

Advent 1
November 27, 2011

Enter the Ark

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Genesis 6:1-3,4-14,17-22

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today marks the beginning of a new season of the church year called Advent. Advent means “coming.” From now until December 25th we are preparing for the coming of Jesus. This season is one we usually associate with peace. This time of year when we think of Jesus coming we think of sweet baby Jesus wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. There are angels flitting around in the sky. Some shepherds walk into the scene and marvel at the Savior who has been born. Is this the coming we’re preparing for? Well, yes it is. This was Jesus’ first coming when he entered humble and lowly, true God and true man, to save us. His holy life sacrificed on the cross did the trick. It took care of all our sins and offenses. All who believe in Jesus receive that benefit. That’s the first coming.

But in the season of Advent, we prepare for Jesus’ second coming as well. The second is nothing like the first. Jesus will come with all the angels sweeping down in glory from on high. The loud blasts of trumpets will announce his arrival. And he’s coming not to save. No, that work is completed. He’s coming again... this time to judge. All mankind will stand before him and be judged once for. Some will enter eternal life and others to eternal condemnation.

Truth is, the season of Advent is really about preparing for both of these comings. So Advent isn’t just about peace and safety as we remember God launching his plan of salvation. It’s a season to also remember God’s righteous judgment. I hope you will forgive me if for ruining the “Christmas mood” as I lead you through a text in Scriptures that demonstrate clearly that our God is both a God of judgment and a God of love. We can only properly prepare to meet Jesus when we have a clear view of who our God is and what he’s like. I fear that in our culture today, there is a distorted understanding of who God is and what he’s like. Let’s correct that now so we’ll be ready to meet Jesus.

To help us do this, we’ll be looking at a portion of the account of Noah’s flood. I’m pretty confident that if you know any Old Testament Bible stories at all, you know all about Noah, the flood and the ark. But do you have a clear understanding as to why God put that story in the Bible? Is it because epic catastrophes make for entertaining reading? No there’s something more important than that.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis, Moses teaches us about the early history of earth. He covers about 2,000 years in those 11 chapters. It’s striking, then, that four full chapters of those 11 are devoted to telling the story of the great flood. When the Holy Spirit gives a lot of press to something, we will do very well to pay attention. In addition, Jesus in his teaching mentions the flood, and said it is a prototype or a foreshadowing of the final judgment. Peter does the same in his second epistle.

So from the flood account, let’s learn something about people, something about God, and through it all get a glimpse of the coming judgment, and how we can be ready.

The flood account is so familiar to some of you, I want to present Genesis chapter 6 to you in a new way. But first, let me read the introductory verses because there are some odd things there that we need to explain. Let’s remember the historical setting first. God created the heavens and the earth. He made it all perfectly. He made man in his image, and Adam and Eve were also perfect and sinless. This didn’t last long, though. Satan came in the form of a serpent and tempted the first couple to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... a tree which God said they could not eat from. They trusted Satan, and considered God the liar. Sin entered into the world.

Two sons of Adam and Eve take center stage: Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of his brother when God accepted his offering, but not Cain’s. He took his brother out in a field and killed

him. Cain was marked and set to be a wanderer over the face of the earth. Adam and Eve have another son, Seth, who is a believer in the one true God. So now we see a fork in the human history, Cain and his descendants are unbelievers. Seth and his descendants are believers who call on the name of the Lord. They publicly worship God. If only the line of Seth had remained faithful to God! Here's what happened as described in Genesis 6:

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. There are all sorts of fanciful interpretations of who the sons of God and daughters of men are. I'm not going to go into all the detail, but I think the simplest explanation is usually the best. In the Bible there are numerous passages where people who believe in God are called children of God. Sons of God would have been believing men. Daughters of men, in contrast, would be those who believe, not in God, but in man... humanists... unbelievers. Quite simply, believing men saw that the heathen women were very beautiful. Without a concern about inner beauty and without a regard to their faith, they married them. Their wives led them astray and they became unbelievers.

The next verse is a little more challenging:

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Who were these Nephilim? Quite honestly, we don't know. The word "Nephilim" is simply a direct transliteration of the Hebrew word, because the Bible translators do not know what the word means. It only occurs one other place in the Bible. The KJV translated the word, "Giants." So for generations, Christians pictured this race of giants who were heroes of old. This really doesn't fit the context.

A better definition would really be "tyrants." Those who rule and intimidate by violence. There were people that would control and intimidate... especially wicked and oppressive. Then, like now, these people of immense ego, arrogance, and strong will succeeded in conquering others. With no concern for God or others, they made a name for themselves. They were seen as heroes.

Now take step back, and think about what God is conveying to us here. After the fall into sin, God made a promise to Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior to remove the guilt of sin and defeat Satan. At the time of Noah, that promise of a Savior and trust in God in general had nearly disappeared from the planet. Through intermarriage, with unbelievers, most believes were led astray. Nearly everyone on the planet lives in a state of rebellion against God.

Now, how will God respond to this? Man has chosen evil. Listen to what God does. This is really important because we live in a world of increasing wickedness as well. God's judgment is approaching just as it did in the days of Noah. What we learn about God here is immensely useful to us today because God hasn't changed. He's the same God!

