

The God of the Flood - Rev. Gordon Matheson

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back in our Bibles just now to Genesis 6. We're going to look at the whole story of the flood, actually. So we'll be looking at Genesis 6 to 9. All of these chapters, we'll be jumping through them as we look at this story together.

Let's bow our heads in prayer, though, before we turn to the Word. Heavenly Father, as we turn for a short time just now to your Word in the Bible, we ask and pray that you would lead us, guide us, direct us into things of truth.

Help us, Lord, to be blessed in our lives from them. Help us to see the marvel of what you've said and done. And help us to see your character and the character of our Savior, Jesus, in particular, as we read through these verses today.

Help us, Lord, to glorify your name with our thoughts. And may the meditations of our hearts and the words of our lips be acceptable in your sight. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You know, very often, when we think through the stories of the Bible, we are tempted to put ourselves, not literally you and I, but humanity, we tend to put people at the heart of these stories.

So the flood is one of them. When we think about the flood, we tend to think about it as the story of Noah, or the story of Noah's Ark. And Noah somehow becomes the focus of the story.

[1 : 35] This is one of my gripes, in a sense, really, with big international organizations that would make much of this. You know, the spectacle of the Ark itself can become a bit of a distraction, almost, in understanding the narrative and the account of what's actually going on here.

The reality is that this story, the story of Noah's Ark and the story of the flood, they're in the Bible not to tell us so much about the man being saved, as they are to tell us about the God doing the saving.

And the saving is truly gargantuan. It's enormous. Just the scope of it is incredible. So Noah is facing what, you know, if you're a fan of modern movies, you would call it an extinction-level event. It's one of these phrases I think that was popular in the movies in the late 90s and the early 2000s. The prospect of humanity being exterminated and somehow a handful of people surviving. It is truly the worst of all possible times. Everything that he knows, everyone he knows, is about to end.

[2 : 58] It's literally going to be washed away. And we maybe can't quite grasp the scale of that, but we can, I suppose, at times feel a bit like that, where everything we know, where even perhaps at times it feels like the ground under our feet is being swept away from us.

It might be because of an illness that has come to us, catastrophic though it might be. Sometimes it can be our mental health that leads us into these places of uncertainty.

Sometimes it can be a spiritual realization because of our lostness, that we realize just how desperate our circumstances really are.

And so the story of the flood I think is a helpful one for us because it helps us to gauge where God is at in disastrous circumstances.

You know, when everything seems lost and when everything seems to be out of control, when everything seems to be against us, how is God working? What is God like?

[4 : 05] What is he doing through these circumstances? The first thing then we can see is God saved Noah, and he saved him because he chose to. God chose Noah to save him.

Sometimes we think that was because Noah was the only good man around. We sometimes have this idea that Noah's salvation in this story is a reward.

You know, everyone else is just awful. But Noah is a good guy. And so because Noah is a good guy, God looked at him and said, Ah, you have found favor in my eyes.

That's the expression that's used in Genesis 6. And we say that was because Noah was such a nice man. But actually, that's not the reason God saves people. You know, one of the biggest mistakes that people make is they say, Well, God saves good people. No. God saves people to make them good.

[5 : 11] And in a sense, actually, Noah's salvation, if we can think of it this way, had started long before the flood. Because Noah, we read, was a man who walked with God.

And that phrase, walked with God, means Noah was someone who enjoyed, for a long time before the flood, Noah was someone who enjoyed fellowship with God.

Noah was someone who knew God and conversed with God. He prayed to God. He trusted in God in some way. And Noah, we read, found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Now, the idea there of favor is the idea of God being pleased with him, God delighting in him. And we know from the New Testament, this wonderful expression is that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

So, before the flood ever happened, Noah was a man of faith. Noah was a man who God had revealed himself to. We know this from the rest of the Bible.

[6 : 14] This is how faith works. God reveals himself. So, God takes the initiative. He comes to us. He might be doing this today with you. He might actually today be saying to you, I'm showing you myself.

