



But God... Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples, Series #12

Genesis 8:1-22

David Sunday

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We have already been greatly enriched. I pray that what I am going to share from Genesis 8 will serve to reinforce from God's Word the theme of God's faithfulness that has pervaded all our worship today. Please turn in your Bible to Genesis 8.

Awhile back, Bill Moyers hosted a series on PBS called "Genesis: A Living Conversation." He invited biblical scholars, religious leaders and people from our culture to dialogue with him about the contemporary application of the archetypal stories that we find in the book of Genesis. When he came to the story of the great flood that we began looking at last week, Moyers asked the panelists, "What headline would you write if you were covering the great flood of Noah's day?" One panelist suggested this: "God Destroys the World in a Flood." But a pastor spoke up and said, "No, it really needs to be this: 'God Gives Humans a Second Chance.'"

If you were on that panel, which one of those headlines would you go with? Which do you think captures the main claim of this narrative in the Bible? Which one better expresses the Holy Spirit's intention in telling us this great, true story? Both of those headlines are true. It is true that God destroyed the world in a flood.

I hope you believe, as I do, in the absolute authority, reliability and inerrancy of Scripture, which presents this historical account as a fact of history. The text took great pains, even going down to dates, to tell us that this is something that really happened. In the newsletter this week, I am going to write [an article](#) to help you answer the question, "Why do we believe in Noah, the ark and the great flood?" In short, the answer from Scripture is: the prophets believed it; Jesus believed it; the apostles believed it; and they all taught that this story is pointing to another historical reality that will happen in the future, which is the judgment that will come on the face of all the earth.

We don't need to go to Mount Ararat in Eastern Turkey or in Armenia to find a piece of wood from Noah's ark to believe this actually happened any more than we need to go to Jerusalem to find a piece of wood from the cross of Jesus to believe that really happened. We trust in the authority of Scripture. My article this week will show you some places in Scripture that point back to this great flood as a historical fact.

It is true that God destroyed the world in a great flood, but I think the second headline captures the intent of the Holy Spirit better: "God Gives Humans a Second Chance." I prefer to say, "God gives humans a new beginning." That is what is happening here. The Reformer John Calvin commented, "It is not to be marveled that there was a flood, but that there's only been one." That is the marvel.

This is not merely a story of destruction and judgment; it is a story of a new beginning for humanity. It is about a God Who, in wrath, remembers mercy. He is a God Who promised to make a new creation and He did not rip us out of His story but began again. It is full of good news for us. So how can we be convinced that this story of destruction is ultimately a story of grace and good news?

First, we can look at the structure of this story as Moses, the author of Genesis, told it. He used a chronological sequence throughout the narrative. Follow this with me:

- Genesis 7:4a: *"For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights..."*
- Genesis 7:10: *"And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth."*
- Genesis 7:17a: *"The flood continued forty days on the earth."*
- Genesis 7:24: *"And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days."*

We are moving up a literary mountain, and we have seven, seven, 40 and 150. Now, looking at chapter eight, as the flood began to dissipate from the earth, what do we see?

- Genesis 8:3b: *"At the end of 150 days the waters had abated..."*
- Genesis 8:6-7a: *"At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven."*
- Genesis 8:10, 12: *"He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark ... Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore."*

As we had before, there is a literary structure here: seven, seven, 40, 150, (coming down from the mountain) 150, 40, seven, seven. I am only going to use this word once. This is

something biblical scholars like to find all over the place in the Bible: a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary structure that builds toward the middle. What you see in the middle is very often what the author wants to be drawing our attention to. So, what is at the middle of this narrative? Genesis 8:1-3, which begins with these monumental words: *“But God remembered Noah...”*

Let’s start with the first two words, “But God...” The late James Montgomery Boice was not a man given to exaggeration, so we need to listen carefully when he says this: “May I put it quite simply? If you understand those two words—‘But God’—they will save your soul. If you recall them daily and live by them, they will transform your life completely.” But God...