Now here is where I'm going to take a different approach. I'm going to first read the verse that most clearly show us one side of God. Then I'm going to read the other verses that show us a different side of God. I do this for the sake of contrast. And if you want to read the account in the order it's written, open up your Bible, or read it later today or this week. Listen:

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend [strive] with man forever [a reference of God working with despite our sinfulness, striving to bring us back into a right relationship with himself], for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." [God gives 120 years to the inhabitants of earth that might repent and turn to him.] **The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.** [The wickedness, sinfulness and rebelliousness of man made God sad

and caused him pain. We don't often think about that, do we? Just as it pains a parent to see his children make bad choices and to act rebellious, so God also feels that way.] **So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them."** [God regrets that man has chosen such a destructive rebellious path.] **Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.** [Get the idea?] **So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.** [Wow, God is really upset over this wickedness. Upset enough to destroy everything.]

There's no question as to what these verses stress, is there? This is a side of God we don't like to hear. It's a side of God we wish weren't true. It's a side of God, quite honestly, that a lot of churches sweep under the rug. They just don't talk about this side of God. But this is who our God is. This is the God who killed the first born in the land of Egypt when Pharaoh would not release God's people. He destroyed an entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Caused the earth to open up and swallow the sons of Korah when they rebelled against Moses. This is the God who struck Zechariah unable to speak when he doubted that his wife really could be pregnant with John the Baptist. He struck Paul with blindness when he was converted on the road to Damascus. He allowed Satan to attack Job, kill his family, take his possessions and inflict him with sores. And, yes, he is the kind of God that sends a worldwide flood that kills every living thing on the planet, save whatever was on that ark. He is a God who in the end truly does send people to hell for their sin and rebellion.

What kind of God is this? He is our God. He is the God of the Bible. He is righteous and unyielding when it comes to sin. His judgment is a terrible thing to fall under. It's a side of him we have to acknowledge if we are going to be prepared for Jesus' coming. And Jesus is indeed coming! Yes, we will soon celebrate his coming as a baby in the manger to save us. But let's keep one eye looking forward. He is coming again in judgment. And his judgment will be like it was when the flood came. Our God cannot and does not tolerate evil, wickedness and rebellion. There is that day of reckoning coming!

But then there's this other side of God. If the above were the only thing recorded in the flood account, we wouldn't be here to read it, would we? The world would have been destroyed... end of story. But there's more to God, and it's emphasized in the verses of the text I skipped over. Let's listen:

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." [God is patient! Giving man another 120 years to repent!] **But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.** [Now, this isn't to say Noah was sinless. We'll see he was less than perfect right after the flood when he plants a vineyard, makes wine, gets drunk and passes out without his clothes on. So don't think Noah was a saint. But he was a believer. He trusted God's promise of forgiveness. He trusted that God makes him right and that God would do this through a coming Savior. In view of his reliance upon God's deliverance, God viewed Noah as blameless and righteous!] **Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ... So God said to Noah, ... "Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every**

kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” Noah did everything just as God commanded him. [So God had a saving plan for Noah and his family. God would spare Noah... not because Noah deserved it but because God intended to remain faithful to his promises. Noah needed a Savior. Noah believed God would send him. God was intent on doing what he said he would do. The Savior would be born. But this flood had to come first.]

So here's the big picture and what we learn here: **God's judgments always serve his saving grace.** The same act of judgment is deliverance for God's people. We're not accustomed to thinking of the great worldwide flood as an act of saving mercy from our God. But that's exactly what it was. In condemning and destroying those who rejected God, his promises and his love, God was saving and preserving the one family left on the planet that still knew the true God, humbled themselves before him and relied on him for life and salvation. What would have happened in one more generation? Could God's promise of a Savior have been lost to man forever? Then what? No one who believes. No one who is saved. Jesus would have been rejected by all. There would have been no Christian church on earth. God sent the flood to save man (as strange as that may sound!)

The flood is a picture of the **final judgment.** At the end God will banish from his holy presence forever all who have remained in sin and unbelief and cast them into eternal shame and woe. Yet for His believers this will at the same time be the day of complete deliverance from all further evil. It is through His Word, the Holy Scriptures, that God takes us, His present-day believers, into His confidence that we may understand His judgments. Through such understanding He wants to aid us in curbing our own sinful flesh, and at the same time cheer us according to our new man with blessed comfort.

Friends, we live in a world that is wicked as well. God's judgment is coming upon the whole world. How can we be spared? How can we escape what the whole world will experience? If only we had an ark. If only we had that place of safety and security that spared us from God's righteous judgment. We do have such an ark! God says to you and to me: Enter the ark. The ark is the Lord Jesus Christ. John 3:18 **“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”** Romans 8:1 **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Safety from the justice and judgment of God could only be found in the ark. When Noah and his family entered in, they were separated from the wicked world and saved. And so are you when God finds you in Christ Jesus on the last day.

When Jesus returns, will be living in the world, or will you be living in the ark? Our God is a God of holy, terrifying justice. Our God is a God of mercy, grace and forgiveness. God has an incredible rescue plan arranged for you so you won't be destroyed, but will live. That rescue plan is the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust him! Know him! Enter the ark, who is Christ, and live! Amen.