

Wednesday of Lent 2

“Suffering for Righteousness’ Sake”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This sermon series is called “Shadows of the Suffering Christ.” Last week, we talked about Abel and how the innocent blood he shed at the hands of his brother Cain points to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to *His* holy, precious blood that speaks a *better* word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24).

This week, we move on to Noah, a man who needs literally no introduction. All I have to do is say his name, and even the smallest child can recall the basic details of his story. “Who built the ark? Noah, Noah!” We know all about the animals going in two by two. We know about the forty days and forty nights of rain. We know about the ark’s eventual landing atop Mount Ararat, and, of course, the rainbow, the sign of God’s promise to mankind that He would never again send a flood to destroy the earth.

But what does this all have to do with *Christ*? How does Noah and what he went through foreshadow the suffering of God’s Chosen Servant?

The Shadow

For that we need to back up to the chapter of Genesis leading up to the Flood. In Genesis 6, which we heard read earlier, we find that things have only gotten *worse* since the Fall. The murderous conflict between Cain and Abel was only the beginning. Now, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was *great* in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*” (verse 5). Man, who was dust and to dust was cursed to return, had reached a new low.

But there was one who found favor in the eyes of the Lord: Noah. “Noah,” it says, “was a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (verse 9). Now, that’s not to say he was perfect. Noah was a natural-born sinner like everyone around him (Ps. 51:5). When it says that Noah was a “righteous” and “blameless” man, this does not mean that he never sinned, but like all other sinners who find favor with God, Noah received this righteousness by *faith*. He did not earn favor with God; it was a gift, pure and simple and undeserved. So, instead of saying that Noah found favor with God, perhaps it would be better to say that grace found Him.¹ And when it did, it set him *apart* from all the

¹ Nancy Guthrie, *The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis*, 100-101.

wickedness and evil going on around him. “Noah walked with God” (verse 9). He stuck *close* to Him, knowing well both his sin and God’s love and mercy toward sinners.

In the New Testament, Noah is even called a “herald of righteousness” (2 Pt. 2:5). So, not only was *he* righteous and blameless by faith, but he preached to others how *they* could be counted righteous, as well. And, according to Luther and many others, we find the content of that preaching right here in Genesis 6, when the Lord says, “My Spirit shall not abide in [or contend with] man forever, for he is flesh; his days shall be 120 years” (verse 3). Sometimes understood as God placing a limit on the human lifespan because of man’s great wickedness, these words rather describe a warning: “Yet 120 years, and the world shall be overthrown. Repent, for you are sinful flesh, and God’s Spirit will not contend with you forever. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but if sin and destruction is all you love, then that’s what you’ll receive.”

Well, you can imagine how a sermon like that was received by Noah’s contemporaries. Actually, we don’t have to imagine, because, again, we’re told that the earth was full of corruption and filled with violence (verse 11). 120 years, and nothing had changed. Nobody had listened. They had rejected God and His herald, Noah.

And that’s when God told Noah to build a boat. And not just any boat, an ark—basically a big, floating box. We’re talking three stories tall and about the length of one and a half football fields, enough to preserve Noah and his family, eight souls in all, along with two or more of every kind of bird and land creature on the earth. “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven” (verse 17). If Noah had seemed like a joke before, just think what everyone thought of him now: “A flood? Here? That’s how God’s going to punish us? He’s just going to sweep us away? And you’re going to, what, spend the next hundred years or so building a boat that’s going to save you and a bunch of animals? Ok, well, you do that, and we’ll just be over here eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. You come join us when you’re ready to come back from Crazytown.” Noah had already spent all this time preaching God’s Word to no avail. Now, he’d have to spend about as much time doing this thing that surely *must* have seemed crazy.

And yet, he did it. After God finishes telling Noah what to do, the chapter simply ends, “he did all that God commanded him” (verse 22). He did this in spite of any scorn he may have endured, any heckling from curious onlookers. The author of Hebrews writes, “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.” (11:7). He believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to him by the Lord. And when there was, he would no longer be vilified but vindicated.

The Suffering Christ

And now you see what this all has to do with Christ. For He, too, was vilified. He came to His own, not just as a herald of righteousness but as the very Word of God made flesh, and His own people did not receive Him (John 1:11). “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). He *suffered*, and not just physically.

In Psalm 22, we read, “I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see Me mock Me; they make mouths at Me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the Lord; let Him deliver Him; let Him rescue Him, for He delights in Him!’” (verse 7-8). That’s the preincarnate Christ speaking through His servant David. The words immediately remind us of the cross, where Jesus, hanging from the nails that have been driven through His wrists, endured the scorn of passersby: “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:40).

He had spent three years preaching God’s Word, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). “Repent *now*, turn away from your sin, and take up your cross and follow Me.” And while some did -- they saw the signs He did, they had their fill of the loaves -- in the end, it just became too much. The things He said, the claims He made, like, “Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53); “The Son of man must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed ~~and on the third day be raised~~” (Matt. 16:21); “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). It was too much. It was beyond belief, more so than even spending a hundred years building an ark without a single drop of rain.

So they killed Him. They tried and sentenced an innocent man -- a *perfect* man, righteous and blameless *in and of Himself* -- all the while calling Him a liar and blasphemer, a false king, and treating Him like a joke.

And if you don’t think that hurt Jesus, then you haven’t been called enough names. Words hurt. They are the weapon of the wicked. James writes, “The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). With it, people who were made in the image of God, the same God who *gave* them their tongues, cursed their Creator. That’s the kind of thing that grieved God to His heart in Genesis 6, and it’s one of the things that grieved Him now. He had spent all this time preaching God’s Word to no avail. Now, He was going through this torment that even His disciples had said was crazy.

And yet, He did it. He did all that God commanded Him, because, like Noah, He believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to Him by the Lord;

that although the Son of Man must suffer and be killed, on the third day He would be raised.

And as surely as the waters did come, and God brought Noah safely through them, so did He keep His promise to Christ, raising Him on the third day. Having suffered for righteousness' sake, they *both* received what was promised them. They were vindicated.

What Does This Mean?

And, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, because He was, so will you. ^(be) The kingdom of God still suffers violence, and not just physically. More and more, we're seeing the tide turn against Christians and their stance on the truth of God's Word. *We* are called to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations (Luke 24:47), but the world, still cursed, doesn't want to hear it. The wickedness of man is *still* great in the earth, and that means that we, if we are faithful, will be vilified. The truth can be a hard pill to swallow, especially when it's the size of an ark or an empty tomb.

But remember what Paul says: "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be trouble, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:14-17). Those who ignored the warning in Noah's day saw what happens when you suffer for doing evil. While they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, the flood came and swept them all away.

And "as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:37). Christ will come, and the dead in Christ will rise first to eternal vindication and blessing, enjoying the fullness of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation promised to ~~us~~ ^{them} as in this life. As I preached at a member's memorial service yesterday, that kind of faith is not easy. It's hard to walk by faith and not by sight. It's hard to look out and see nothing but wickedness all around. But looks can be deceiving, and God's Word is sure. When He makes a promise, it cannot be broken.

"So we are always of good courage" (2 Cor. 5:1). We do all that God has commanded us. By grace, we believe that there will be a fulfillment of what the Lord has spoken to *us*, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. No rain? No problem. No rescue? Not *yet*, perhaps, but one day, and one day soon. "Then," as we read in Psalm

43, "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you...O God, my God" (verse 4).

Hope in God. He will come through. Be faithful unto death, and you will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, stand firm, for it is better to suffer for *this* than for doing evil, and you shall be vindicated.

In † Jesus' name. Amen. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria