

“God’s Judgment Brings A New World”

Genesis 8:1-9:7

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2nd Sunday in Easter

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This morning, we return to our ongoing sermon series on the early chapter of Genesis, picking up in Genesis 8:1-9:7.

Just to briefly set the context here before we read our sermon text this morning. Remember, in the early part of Genesis 6, God draws near to the earth and evaluates humanity, and he finds that the human race has become corrupt, that “that every intention of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.”

And so God determines to judge the evil and wickedness world. He determines to blot out man whom he has made, by means of a worldwide flood.

However, in the midst of this coming judgment, God also determines to rescue and preserve a people for himself, a people who will endure through his judgment and come out on the other side into the new world that his judgment has brought.

And so he chooses Noah, a righteous man, along with his wife and his sons and their wives. And he gives Noah very precise instructions on how to build a gigantic wooden house called an ark, much like how God would one day give Moses very precise instructions on how to build a wooden house called a tabernacle.

And this ark which Noah built would be the vessel of his salvation — and not him only, but also his family and representatives of the entire animal kingdom.

You see, God, in his judgment, did not intend to destroy the world. Instead, he intended to persevere the world, and cleanse it, and bring about, in a sense, a new world, a new creation.

And, so, in chapter 7, we read about how God did these things. Noah and his family and the animals went into the gigantic wooden house that he had made, and God shut the door behind them.

And then God opened the floodgates of both the earth and the heavens, and waters came from below and from above and it rained for forty days until, as Genesis 7 tells us, even the very highest mountains were covered, and all human and animal life perished — with only this exception: those who had come into the vessel of God's salvation, those who had entered into the Ark were kept warm and safe and dry as the Ark was lifted up to heaven and floated on the face of the waters of death.

For those outside the Ark, the floodwaters of God's judgment meant death. But for those inside the vessel of God's salvation, the floodwaters of God's judgment meant life.

And now, in chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9, we read about the new world that God's judgment brought about.

Listen now to God's holy and inerrant word. It is more to be desired than gold; even much fine gold. It is sweeter also than honey; sweeter than the drippings of the honeycomb.

1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. 2 The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. 9 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. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 11 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. 12 Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 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." 18 So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

20 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. 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, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

*6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.*

7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Prayer...

Many of us, I think, have a somewhat ambivalent relationship to God's judgment.

It's necessary, yes - we can admit that, but do we really want it? Do we really long for it? Do we really see God's judgment as a good thing?

The Scriptures contain no such ambivalence about God's judgment.

Psalms 50, for example, to pick just one text of many like it, boldly declares:

*Our God comes; he does not keep silence;
before him is a devouring fire,
around him a mighty tempest.
He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:*

*“Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”
The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge!*

Read the psalms. Listen to the promises of our Lord Jesus. Hear the cries of the prophets. Again and again, throughout the scriptures, the judgment of God is what God’s people long for. They anticipate it. They want it. They long for it.

And one of the fundamental reasons they long for it is because God’s judgment brings about a new world.

We see this in our Old Testament readings this morning.

In Exodus 14, God judges the wickedness of Egypt and brings his people into a new world of freedom, a world in which there are new opportunities and new responsibilities.

No, this new world does mean that things are easier, necessarily. In fact, in very short order after they enter their new world of freedom, the Israelites begin to complain about how it was easier when they were slaves in Egypt, and maybe it would be better if they could go back to that previous existence.

But when God’s judgement moves us forward into a new world, a new existence, there is no going back. We must embrace maturity, no matter how painful it might be.

In a similar way, God’s judgment of Judah brought the exiles into the new world of Babylon. In this strange place, as Jeremiah told them, there would be new dangers, but also new opportunities for righteous and wisdom, as the stories of both Daniel and Esther proclaim.

In the death of Jesus, God's judgment was poured out on his son. And this, judgment, of course, brought a new world, as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning from John — a new Adam in the garden with a new bride, as Mary Magdalene stands in for the church.

Indeed, God's judgment in the death and resurrection of Jesus brought God's people into a new world — now, it was not necessarily a safer or easier world — remember the suffering and persecution that lay before them — but there was no going back, no returning to what lay behind.

Beloved, this is what our God does. This is who he is. He is always bringing us forward, by his judgment, by his intrusion into our world and our lives, into new places of maturity.

And our passage this morning show us, in particularly stark ways, how God's judgment brings a new world.

In Genesis 8, we are in the middle of the flood story. The waters cover the earth. All human and animal life, outside the ark, has been extinguished.

The ark is floating on the face of the waters.

But then, in the first verse of chapter 8, we read these words.

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.

In the midst of his judgment, God had not neglected his people. In the midst of his judgment, God did not neglect the animals either. He remembered, them, all those who had gone into the Ark according to his instruction.

