

“NEW CREATION”

We come tonight to the account of the great flood. I would imagine that the story of Noah and the ark is one the best known stories in the entire Bible, at least when it comes to the sheer number of people, whether Christian or not, who are familiar with it. This is a bit peculiar when you consider the fact that it is a story of judgment, and that we are living in such a non-judgmental age. Judgment is bad news, and people do not like to hear bad news. But, apparently, not even that is enough to offset the fact that people just love the thought of all of those animals on the ark with Noah. I remember as a child that one of my favorite toys to play with when I visited my grandmother was a model of Noah’s ark with all of the different kinds of animals - the tiger was always my favorite. And one of the first books that my daughter ever received was a board book containing a simplified version of the story of Noah’s ark. By the way, neither of those things were what have come to be referred to as “Christian products.” Noah’s Ark is just as hot a commodity in the secular marketplace as it is in the Christian sub-culture. A quick search on Amazon.com showed that there are about 500 Noah’s Ark toys and games, over 25,000 books on Noah’s Ark, over 1,700 home decor items with a Noah’s Ark theme, and, among other assorted products, 75 watches with a picture of Noah’s Ark on them. People like the story of Noah’s Ark. The great irony about this is that the biblical account of the flood actually contains all of the key elements of the gospel message. It is, as we will see, a story of how God graciously brings his church through the waters of judgment into the life of the new creation.

Our passage opens with the Lord instructing Noah, after the ark was completed, to go inside it. Notice that it is because of Noah's righteousness that he and his household are delivered from the waters of judgment. This righteousness did not come from Noah himself, but was his by faith, as Hebrews 11 makes clear. Noah's righteousness results in the salvation not just of himself, but of his entire family as well. This is one of many Scriptural examples of the critical role of the family in the building of God's kingdom. Of course, it is true that each individual member of a covenant family needs to have a living faith in order to be a true heir of salvation. But the principle way in which that faith is cultivated is by being raised within a godly household.

In verse 2, God commands Noah to take seven pairs of the clean animals and birds, but only one pair of the unclean animals. The Old Testament uses the categories of clean and unclean in order to illustrate the holiness that God requires of his people. The reason why Noah needed more clean animals is because he would have to use some of them for food and for sacrifices. If he hadn't taken extra, those species would have become extinct.

Some biblical scholars argue that the command in 7:2 contradicts what is said in 6:20, where God tells Noah to take two of every sort of animal. This, they claim, is proof that chapters 6 and 7 were originally written by different authors and were only brought together by a later editor. Such scholars claim that there are many examples of this sort of thing throughout the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and that this

undermines the historical reliability of these books. This idea is referred to as the documentary hypothesis, and it is the view held by most liberal biblical scholars.

But the problem with this way of handling the Bible is that we do not use this approach when we read other kinds of literature. For example, I mentioned in this morning's sermon that I have been reading Daniel Defoe's classic novel *Robinson Crusoe*. In Defoe's novel, there are two separate accounts of Crusoe's first days on the island. And there are differences between these accounts, even though Crusoe is the narrator in both of them. One account is in the form of an ordinary first-person narrative, while the other is in the form of journal entries. Now, when I read these accounts and noticed how they were different, I did not conclude that they were contradictory and that at least one must have originally been written by someone other than Daniel Defoe. We simply don't read books the way proponents of the documentary hypothesis read the books of Moses. We understand that authors have the freedom to make use of repetition and variation when they are telling a story. In fact, this is one of the traits of a good writer. In our passage, the information in chapter 7 about the number of animals taken into the ark is simply an elaboration and clarification of the general instructions given in chapter 6. The general instruction was for Noah to take two of each animal, but he would also have to take extra pairs of the clean animals. Chapter 7 is not a contradictory command, but simply a more detailed one.

The text also repeats Noah's response to the Lord's command, saying that he "did all that the LORD had commanded him." Noah went into the ark. Just imagine what that

meant for him. Entering the ark was a renunciation of the world. For Noah, the only way of salvation required him to turn his back on the world. And this is something that remains true today. When a person is baptized into Christ he or she is set apart from the world in order to belong to God. The Lord calls us to be holy as he is holy. He sets us apart from the world in order that we might live as his holy people. This is why it is so tragic when the church tries to retain its influence in the world by adapting itself to worldly ideals. That is the exact opposite of what the church is to be. When a church conforms to the pattern of the world, it is no longer a true church.

Of course, there is a sense in which God's people today are not like Noah. Noah had to literally turn his back on the world, but God calls us to do this in a spiritual sense. We still live in the world, but we are to do so as those who belong to Christ's kingdom. We are called to take no part in the works of darkness but to expose them to the light of the gospel. This is why the apostle James said that those who want to be friends with the world are enemies of God. You cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God. You have to chose a side. If we want to be friends of God, then we must live as strangers in this world. And the world doesn't like strangers. As Samuel Rutherford put it, "If you were not strangers here, the dogs of the world would not bark at you." [Letters, 127]

Noah renounced the world by turning his back on it and entering the ark. You and I need to renounce the world by refusing to adopt its ways of thinking and living, and by staying faithful to the mind of Christ.

Once Noah's family and all the creatures were on board the ark, the Lord shut him in. This points to one of the major differences between the biblical account of the flood and the flood stories in other ancient literature. In the other stories, the human figure is the hero, and the gods are depicted in a much more negative light. In the Mesopotamian version of the flood story, contained in the Gilgamesh Epic, the door of the ark is closed by the human hero Utnapishtim. But here it is the Lord who shuts the door. Noah's salvation is accomplished by God's power and by God's grace. The Lord is the one who gathers his elect and preserves them from the Day of Judgment. As Jesus said in Matthew 3:12, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

This brings us to the central point of the passage. The story of Noah and the ark is a story of de-creation and new creation. Notice the way in which the flood is described. In 7:11, the fountains of the deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens are opened. This is a reversal of what God did at creation, when he separated the waters from the waters. And then, as the flood waters increase and cover the earth, the creatures of the earth are listed in the order in which they were created: birds, livestock, beasts, swarming creatures, and lastly, mankind. As the waters come over these creatures, the breath of life is taken away from them. The wickedness of man has caused the Lord to unmake the world.

But that is not the end of the story. The Lord remembers Noah. This doesn't mean that God was in danger of forgetting Noah. Whenever the term "remember" is used of

God in the Bible it refers to his remembering the covenant that he made with his people. God's remembering always results in action on behalf of his people. In Genesis 19, God remembered his promise to Abraham, and this caused him to save Lot. In Exodus 2, God remembered his covenant with Israel's patriarchs, and this caused him to deliver Israel from Egypt. Here, God remembers his promise to Noah, and this causes him to bring the flood to an end. When God remembers, he takes action to save his people. This is why so many of the psalms include pleas for God to remember:

“Remember your mercy, O Lord , and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.” [Ps. 25:6]

“Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.” [Ps. 74:2]

The Lord wants us to bring to his remembrance the things that he has said in his Word. He wants us to plead our case before him by using his own promises to present our argument. And he wants us to know that he never forgets what he has said. He will remember. And when God remembers, he takes action.

God's remembering of Noah caused him to begin to remake the world that was destroyed by the flood. It is clear that God wants us to understand the post-flood world

as a new creation. We can see this by taking note of the many parallels between the flood account and the first two chapters of Genesis. In Genesis 2, the animals came to Adam to be named; in Genesis 7, they come to Noah to be saved. In Genesis 1, the creation account begins with the description of the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters; in Genesis 7, the ark floats on the face of the waters just before the flood is brought to an end. In Genesis 1, God separates the waters from the waters; in Genesis 8, he does the same. In Genesis 1, God filled the earth with his creatures and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply; in Genesis 8, he does the exact same thing.

It is very clear that God wants us to see the post-flood world as a sort of new creation. The story of the flood provides us with a picture of what God's great plan of redemption is all about. The very same things that took place in Noah's life are taking place in our lives. God saved Noah and his family through the waters of the flood, and he saves us through the waters of baptism, the waters that signify and seal our union with Christ by faith. In Christ, the new creation that was foreshadowed by God's renewal of the post-flood world has already begun. The new creation has been inaugurated, though it has not yet been consummated.

Where is this new creation to be found today? It is obviously not "out there" in the world around us. The world in which we live is a world that is being reserved for judgment. It is a world that will one day be unmade. The new creation is found in the place where God remembers his covenant promises, the place where he preserves his people from judgment. It is found in the place where God gives his people faith so that

they might renounce the world and patiently endure the trials of this life until he brings us to our true home. The only place where the new creation is made present in this dying world is in the church in which Jesus Christ makes his presence dwell. And he calls us, as he commanded Noah, to live fruitful lives as his new creation people in this world.

*The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the Word:
from heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.*

*'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.*