I'm showing you the kind of God I am. I'm showing you so that you will trust me. So that you'll get to know me. So that you will find my salvation. So that you can be saved.

Maybe today that's what God's doing here. But certainly God had already done this with Noah.

Such that Noah, before the flood ever happened, Noah walked with God.

What that means actually is that Noah found, not that he pleased God, but that Noah found it pleased God to be gracious to him. God out of his, you know, the way the Catechism puts it, when we learned that when we were young, some of us, God out of his mere good pleasure has chosen to save.

And that's what God's doing with Noah. He's favoring Noah. He's out of his mere good pleasure. He's saying to Noah, I'm going to save you.

[7 : 20] And we're here today because of that. It's one of these stories where the whole of humanity is bound up in this. Because God chose to save.

So it wasn't that Noah was offering good sacrifices. It wasn't that he was doing good works. It wasn't that he was necessarily an excellent example in everything he did. Maybe he did all of these things.

But the reason he is saved is because God saved him. And the Bible is full of stories like that. The Bible is replete with stories of people who are awful, but God saves them.

Perhaps even people that we might think of as great heroes in the Bible. But actually, when you look very closely at them, they're awful. David, an adulterer, a murderer, a hypocrite.

A violent and bloody man. And yet God saved him. Actually, God says he's a man after his own heart. Or Peter in the New Testament. A blasphemer.

[8 : 33] And someone who despised knowing Jesus and refused to acknowledge that he knew him in a tight spot. And cursed the name of Christ within Jesus' own earshot. And yet, God saved him.

He used to mightily Paul the Apostle, another example. A violent persecutor of the church. Who God saved on the Damascus Road. And in a house on Straight Street.

When he had his sight restored. God saved him. The Bible is full of these stories where God chooses to save.

He helps people who don't deserve it. He's not some kind of Santa Claus who gives presents to good kids. He is a merciful God who helps sinners.

And that's what happened with Noah. God favored him. Not because he deserved it. But because God chose to.

[9 : 36] And the amazing thing is that Noah has a response to this characteristic of God's. God is a God who saves people. Noah is a man who has faith.

And that's a lesson for all of us today. As we think about God's character today. We should all of us remember and know that God is a God who saves people out of his mere good pleasure.

We can be people who have faith in response. We trust that saving God. We trust the God who sent Jesus into the world to die in the place of sinners.

And we see where that goes. And that's what Noah did. So that's the first thing. God chose Noah. The second thing we can say as well is God chose Noah.

But then he didn't just leave Noah in the dark. I mean sometimes we might think that. We might think that well you know God will save us. But then how we live thereafter is kind of up to us in some way.

[10:34] We just need to suss it out. We need to just make wise decisions. And we need to work through it. And perhaps we might almost think well maybe that's what Noah had to do in those circumstances. God says to Noah I'm going to destroy the world with a flood.

I'm going to save you. And Noah's like well what shall I do? I'll go to the highest mountain I can find. No. God then says to Noah this is how I'm going to save you.

This is what you must do. You must build yourself an ark. You will make it out of this thing called gopher wood. Which we still don't conclusively know what that was.

We can be pretty sure it wasn't high tensile steel. And therefore we can assume that the boat that was produced was not an engineering masterpiece. There's just no way it can be.

I mean look at the dimensions of it. It's a 300 cubit boat. That's like 100 yards long. And you know it's 50 cubits across.

[11:35] It's 10 cubits. It's 10 yards high. This is an enormous structure. And Noah's told this is what you have to build.

And he follows. The interesting thing is he's given the set of instructions. And he has to obey them. I want to put it to you like this. The Bible again is full of stories like this. God will save you.

You need to follow his instructions. A good example of it is a Babylonian or a man of Damascus who's a general in the army.

Who's a leper. And he comes and he wants to be saved of his leprosy. Healed of his leprosy. So he goes to the prophet and the little slave girl tells him go to the prophet. So Naaman off he goes to the prophet and he says can I be cured.

