God forgotten us? Has he forgotten me, you? No.

Scholars point out that the story of Noah is artistically structured to draw the focus to this one key phrase at the very center of the story as the central message of the story. **God remembered Noah.** *And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.* God remembers God remembers those who walk with him in this life. God remembers to care for, watch over and bless.

Does Noah know this at this point? Maybe. God doesn't seem to tell him what to expect or even what to do. Noah sent out birds, testing to see how much the waters receded. He sent out a Raven that never returned. He sent a dove. It came back. He sent a second dove. It returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in its mouth. That was a good sign! He sent a third dove which never returned. At this point, he removed the top of the ark and saw dry ground. **Genesis 8:15** says then God spoke again and said go out from the ark.

Noah and his family left the ark, and the first thing they did was build an altar and make sacrifices to God. And then God spoke again and made a covenant with Noah. God promised he would never bring a flood like this again. It doesn't mean there will never be local disasters or that there will not be a *final* judgment. But that God will not hit reset on humanity and start this story over again. God will preserve the earth until the final judgment and then make all things new. At the end of the story, God says the rainbow in the sky will be the sign of this promise.

If we are willing to let it, this story can teach so much about God and his relationship to our world. 1.) He cares, 2.) He is patient, 3.) He is righteous, 4.) He remembers those who walk with him.

There is a place in the book of Romans, **Romans 11:22** where the Bible says, *Note then, the kindness and the severity of God.* The crucial word there is "*and*" in the context he is saying don't just look at the kindness of God only. On the other hand, do not just think about the severity of God alone. The story of the flood reveals both. Modern people struggle with this. One reason is because people have become used to relying on their hunches and feelings instead of receiving the revelation God has given of himself in the Bible. One of the purposes

of the ancient paths we have talked about recently is that by worship, prayer and listening to the Bible we unlearn the pride that lets us imagine we can rely on what we feel instead of what God says. If the corruption of humanity pictured in a story like this is true, then we can expect that our own fallen nature imparts a degree of perversity and even hostility against God to all that we think about God. We have to counter that by humbly relying on what God has said in Scripture.

Many scholarly arguments have been developed in defense of the righteousness of the judgment of God. But there are few things more compelling than the simple fact that Jesus is the one who speaks about God's judgment so often. And in the strongest way, he tells us that God is good. In **Luke 18:19** He says *No one is good except God alone*. God is the only one who is truly, perfectly, thoroughly and eternally good. Who are we to think that we hold the intellectual and moral high ground from which you can judge Jesus' view of God and God's revelation of himself as if we know better than he does who and how he should judge? We do not know better than him because he is God and he is good, and we are not God, so we have to let God be God. *When we do that we discover that God cares deeply, waits patiently, judges righteously and remembers those who walk with him. Even when God is dramatically judging human corruption, he faithfully remembers those who walk with him.*

So there is a personal lesson for us in all of this...

II. THE STORY OF THE FLOOD CALLS US TO WALK WITH GOD.

Genesis 6:9 says: *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.* Did you know that apart from all the genealogies in which he is named Noah is singled out for mention in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Luke, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Hebrews? God wants you to walk with him the way Noah walked with him.

A. To walk with God means God isn't just a part of your life, God is at the core of your life.

Look at the three words that describe Noah.

1. To be righteous means to do the right thing. If you are singing you either sing the right notes or the wrong notes. If you are counting change, you get the right amount or the wrong amount. What's true with money and music is true in your moral and spiritual life. There is a right and wrong way to live, to use words, to use time, to use your

sexuality, to live relationally, to respond and react to hardship. To be righteous is to be guided by the principle that you want to do the right thing.

2. The word blameless applies the idea of righteousness to all of life. It doesn't mean sinless; no one achieves that. It means to be complete or whole. It means you are going after righteousness, inside and out, actions, attitudes, and emotions. Not just sometimes, with some people, in some areas but all the time and in everything.

The last phrase takes us to the heart of a truly righteous life:

3. Noah walked with God. The word *walked* with God stresses that your every day, step-by-step way of life is one of relationship with God. It is this everyday step-by-step walk with God that has the positive and powerful domino effect of shaping the trajectory of your life.

When you walk with God, God isn't just a part of your life he is at the core of your life. And there is this...

B. To walk with God means while the world goes its way, you go God's way.

When **verse 9** says, Noah was *blameless in his generation*. Alexander Maclaren said, "Noah stands alone 'in his generation' like some single tree, green and erect, in a forest of blasted and fallen pines." When you walk with God, it doesn't matter what anyone and everyone else does. Let them go their way; you go God's way. Don't worry about being in the minority, standing alone, or being lonely. The more corrupt the world becomes, the more you need the clarity and courage to walk with God. Every choice to stand alone has that domino effect, that chain reaction of influence that gains ground for God in your life.

And this is crucial...

C. To walk with God means your faith isn't just accepting of the idea of God, faith is trusting in God and acting on your faith.

Hebrews 11:7 says, *By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.* There is a phrase repeated several times in this story: *Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him* (**Genesis 6:22, 7:5**). Why did Noah do all that God commanded him? Because of faith. He put his trust in God.

The gospel emphasizes that we are saved by faith in Jesus. We do not earn our salvation by our own righteousness. The last line in **Hebrews 11:7** says that Noah *became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*. To be an heir means to receive something from someone else. So ultimately the righteousness that matters most was not Noah's own, impressive and yet imperfect righteousness but a righteousness he received by faith. The apostle Paul said the same thing. Listen to **Philippians 3:8-9**. *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.* Paul says when it came to what would actually save him from the judgment of God – he counted his righteousness as loss in order that he could be found in Christ. Christ is like the ark. When the flood of judgment comes what actually saves you is whether or not you are in him.

Conclusion

Jesus is the ark for us. He saves us from the flood of judgment by taking its full force fall on the cross for us as he dies for our sins. His resurrection was a new beginning. You can be part of that. Your best efforts cannot build a life that can withstand the storm of God's righteous judgment. But if you get into Jesus, you will be saved by him. How do you get in him? By faith. You turn to him and trust in him and

We are saved by faith, but faith when real, *if it is real*, shouldn't it change us? Let your faith be a force for change in your life. Every seemingly little domino-like step you take that is based on faith: to spend time with God, listening, praying, doing the right thing, loving, enduring, going God's way because you are putting your faith in him, it all builds a powerful, spiritual domino effect in your life in which you gain ground for deepening walk with God. It all matters to God. ***Even in the midst of God's most dramatic judgments. God remembers the man or the woman who walks with him.*** That does not mean life will be easy. Noah's life was not, but it does mean God will use even the most destructive forces that come into your life not to destroy you but to lift you up and give you a new beginning. Believe that and walk with God

Amen.

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/just-twenty-nine-dominoes-could-knock-down-the-empire-state-building-2232941/>