Back in 2010, when my wife, Kate, was going through her cancer treatments and surgery, our dear brother, Horst Fiebig, started sharing “But God” verses with Kate to encourage her through the ordeal, and they continue to trade those verses back and forth today. Just a few weeks ago, Horst sent another email with another “But God” verse that he had found in the Bible. The list gets longer and longer.

What is it about these words that thrills our souls with hope and puts iron in our spiritual bloodstream? “But God” breeds hope—hope that we are not confined to our own resources, defined by our own failures and consigned to live forever with the dreadful consequences of our sin. “But God” speaks of a Rescuer Who doesn’t wait for us to find Him, a Savior Who intervenes and is relentless in mercy when we are helpless to save ourselves. Whenever we see “But God” in Scripture, it is always signifying a great turning point.

Pastor Casey Lute wrote a book entitled But God and here is what he said:

To the left of ‘But God’ in Scripture appear some of the worst human atrocities, characterized by disobedience and rebellion. To the left of God is hopelessness, darkness and death (Genesis 6-7). But to its right, following ‘But God’ (Genesis 8-9), readers of Scripture will find hope, light, and life. Following God’s intervention, the story of Scripture becomes one of grace, righteousness, and justice.

That is what we see here in this great narrative of Scripture. *“But God remembered Noah...”* That is the first time the words “But God” appear in Scripture, and it is all over the place. God remembered Noah.

By God’s grace, Noah was a man of faith, but he was also a man. Do you not wonder what went through his mind and heart as he was tossed about on the ark for 40 days, waiting week after week and month after month, as the waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days? Did Noah fear that the ark would crash against the rocks and capsize? Could he hear the rain pounding on the roof of the ark at night? Was he able to sleep? Did he wonder when the waters stopped

where they would go? “How is God going to take care of this? How long is this going to take? Will this ark become like a huge, floating coffin in which my entire family and I will die?”

Did Noah ask questions like this? Being a godly and righteous man, Noah was more sensitive to his sin than the people of the world were. I wonder if Noah, as he saw God’s sweeping destruction on all of humanity, was worried, “How am I, a sinful man, going to live in the presence of a holy God? What if I sin and God destroys me?” I wonder if Noah ever felt forgotten and abandoned by God in the midst of the great storm, this universal judgment on sin, when only he and his family remained.

What would that have been like? We do not know. Nevertheless, this we know: God remembered Noah. That does not mean God ever forgot about Noah. When the Scriptures say God remembers someone, it is referring to a covenantal commitment. It means God moves toward this person. He chose to work on Noah’s behalf, for his good and for the good of all creation, including all the beasts and livestock. God remembered them, too. Does God remember cattle? Then surely He will not forget His own people.

How does God move toward Noah to work on his behalf and for his good? There are three ways this narrative shows us how God moved toward Noah to work on his behalf and for his good. God sent a wind; God gave a sign; God spoke a word.

God Sent a Wind

We see that God sent a wind in 8:1-5. God dried up water with the wind. I do not know where all that water went. Did God deepen the basins of the ocean to contain all that water? Did He raise the mountains higher? We do not know for sure how God did it, but this we know: God did it with ease.

Psalm 104:6-9 describes God’s creative, majestic power like this:

*You covered it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.
The mountains rose, the valleys sank down
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.*

That is our God! Behold the majesty and the glory of our God. He did this for a man. He remembered Noah and He sent a great wind to dry off the waters from the earth. Let’s be emboldened by this truth. There is not an angel in heaven that God will not send to our aid if we need him. There is not a wind in any corner of the globe that God is not able to guide to us if it is

necessary for our welfare. There is no wave of the sea that will not obey the Lord's command concerning you and me, His people.

We might feel shut in a tight and uncomfortable place in our lives, with a storm raging around us. You might feel like you are stuck on something like Noah's ark right now, but remember this: God has not forgotten you. God has all the resources of heaven and earth at His disposal to move to your aid. I do not know when your deliverance will come. Noah did not know, either. He knew when he had to get on that ark, but God never told him when he would get off the ark. Noah did not know how long this would last, but it must have been a comfort for him to hear that soft thud the night of verse four, when the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. He realized, "Though battered and beaten, this boat is not broken. My refuge has held firm and secure. I have been kept safe from the deluge of God's wrath. I am safe and secure here from all alarm."