[12:39] And the prophet doesn't even come to the door to cure him. He just sends his servant and says go and wash yourself seven times in the river Jordan. And Naaman's saying what? You know the rivers of my own province back home.

They're much more splendid than that muddy brook. I'm not going to go there. And his servant issues him with some wisdom. He simply says to him you know why don't you just do it?

It's just a small thing he's saying to you to go and do. Just go and do it. So Naaman relents and he humbly obeys. And he washes himself in the river.

And he's cured of his leprosy. It's a remarkable thing. Now we are very often like that. We say to ourselves well I think I know what I need to do to get saved.

I know what I need to do to please God in order to get his salvation. I'll just make myself a better person. I'll do a kind of Christian self-help program.

[13:43] I'll read my Bible. I'll see what the Bible says about living good. And I'll try and implement that in my life. And I will try and take steps to fix myself.

Maybe you'll start with the Ten Commandments. And you'll say well the first four are about spiritual stuff so I'll not worry about them. But you know the fifth commandment is honor your father and mother.

So I'll try and treat my parents right. And I'll try and not kill anyone. And I'll try and not commit adultery anywhere.

And there's a whole string of things that we say to ourselves. I'm just not going to do these things. And surely to goodness if I do these things God will save me. And the problem is we're not listening to God in the instructions he's giving us.

I often think one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible is the story of the Philippian jailer. Paul and Silas have been put into the innermost prison.

[14:46] They're in the stinks in the heart of the prison in Philippi. In the carcer. They're incarcerated. That's where the Latin word comes from. And the jailer is quite satisfied that all of his prisoners are secure.

So off he goes to settle down for the night. And in the middle of the night, at midnight, there's an earthquake. And the foundations of the prison are shaken. And all of the doors are shaken off their hinges.

And all of the stalks are opened. And the Philippian jailer is absolutely terrified. Because he thinks all of his prisoners are bound to have escaped because of this earthquake. He is liable for them with his life.

And so rather than face execution, he thinks the honorable way out of this is to take his own life. So he takes out his sword. Not because he wants to chase down the prisoners who have escaped. But because he means to take his own life. And Paul says to him, do yourself no harm. We're all here. And the man comes trembling before him.

[15:48] And he is terrified because his world has been turned upside down. And he says to Paul, what do I have to do to be saved? Now, that man at that moment is not looking for a fully rounded message of Christianity.

I'm not even sure that that's what he was necessarily asking. What do I have to do to be spared from, saved from hell? He's talking about his immediate circumstances. The terror that he's in at that moment.

And Paul says to him a very simple message. He says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And not just you, but your whole house.

Because the blessings are a little overflowing. And it sometimes astonishes me at the simplicity of that instruction.

And part of the reason it astonishes me is because I think about my own heart as a young man growing up. And I knew that message and I'd heard it.

[16:47] And I kept thinking, no, there has to be something else. There has to be something more. There needs to be something in addition to this that I have to do. I have to, obviously, it must, surely I have to attain a certain standard.

Surely I have to do, you know, perhaps people, you know, in the Middle Ages, maybe even today, people think, well, I have to do a pilgrimage. I have to do something extra in order to get saved. And God says, no, just follow my instructions. I will teach you what you need to do. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, the instruction given to Noah is a bit more complicated than that. It's build an ark, you know, that's 100 feet, 100 yards long. And, you know, it's huge. It's a massive thing. But, you know, go and build this ark. And we might almost say to ourselves, well, I'd rather be given an instruction like that than believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mean, that seems possible. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in him. Come to him with that humble trust that says, I cannot save myself in the face of death and everything else that is going wrong in my life.

[17:57] Everything that my sin has done to me. And trust him. And God will show you how to be saved. A life of discipleship will flow from that.

A life of obedience to God will flow from that. But it begins with that first one single instruction. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I ask you today, is that what you're doing? Is that what you're willing to do? Is that what you're willing to take a step of faith doing? Trusting in him.

And you will find salvation. The interesting thing is, Noah, again, the character of God is to save by giving us an instruction, teaching us what we have to do.

