

GENESIS CHAPTER 8 – FAITHFULLNESS

4 O’CLOCK CHURCH – 27.1.2008 MARTIN LEVETT

We are continuing our series on the flood and today we have got to Genesis Chapter 8. It will be helpful to you to keep your Bibles open at that chapter.

Lets pray; Lord God, help us to see you more clearly as you truly are, not as we imagine you to be, or as we would like you to be. Make we know more of your awesome justice, your wonderful faithfulness and your utter dependability. Amen

INTRODUCTION

These opening 11 chapters of Genesis are the most wonderful piece of poetic prose. Very complex, yet coherent as the writer uses all sorts of literary devices to inter connect his themes reinforce his message and fire our imaginations.

One technique he uses here in the story of the flood is to give symmetry to the account. This is reflected in various ways. So there is a symmetry in the numbers in the story: 7,7, 40,150, x, 150, 40,7,7.

There is also symmetry in the structure and I have set out on the PowerPoint slide, one of a number of ways that could be depicted:

A Noah and the world before the flood 6 v9b -12
 B Provision for Judgement and Noah 6 v13-22
 C Embarkation 7 v1-5
 D Beginning of Flood 7 v6-16
 E The raging Flood 7 v17-24
 X God remembers Noah 8 v1a
 E The waning Flood v1b-5
 D Ending of the Flood v6-14
 C Disembarkation v15 – 19
 B Provision for post Flood world v20-22
 A Noah and the world after the Flood 9v1-7

Incidentally as we look at this carefully crafted composition, it does say something to those critics, who claim that this part of the bible was just cobbled together at a much later date from a variety of sources. Looking at the care with

which this has been written looks very much to me as the work of an author, not an editor; of a careful artist not an assessing committee.

(1)

And as you look at the structure you see it clearly draws our focus in on the pivotal phrase. The small statement right at the heart of the account, which everything either leads up to or leads out from 8 v1a *“But God remembered Noah”*. This is the key point the author wants to stress. This is the very heart of the message of the flood.

You see this account isn't chiefly about the flood. When was it? What was its extent? What damage did it do? Nor is it principally about Noah. What did he look like? What were his feelings going through the flood? Did he really love animals? In fact you notice Noah never speaks during chapters 6-8. We know he can talk because he does so in chapter 9. Yet even when it would surely heighten the dramatic impact Noah is silent. He isn't the centre of attention. Unlike some of the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts of the flood where the Noah character is the real hero of the story, here he plays a supporting role.

No the key message is that God remains faithful to those he has promised to save. If you get no other point from this story hold onto that.

But what does the word *“remembered”* in v1a mean? In English we often use the word remembered to refer to something we recall. It has been forgotten or has slipped to the back of our mind. In Hebrew when god is the subject *“remembered”* has much more of a sense of constantly keeping to the forefront of one's mind a promise one has made.

So to illustrate you and the family are going on holiday and you borrow a wetsuit from a friend. The deal is that as you get back fairly late on Saturday night and they are going away fairly early the following morning, that you will return it promptly the evening you return. The sense in v1a is not you suddenly remember at 9.30pm you have to return it and you rush it round with a huge sense of relief that you had remembered your promise. Rather that all the way home you constantly have it crystal clear the first thing you must do is return the wet suit. And that is what you do before you check your post, e-mails answer phone etc. There is never any doubt you will keep your word.

We really need to grasp hold of the truth about God's faithfulness. Just three points to help us unpack what it means:

(2)

A. GOD'S FAITHFULLNESS IS CERTAIN

We need to remember this as so often we can come to doubt it:

1) We are tempted to think God has forgotten us.

Just imagine what life was like in the ark after the rain stopped. Day followed day as they just drifted along. No one aboard knew where he or she was going. Then week followed week and then month followed month – just apparently aimlessly floating. Were they tempted to think, “God has forgotten us”? I am not sure how good their geography was. Did they imagine for a second they would float over the edge of the World and perish? Or drift out into the Persian Gulf then the Indian Ocean. There they would just travel through the oceans of the world until the food and water ran out.

We too can be tempted to think – “Has God forgotten me?” You can remember so clearly starting as a Christian and that relief at being rescued. But now you wonder as the Christian life seem rather dull and listless whether God is still looking on and guiding you. Or are you going round and round aimlessly in spiritual circles.

If you are ever tempted to think like that remember 8 v1a. God never lets you slip out of the focus of His thoughts for a nanosecond. His promise to rescue you and bring you home to Himself is at the heart of his plans and He has never for a minute taken his eyes off you or left you alone. God remembers.