However, Noah still had to wait. That is where we are, too. We are waiting patiently for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Our trials may batter and bruise us, but they will end at the time God has appointed. In the meantime, God has all the resources in heaven and on earth to work on our behalf. God sent a wind.

God Gave a Sign

We see in 8:6-12 that God gave a sign. It begins, "*At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.*"

Then we get this image of lingering loveliness in verse eight:

Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him.

What a beautiful picture that is! God gathers us into the ark of safety. However, it is even more beautiful as we read on: "*He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.*"

In many cultures and throughout the ages, this picture of a dove with an olive branch has become a universal symbol of peace. It is here in the Bible, telling us that in wrath God

remembers mercy. It is a sign that He is building a new creation. There is hope: God brings salvation out of judgment.

How has God encouraged you during times of great distress? Can you think of ways that God has sent a sign that conveyed to you His care, love and peace? I remember notes that we received at just the right time, gifts that came in the mail or a place in Colorado Springs where, one month before Kate's surgery, we were able to experience God's presence and peace in a little refuge due to the kindness of some friends in our church family. God sends His doves—His servants—with freshly plucked olive leaves so as to say to us in the words of the song we sing: "Through the love of God our Savior, all will be well." God sends a sign.

God Spoke a Word

Why didn't Noah just come out of the Ark here in verse 13? It was the 601st year. Remember, these are not calendar years. They are the years of Noah's life. It is the 601st year in the first day of the first month. So, what is this? It's Noah's birthday! It is his 601st birthday. What did he discover on his birthday? The waters dried up from the earth. Why didn't he just leave the ark at once? What a great birthday gift to see dry earth!

"And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry." He was on the ark a long time and I don't think it was always a whole lot of fun to be there. Someone said, "It was like living in a zoo with your in-laws." I love how Kent Hughes describes it:

Think of it: a five-month lock-in with Mrs. Noah, his three sons and their three wives and a complete menagerie of the world's animals, birds and crawlers. Five months of stable muck and bilge water, daughters-in-law and mother-in-law, and seasickness. There must have been times where Noah wished they had hit an iceberg.

But he was patient. He came in through the door that God had opened. He watched God shut that door and seal him in. We read about that last week. God shut the door and Noah waited until God said, "That door can open and you can come out now." He waited another 57 days before the Word of God came to him in verse 15. Noah was on the ark exactly one year and ten days after the flood began. During that time, he never heard the Word of God. He didn't have a Bible, of course. God never spoke. Noah just had to trust in the words that he had heard, and then he had to wait.

When we try to get in a hurry, we get ahead of God's Word and God's direction. We are not listening to what He has spoken in His Word. When we start rushing around trying to get things done, we end up losing time, not saving time. We end up making things worse, not finding

relief. We need to say what the Psalmist said: *“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope”* (Psalm 130:5).

That is what Noah did. He waited for the Word of the Lord and the Lord said:

“Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

When Noah heard that command from God, he obeyed completely. Verses 18-19 tell us exactly how he obeyed by doing what God had told him to do. At last, God spoke. God sent a wind. God gave a sign. God spoke His Word. We see God’s grace, covenant mercy and kindness toward Noah in that. This brings us to the last section in verses 20-22.

Act 1 of a New Creation

Imagine what it would have been like for Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law to step onto that green earth after the flood had destroyed it. A whole new world lay before them. There were no roads, houses or civilization, i.e., no life. We remember back in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina came through the Gulf Coast of America—all the devastation, all the rebuilding and all the search-and-rescue efforts that had to take place. But here in Noah’s world, no one cried out for help. No one hugged onto a tree branch or on a rooftop waiting for rescue. There was no search-and-rescue. All was silent.

I wonder what that was like. Scary? Overwhelming? Think of all the work that lay ahead of them. Was it exhilarating? I don’t know. But this I do know: what happened next in verse 20 was surprising. What was the first thing on Noah’s mind as he stepped off that ark? Worship. “I must worship the Lord.”