And the interesting thing is, Noah did this. Noah did all that God commanded him. And that phrase actually, you know, as you read through, maybe you can do it this afternoon, you can go away and read Genesis 6, 7, 8, 9.

[19:08] You'll see that phrase keeps cropping up through the whole story. Noah did all that God commanded him. Noah did all that God commanded him. Noah's life becomes characterized by obeying God, obedience to God's call on his life.

And that's the fruit of salvation. That's what happens when we begin to walk with God. We follow him. And our response is, we obey God.

So Noah goes into the ark. The interesting thing is, actually, Noah doesn't shut that. I love this detail in the story. We didn't read it, but it's there in chapter 7. You can go and find it yourself. When Noah goes into the ark, God says to him, you go into the ark, you, your family, your sons, their wives, all the animals that you're taking with you, go into the ark now.

And Noah does this. And then God says, I will close the door. So God closes the door for Noah. And then the floodwaters come.

The ark becomes afloat on the flood. And Noah and his family are saved. And then we read at the beginning of chapter 8, but God remembered Noah.

[20 : 19] And it's almost as if we're inclined to kind of think when we read that phrase, we would tend to think, oh, well, maybe God kind of forgot about him for a minute. You know, God was a bit absent-minded. And then all of a sudden, God remembers that Noah is there on the ark.

But that's not what that verse means. God didn't just leave Noah and the ark and say, well, that's me done my part, and now I'm just going to wait it out and see what happens.

It's not like God says, well, I've warned you. I've told you what to do. Now you just go and do it. No. God remembering Noah is a narrative about God's commitment to Noah.

The word remember in the ancient world is tied up in obligations. Kings in the ancient world had a court official whose job it was to remember the king's commitments.

You see a good example of this in the story of Esther. Early on in the story of Esther, Esther's uncle Mordecai hears about a plot to kill King Ahasuerus, King Xerxes. And he alerts the palace authorities to this plot, and the plotters are discovered, they're interrogated, and they're eventually put to death.

[21 : 44] And a note is taken in the records of the king that Mordecai has done this. So there is a form of record made, but then everyone forgets, and Mordecai is never rewarded for his actions.

What actually happened there is the remembrancer, the one whose job it was to recall the ones that the king should show favor to, forgot. The remembrancer didn't do his job, and Mordecai was never rewarded for saving the king's life.

And in the ancient world, there are officials who do this throughout the kingdom. And the main thing that they have to remember is the king's covenant commitments, the alliances, the strategic deals that have been struck, the agreements that the king has made.

If so-and-so is attacked, I will come and help you. If so-and-so is under famine or some kind of disaster, we will send aid. These are the obligations that the king has.

And although they're written down in documents, and the documents are stored often in the temples and in the libraries of the king, that doesn't necessarily mean just because something's written down that it'll be there in the forefront of the king's mind.

[22 : 55] And so the remembrancer does that job. And so when it says at the beginning of chapter 8, God remembered Noah, what actually that means is God recalled continuously the covenant that he had made with Noah.

Because earlier in chapter 7, we're told God made a covenant with Noah. God entered into an obligation with Noah to save him. And all of God's actions thereafter are shaped by that covenant obligation.

God was orientated in all of his actions in the flood to saving Noah and his family. The ark did not save him.

We need to stop thinking that way. That rickety, hundred-yard-long wooden boat built by a man who had never seen an ocean did not save Noah.

It couldn't. The notion that he had an engineering masterpiece that could survive the cataclysm of that flood is nonsense. God saved him.

[23 : 57] God carried him through that. God preserved him miraculously. And the outcome of it is God remembers him because God made a promise to him.

And that's us today, if we're Christians. God has not forgotten you. Whatever you're going through as a Christian, God has not forgotten you.

God cannot forget you. He cannot forget the one for whom his son died. He cannot. The evidence of your presence on earth is there, seated at the right hand of the throne of God today.

Jesus, the one who died for us and who rose promising us life, is seated at the right hand of God. And he makes there continual intercession for us. God cannot forget you.

