

Walk with God now \* Genesis 6-9

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One of the most difficult questions that Christians have had to wrestle with is the problem of evil. If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He do something about the injustices that happen every day?

That's a great question. What is God going to do about the gang members that kidnapped those missionaries in Haiti? What's God going to do about the hundreds of Christians persecuted by the Taliban as they moved back into Afghanistan? What's God's going to do about the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women who appear to have no hope for justice? What's God going to do about the violence and fraud and injustice that happens in our culture every day? What's God going to do about evil?

The passage that we're going to look at today answers that question. I know that usually when we think of Noah and the Ark, we think in terms of kids' books and nursery décor, but if we leave it there, we miss out on the message of this story. God's justice and mercy are on full display in the account of the Flood.

So let's go to Genesis 6; we're going to cover a lot of ground today – three chapters – 6-9 – so I'm going to paraphrase a fair bit and I'd encourage you to have your Bible open in front of you so you can fill in the details as we move along. So let's look at Genesis 6 and the way that God will deal with the problem of evil.

Genesis 6 opens with a summary of how things have been going on earth. About a dozen generations have passed since Cain killed Abel and things haven't gotten any better. Look at verse 11 -

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.

12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.  
(Gen 6:11-12 NIV).

It was a mess. Cain and Abel were just the beginning. "All the people on earth had corrupted their ways." And if you slide up a few verses you see why it got so bad – verse 5 –

5 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.

That's a pretty stunning statement about human nature isn't it? "EVERY inclination of the heart was ONLY evil ALL the time." This verse tells us that there is something fundamentally messed up about the human heart, because of the Fall and the influence of sin in every generation.

Now some of you, me included, will want to push back and say – 'no, human beings aren't evil like that – we're fundamentally good!' And to a degree, that's right. Because of God's common grace, because of social norms, people ARE generally good and we DO tend to look out for one another.

But even I have to admit that I can see what this verse is saying. And I can see it played out in the world over and again. There is an inclination in every heart towards evil and when people indulge in it, it creates all kinds of problems. I mean, just look at the newspaper and you'll see story after story illustrating this point. There is something fundamentally messed up about the human heart.

That being said, verse 6 is even more striking. Verse 5, verse 11, those are stunning indictments of human nature, but verse 6 – look at how God’s responds to this -

6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Isn’t that an interesting way to talk about God? ‘He was grieved that He had made man. His heart was filled with pain.’ This I think is the grief of a parent, who sees their child making bad decisions and doing stupid things and knowing that they are capable of so much better than this. It grieved the LORD to see His people taking His blessings for granted and corrupting them for their own pleasure and so He decided He needed to do something about it.

Verse 7 - 7 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."

This was God’s solution to the problem of evil – wipe it out. Wipe the slate clean. Shake the etch-a-sketch. Hold people accountable for their evil deeds by giving them what their evil deeds deserved.

This is wrath. This is God’s judgment. This is God saying ‘Violence and injustice is not ok. Corruption cannot be tolerated. People are accountable for what they do.’ And so He decided to wipe it all out.

But not all. Even in God’s justice, there is mercy. Rather than destroying the earth and wiping His hands of it, He decided, ‘I’m going to give them a second chance.’ This was not the end of the world; this was a hard reboot; a second chance, a new beginning. God would cleanse the earth, but He would preserve people and animals to live in the new earth, free from the corruption and evil of the old one.

And He did it through a man named Noah. Noah, it says in verse 8, found favour in the eyes of the LORD. Verse 9 tells us that he was a righteous man, blameless compared to the people of his time and he walked with God. Remember that – he walked with God. He was probably not perfect but he made it his goal to walk in a way that was consistent with His Maker’s character.

And so God said to him in verse 13 - 13 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.

14 So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.

15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.

(Gen 6:13-15 NIV).

19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

20 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.

21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him (Gen 6:19-22 NIV). That’s what made him righteous. He did what God asked. This is what ‘walking with God’ looks like.

Now from here, you probably know the story. Noah built the ark, and in came the animals and up went the door and down came the rain. And it rained for forty days and forty nights and chapter 7:21 –

everything perished. This is Romans 6:23 – the wages of sin is death – but the Lord preserved Noah and his family so that the world could start again.

Eventually the rain stopped and the water drew back and Noah sent a series of birds out to see if it was safe to get off the boat. Then chapter 8, verse 15, God said to Noah - 16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.

17 Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you--the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground--so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it" (Gen 8:16-17 NIV).

Does that sound familiar? It should. That's the original Great Commission – be fruitful and multiply. God is starting over with Noah and his family and their job is to be fruitful and multiply on the earth and live in a way that is consistent with the God who has just delivered them. He actually repeats it two more times – chapter 9, verse 1 and again 9: "7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it." (Gen 9:7 NIV). This is Creation all over again; Creation getting a brand new start.

And then starting in verse 8, God promises to never destroy the earth like this again, with a flood. Verse 11, He says - 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

And then He gives them a sign to represent that covenant – verse 13 - I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds,

15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

It's as if God is hanging up His bow, His weapon of war, promising safety and security to all who live on earth. God used the flood to deal with the problem of evil and then hangs up His bow, so that this second creation can start anew. He pays back every evil and injustice but graciously saves a remnant who will live for Him.