“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” I wonder what his sons thought of that. “We have spent all this time trying to conserve these animals from destruction, Dad! Only a small number of them remain. Every species is an endangered species and you are going to take them and sacrifice them to the Lord?” But the thing on Noah’s mind was, “I am a sinner; God is a holy God. I must make a sacrifice of thanksgiving and atonement for sin.”

This sincere, unprompted worship of Noah’s heart was pleasing to the Lord. Look at verse 21: *“And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man...’”* How do we know what God said in His heart?

He reveals His heart to us in His Word. God said, "I'm never going to destroy the world in a flood again because of man." These are breathtaking words, because in wrath God remembers mercy.

The ESV Study Bible has a helpful note on this. It says, "The Hebrew word for 'pleasing' conveys the idea of rest and tranquility." Did you know that Noah means "rest"? When his father, Lamech (who was different from the Lamech in chapter four), named his son "Noah," this is what he said, "*Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.*"

How did Noah bring relief to humanity? Last week, we saw Noah that heard the Word of God and acted upon it. He found the place of refuge that God had appointed and ran to it. He found refuge there, so he was preserved as a remnant from whom the rest of humanity will now be reborn and a new creation will be made.

Noah brings rest to all humanity by offering a sacrifice of atonement that soothed God's anger. Do you see that in the ESV Study Bible note? "The burnt offering soothes God's anger at human sin, so although human nature has not been changed by the flood, God's attitude has changed."

That is the astonishing reality of the world after the flood. This world is still as sinful as it was before. That hasn't changed! Do you see that in verse 21? "*...the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.*" That is the reason why God sent the flood in chapter six. Every intention of man's heart is only evil continually, so God sent a flood to destroy the earth. However, that same reality remains. Sin and evil remain in the world. Instead of sending destruction, what did God do? He said, "Never again will I destroy or curse the ground because of man. I'm going to be gracious. I'm going to give new life. Though they have made a royal mess of things, I am going to give them a new beginning."

What we see here is that a new logic took over—gospel logic—that said, "Yes, they are as evil as they have ever been, but I am not going to destroy them." How can that be? It is because God made a new way to deal with sin. He atoned for sin through blood sacrifice. This was a soothing, pleasing aroma to the Lord. Now, through and under the blood, sinners can enjoy peace with God. Sinners can live under the favor of God. Sinners can find refuge, security and new life in God's world.

Every day we wake up on God's green earth and see these beautiful trees blossoming and breathe this fresh air. In every breath we take, we are breathing in God's grace. Every day we live is a fresh example of God's mercies that never end, of His steadfast love that never ceases and of His great faithfulness. It is from verse 22 that the hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness, derives its

inspiration: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.”

“The amazing thing is not that there was a flood, but that there has only been one.” And there have been millions of days when people have breathed in God’s air, lived on God’s earth and enjoyed God’s mercy. We, too, have been recipients of that common grace. It is all because God has made a way to deal with human sin through the sacrifice of blood.

If you turn your pages through the rest of the Bible, what you will see is that this theme of sacrifice grows larger and larger until a greater Noah appears. He is the Ultimate One Who says, “I will give you rest.” He cried out to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not My will, but yours be done” (Matthew 26:39). He went to the cross and the Father crushed Him. His blood was shed for the sins of the world.

Ephesians 5:2 says, “*And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*” When God smells the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice of Jesus, He says to all who trust in Jesus, “Never again will your sins separate you from Me. Never again.” When God says, “Never again,” He means it. We say, “I’ll never do that foolish thing again.” “Never again will I indulge in that sin!” “Never again will I say those mean words.” What happens? We do it again and again and again.

We may wonder and worry, “When is the other shoe going to drop?” When is God going to say, “I have had enough of you”? Never once has that happened to any one of us. Never once have we ever walked alone. Never once has God said, “I’m through with you.” How can that be? How can we, sinners through and through, dwell in peace with a God Who does not tolerate sin? How can it be? Answer: There is a sacrifice that is a pleasing, soothing aroma to God. “*Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world!*” (John 1:29)”

We can remember many reasons why God should be done with us, but God remembers one. Because of Jesus God says, “I have reason enough to be reconciled to you forever.”

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