God has not forgotten you. And so whatever you're going through, God is not forgetting you. God hasn't suddenly thought, oh, oh man, I forgot about John for a minute and now he's got cancer.

[25 : 04] That's not how he works. He hasn't abandoned you. He hasn't left you. He's with you. He's with you.

Always. Even until the end of the age. And the character of God is one that works in this way, in the lives of Christians to this day.

He remembers us, just as he remembered Noah. And he kept him in mind, and he continued to preserve him. And eventually the ark is brought to rest on Mount Ararat, and Noah and his family come out of the ark into the new world, and they are saved.

And it is interesting to think what Noah then did. Because in the face of God's remembering him, God's covenant commitment to him, God's preservation of his life, what Noah does is he worships. The first thing Noah does when he comes out of the ark is he builds an altar, and he offers a sacrifice. He worships God. Bends the knee before him, and he sings his praises.

[26 : 13] And he gives thanks that God has remembered him. He doesn't come out of the ark and think, wow, that was an engineering masterpiece. We better protect this and keep it somewhere.

The ark isn't a shrine. It's just a bricky old boat. What saved him is the almighty hand of God. He has preserved his life. And Noah worships. And, you know, for us, as we go through trials in our lives, as we go through dark valleys, the valley of the shadow of death, the challenge to us is, do we retain that posture of worship before our God?

Do we say, I will worship you? I will bow the knee before you. I will trust you and love you and pour out my heart before you. Because you are God who remembered me.

And very often when we think of the story of the ark, that's actually where we finish the story of the flood. We think, well, God remembered Noah. The ark came to rest him and Noah builds an altar and he finishes.

[27 : 28] But that's not the end of the story. We know that, really. Because we remember then, at the end of the story, actually, there's another tiny little component here. God establishes a new covenant with Noah.

So this is the second time God established a covenant with Noah. It's very interesting, the sequencing. But the second covenant that God established with Noah is once he comes out of the ark, God says, I will never again destroy the world in this way.

And he gives Noah a sign of that, the ark in the sky, the rainbow. It's literally a bow which is bent back and tightened against an arrow flying upwards into the heart of God himself.

I think that's symbolic of Jesus in this story. But then God gives Noah an instruction. He reinstates the instruction of Adam, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

And in so doing, God uses this wonderful word creeps in, God blessed Noah. The word blessing means to give somebody all that they need to flourish.

[28 : 41] If you're blessed, you have everything you need. And so the Beatitudes in the New Testament, they're full of statements of us, the church, the children of God, the kingdom, receiving everything that it needs to flourish.

If you're blessed, you've got everything you need. And Noah is told by God, you're blessed. You're blessed. The conclusion of the catastrophe is God's command to go out and fill the earth, fulfill the creation mandate.

And God says to Noah, you have everything you need to fulfill this new instruction. And here we are today, the fruit of it. You know, the earth is well and truly subdued by us.

And in the midst of our sin, what a mess we're making of it. But God has blessed us to do that. It's funny, when we sin, we take the blessings of God and we corrupt what God gives us.

The question really is, what will we do with that blessing? When we're given everything we need to thrive. So that's the story of the flood.

[29 : 57] It's a story about a God who chooses Noah and Noah is saved. Noah trusts that God of choosing. It's a story about a God who teaches Noah what to do and Noah obeys his commands.

It's a story about a God who remembers his covenant commitment to Noah. And Noah worships because God remembers him. And it's a story at the end of a God who blesses.

And Noah goes on to thrive. And if God's working in our lives, he is doing the same things. God is today choosing us.

Today he's teaching us. He's showing us what to do. He's made covenant commitments to his people. And he has blessed us with what we need to thrive. And so the question is, what are we doing? Are we trusting him?

Are we obeying him? Are we worshiping him? Are we trying to live wisely in light of his blessing? I'll leave that with you to ponder for yourselves.

[31 : 04] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you today that you are the God of the flood. You are the God who saves in the midst of disaster and calamity in our lives.