But there's a problem. And that problem's illustrated by the little story that's tacked on to the end of the Flood account. (I never heard this one in Sunday school. But it's there). You can see it in verse 20 and onwards.

Noah plants a vineyard, makes some of the fruit into wine and then ends up hammered and naked on the floor of his tent. And then his son Ham came in and did something – we don't know what because the Bible thinks it's too vile to record – but we know it was evil because Noah ends up cursing him for it. Cursed be Canaan and blessed be his other sons, Shem and Japheth.

Do you see what the problem is? Evil still lurked in the heart of man. The evil in the world was wiped away, but it came onboard the ship in Noah's family, and they went on to exercise that evil all over again.

Which means there's another problem. Because God is still holy. God is still righteous. And He can't tolerate injustice. And He won't tolerate evil. And so if God is going to be faithful and just, which He is, then He needs to deal with this ongoing problem of evil, somehow.

And Jesus actually uses the language of Noah's story to say how God's going to do it. Matthew 24:37, Jesus is telling His disciples about the end of the age and He says:

37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;

39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Mat 24:37-39 NIV).

And then 2 Peter 3:6-7 says that the same power that unleashed the flood will unleash a fire for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men.

In Jesus' mind, in Peter's mind, the flood is a picture of what God is do at the end of the age. The flood is a picture of how God will ultimately deal with evil. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is waiting, giving people a chance to turn to Him from evil, but the day will come and everyone will be accountable for what they have done. What God did with water at the flood, God will do again with fire in the end.

How do we bring this altogether? Let me put it to you like this - the wrath of God is coming, so walk with God now. The wrath of God is coming, so walk with God now.

Now let me pause for a minute because I know nobody likes to talk about wrath. Every human instinct I have so don't talk about that – nobody wants to think about judgment – nobody want to talk about wrath – but you know what? If we as a culture are willing to put ghoulish skeletons and severed heads on our front lawns for Halloween, then I think we can talk about wrath. The aftermath of the flood would make my neighbours' front lawns pale in comparison.

And there's a side of wrath that we as pretty well-off Canadians miss – and that's that God's wrath is the only hope we have that some people will get what they deserve.

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian theologian who saw the evil in the heart of men 'all the time' and wrote –

I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love (from *Free of Charge*).

This is how God will deal with the problem of evil – by paying back every evil thought and every evil deed that has ever been done. Every injustice that went unavenged in this life, every corruption that

hurt the lives of innocent people will be paid back at the end of the age. 2 Peter 12-13 says 'That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire... but in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.' Just like the Flood, the fire will cleanse this world and then establish a new one. But this won't just be a second creation where evil still lurks; God has will make a NEW creation, which is home to nothing but righteousness and goodness.

Since the wrath of God is coming... walk with God now. There's a sense in which God's wrath is a good thing – great, every evil will be repaid. But wait, what about the evil inclinations of my heart. What about the times when I've hurt others or I've pursued my own desires over what is objectively good?

That's where God's grace comes in. You know, there's something really interesting in the rainbow because which direction does it point? Stick an arrow in that thing – up. It's as if God was saying – I will never again destroy the earth and if I break that promise (that's what a covenant is) then I'm the one who's going to pay. I will have to suffer before I deal with the problem of human sin.

And that's exactly what He did. Jesus gathered up every sin, every evil thought, every evil deed into His body; the wrath of God was poured out on Him, abandoned on the Cross, so that He could then extend grace to us as sinners. Imagine the all of the suffering that people experienced during the Flood, plus the sin of every person who has ever lived, poured out on Jesus on the Cross, so that He could deliver us from sin. Somebody's gotta pay for all that evil; it will either be us at the end of the age, or it was Jesus on the Cross, when we hide ourselves in Him.

This week I kept thinking about this verse from the hymn 'Here is love' because it captures exactly what happened –

On the Mount of Crucifixion, Fountains opened deep and wide;  
Through the flood-gates of God's mercy Flowed a vast and gracious tide.  
Grace and love like mighty rivers Poured incessant from above;  
Heaven's peace and perfect justice Kissed a guilty world in love.

That's exactly what happened – mercy and justice met on the Cross so that Jesus could extend God's love to us, guilty sinners that we were.

In this sense, Jesus is the Ark. He says, 'Come on board. Receive forgiveness. Escape the wrath. Your sins have been paid for, graciously forgiven at my expense – receive the grace of God.' When we do that, our sins are paid for, we are delivered from the coming wrath and promised eternal life in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

And Peter says in 2 Peter 3:11, because of this, what kind of people ought you to be? Because of this free gift, we ought to live holy and godly lives, as we look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

We should walk with God, constantly living in ways that are consistent with His character. Just like Noah stood out amongst the corruption of his generation, we need to stand out like stars in the darkness, living visibly good and different lives amidst our neighbours. Not because that will earn us salvation from wrath, but because Jesus freely delivers us and gives us the promise of new life both now and forever. Live justly. Love mercy. The wrath of God is coming so walk humbly with God now.