2) We are tempted to think we have been conned

Again imagine the daily routine on the Ark. It must have been such hard work, so repetitive, pretty unpleasant. Wake up; breakfast, a time worshipping God Then down to feeding the animals – elephants first, then the camels, then the giraffes, then the rhinos, then the lions (watch out for the claws), then the porcupines, etc etc. Once that was finished, let start the mucking out and boy was there a lot to do. Elephants first, phew, then the camels, the giraffes, the rhinos, the lions, the porcupines (ouch – forgot about the quills) etc. Were they ever tempted to think – *“Is this really what we have been saved to do? Is it worth*

it? We worked for years to build the Ark and collect all the stores while everyone around us enjoyed himself or herself. True they are dead, but if this if all life holds then I am not sure that this salvation is all it is cracked up to be."

It can be the same for us. It is hard work swimming against the stream of the world. It takes discipline and sacrifice to follow Jesus. Galatians 6 v9 tells us "*let us not grow weary in doing good...*" It warns us because it is very easy to get weary of doing good and then to start thinking I'm in the wrong boat. Remember

(3)

the words of the old Billy Joel song. We think all the sinners laugh all the time and have much more fun than the crying saints.

When we start to think like that, we are being conned. But not by God; rather by the World, the Flesh and the Devil. 8 v1a is a hinge verse. It helps us to see the whole of God's faithfulness in perspective. Looking back we can see how truly horrendous God's justice is. And all the picture language in God's Word cannot truly reveal the horror of God's final calling to account. For people who want nothing to do with God, will having nothing to do with Him for eternity. However they will be totally cut off from all that Jesus provides. It will be a place with no love, no trust, no honesty, no truth, no relationship, no fulfilment, and no hope -truly hell. People would like to forget about it or turn it into a joke but the Bible keeps warning us how serious it is. As Martin Luther once said "*If we truly knew what we had been saved from, we'd die of fear*".

However to complete Luther's quote he went on to say, "*If we truly knew what we have been saved to, we'd die of joy*". You see looking forward from 8 v1b you can see there is a gap, between when Noah and his family were saved from the flood and the time they came out to enjoy and re establish themselves in a new cleansed world. The same gap exists between when God saved us and when He will take us home and we will see Him and be like Him. There, there will truly be no separation, no tears, no hurt, no lies, perfect relationship, perfect love, and total fulfilment. Yet we have not yet got there and we are still on the storm tossed sea of this World with all its pressures and problems. Yet God is faithful and He will save us from His justice and save us to enjoy a New Heaven and New Earth.

c) We are tempted to think He won't finish the job

This leads on from my previous point and is one we often struggle with. Why couldn't God have just whisked Noah, his family and all the animals up to heaven and returned them once the flood was over. Why did they have to go through all the hassle of building the Ark and living through the horrors of the destructive

torrent? Well God's ways are not our ways. We when we ask God to rescue us expect Him to totally remove ourselves from the problem situation. Or totally remove the problem situation from us. God doesn't do that here. He doesn't take Noah out of the World experiencing judgment. He takes them right through it, protected in the Ark, but experiencing so much of the traumas and tragedy first hand. They had to trust to God every single step (or should that be wave) of the way.

(4)

And God usually (but not always) does the same with us. He rescues us by taking us right through the trials and pressures, protected by His faithful hand, and not by taking us out of the situation. Now there are a lot of applications here – too many to cover in our limited time. However it is true it makes a nonsense of those who claim the Christian faith is just escapism. And if you feel right in the middle of a major storm in your life, don't doubt God because it hasn't gone away. He may want to teach you more about His absolute faithfulness, by keeping you in the midst of it, rather than taking you out of it.

B) GOD'S FAITHFULNESS DEMANDS A RESPONSE

God is looking for a relationship from those He created, so is calling for a response. This is in marked contrast to the Sumerians and Babylonian accounts of the flood. There the "gods" behave so much like humans with weaknesses, fears and vulnerabilities. In one account when the sacrifice is made, all the gods gather like flies. In the pagan world, the gods need human to sacrifice to them or they can't survive. The flood has stopped human from making sacrifices, so they are "dying". Yet there is no sense of a relationship. The God of the Bible needs nothing. He is dependent on nothing or no one, yet He delights v21 in the response from Noah. SO:

a) A response of thanks v20

The very first thing Noah does when he gets out of the Ark is sacrifice to God – to acknowledge all He is and all He has done.