And so, because God remembered them, he caused a wind to blow across the waters. And as the wind blew, and the rain stopped, the waters began to recede.

They receded continually, Genesis says. Once the waters began to go down they continued to decline. The new world was coming into existence.

Five months after the rain began, five months after Noah and his family and the animals entered the ark, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

The waters continued to recede, but the ark hung there, grounded on the mountain. The ark was so high up that Noah couldn't see down into the valleys, down into the lower regions, and so he sent out birds to explore the new world for him.

The first bird, Noah sent out, a raven, didn't come back.

Ravens are carrion birds, scavengers, and the reason he didn't return to the ark is likely because he found plenty of dead animal flesh to eat and survive.

Then, later, Noah sent out a dove. The first time he sent the dove out, it returned, because doves eat plants, and the waters had not yet receded enough for living plants to grow in the ground.

Then Noah sent out the dove again, and this time the dove returned with an olive branch in her mouth — evidence that new plants were growing.

One week later, Noah sent the dove out again, and this time the dove did not return at all — it had plenty to eat and survive.

And so finally, over one year after the rain began to fall, the earth had dried up, and God told Noah and his family and the animals to go out from the ark, and to be fruitful and multiply.

That phrase — be fruitful and multiply — is an important one. God had cleansed the earth, by his judgment he had made a new world for Noah and his family and the animals — and now he gave them the same commission he had given Adam and Eve at the beginning — to be fruitful and multiply, to spread out and enjoy and rule over his creation.

But notice, in first verses of chapter 9 how, though in some ways, Noah and his family were given the same commission as Adam and Eve, they were also given new responsibilities and new freedoms in this new world that God had brought about through his judgment.

Now, of course, the world as a whole is quite literally new — it has gone through a kind of death and resurrection by being submerged under the waters, and then emerging again out from the flood.

But the world is new too, in the sense that man's place in has been advanced by God into new realms of responsibility and freedom — new maturity will be required for man to live in this world God has made through his judgment in the flood.

In verses 2-4 of Genesis 9, Noah and his family are given new authority over the animals, authority that was not explicitly given in the same way to Adam and Eve.

The animals will now fear and dread humanity, and God explicitly tells Noah and his family that the animals are given to them for food.

This is different from the garden in Genesis 1, where God tells Adam and Eve that he has given them every plant and every tree with seed in its fruit for food.

Now, God says in Genesis 9, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."

But with this new freedom comes also new responsibilities. For the first time, God sanctions capital punishment, saying to Noah and his family: *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."*

After the flood, man's authority over the animal kingdom is intensified — the animals are now to fear human beings in new way, and to be food for them, and humanity's rule over other humans is intensified as well.

Now, those who take human life will be held to account in a new way.

The point to see here, beloved, is that after God's judgment in the great flood, the world will no longer be the same.

And this is the way it always is after God's judgment comes. God's judgment always brings a new world.

That's how it was after the Exodus. The world changed for God's people. It was no longer the same.

That's how it was after the Babylonian exile. The world changed. It was no longer the same.

That's how it was after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a new world, with new freedoms and new responsibilities.

And of these things are given to us so that we will understand our time as well.

Beloved, I don't know what lays before us in the years and decades ahead.

But I do believe that we live in a time of widespread decadence and wickedness, and it seems likely to me that God will not allow things to remain the same indefinitely.

I don't have any idea of when it will come, but I suspect that some time in my lifetime, or the lifetime of my children, unless there is widespread repentance and change, God's judgment will come upon our nation and our culture.

But what I want you to believe, beloved, is that we don't have to fear that judgment, if and when it comes.

Yes, it will likely be painful and disruptive, and even perhaps, cataclysmic. It might involve suffering and difficulty.

But this the way that God governs and rules the world.

He judges evil. And in the midst of his judgment, he preserves his people, he preserves his church, even as he preserved Noah and his family and the animals in the ark.

And after his judgment, God always brings his people into a new world.

This what God does.

He does this in human history. He does this in the details of our lives.

And in the end, on the last day, his Son Jesus Christ will judge all of humanity and bring his people out of their graves into the new world that he will raise also from the dead.

So let's not be afraid of God's judgment. Let's hope for it, long for it, look for it.

For if God preserved and cared for his church through an absolutely cataclysmic world-wide flood, he can preserve and care for us and bless us in the midst of whatever judgment he has prepared for our time.

Let's hold on to the wisdom of the Scriptures, and boldly say with the Psalmist, not only about the Last Judgment, but also about God's judgment in our time:

*Our God comes; he does not keep silence;
before him is a devouring fire,
around him a mighty tempest.
He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:
"Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"
The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.