Those of us with children may have experienced the situation where the young child receives a present. They rip off the wrapping paper and immediately rush off to play with it, without a backward glance or a word of thanks to the donor.

Or thank you letters. After twenty-five minutes you have *“Dear X, thank you for the present. It is very nice.”* After a lot more coaxing you might be lucky to get another line *“I haven’t broken it yet”*.

And we say, “Well that’s typically childish behaviour”. Yet how often is our thanks to God for His salvation and utter faithfulness, superficial, perfunctory or just a going through the motions? Would we be honest enough to acknowledge it as immature? Do you truly value God’s faithfulness? If so, when did you last thank God from the depth of your heart for what He has done for you? Or do you take it for granted?

(5)

b) A response of ongoing dependence e.g. v13-15

Look at these verses. Noah opens up the covering and sees the surface of the ground was dry, yet he waited two more months, stuck in the Ark, looking after all those animals. Why not get straight out there? No Noah was waiting for God to say it was time to disembark. Noah had totally trusted God when the threat of destruction loomed. And he was going to completely trust Him, now the threat seems to have gone away.

Of course that makes sense – if you see someone winched to safety from raging floodwaters by a helicopter crew. They dry him off, strap him in and tell him to sit tight as they fly back to their home base or continue to look for others struggling in the water. And you would expect him to follow their instructions now he is “safe” stay seated and trust to the crew to get him home. The last thing you would expect would be to see him unstrap his seat belt, say “thanks very much folks, I can manage from here” and dive back into the floodwaters.

Yet so often that is what we are tempted to do. We think God has saved me, but I don’t need to keep depending on Him and relying on Him to get me home. I can now manage the rest of my way on my own. We think growing as a Christian, means becoming more self-sufficient and more self-reliant. In fact it means realising we need to depend and rely on our Lord more and more and more.

c) A response of ongoing obedience e.g. v7-9

A person who is truly thankful and who continues to truly trust God, will demonstrate that by ongoing obedience even if it is hard. Noah had had the hard task of warning his generation (Hebrews 11 v7). Now in the Ark he had the ongoing responsibility for caring for all the animals God had entrusted to him. Noah faithfully carried out that task with care and love. Look at v7-9. He sent out the raven first. A powerful bird well able to live off any carrion that was floating on the water. Only as a second choice did he send out the “weaker” dove. The poor bird v9a couldn’t find anywhere to land, so returned to the ark and exhausted and weak found Noah waiting. Tenderly he reached out his hand to gather it in and *brought it back to himself* in the ark. (Echoes of Exodus 19 v4). As God had cared for Noah and his family, so Noah would care with love and compassion for the creatures God had given into his care. This was not obedience through gritted teeth or with reluctance. This was obedience flowing from love, as God had first loved us.

Is our obedience a response to legalism? Or out of habit? Or is it a joyful response to a faithful God who holds us safe in His hand?

(6)

C. GOD’S FAITHFULNESS PROVIDES SECURITY

I don’t want to trespass on Joe’s ground as he will be speaking on Genesis 9 next week, but do realise that God is faithful to His word and that provides an amazing security despite the terrible state of our world.

Contrast 6 v11 – 13 with 8 v21,22. In the first passage God states he will destroy the world because it was so evil. By 8 v21 nothing has changed. The human heart remains evil from childhood, yet now God promises not destroy the world by a flood again. There may be terrible local floods or other disasters but nothing on this universal scale. Instead mankind will see God’s utter faithfulness demonstrated as seedtime will be followed by harvest, day by night, Summer by Winter.

For those who are aware how corrupt their hearts are, it offers a real hope. There is evidence that there is a window of opportunity, before God brings in a new heaven and new earth, where God’s faithfulness is still sustaining our world. In this period of divine grace, we can personally find God’s salvation and a certain rescue from such a trustworthy Lord.

It further shows that the view of God as some one always looking to find fault, always just waiting to punish is a lie. God knows how selfish our hearts are. He knows us better than we know ourselves, yet does not want us to perish, but to turn and accept His rescue package. He is a God who longs to forgive.

For those who are Christians it also provides security. We too often accept our culture's postmodern values than nothing is certain. We find ourselves worried whether God is still for us or still with us. We look at the circumstances we are in, not to the certainty of God's Word. We talk of Christian love and peace a lot, but less about God's utter faithfulness. Here is living proof that God keeps His word. If he does so for fallen mankind, he will certainly do so for those He has called to be His own chosen possession.