

*This is the account of Noah.*

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. <sup>10</sup> Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

*<sup>11</sup> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. <sup>15</sup> This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. <sup>16</sup> Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."*

*<sup>22</sup> Noah did everything just as God commanded him. ... <sup>7:11</sup> In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. <sup>12</sup> And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.*

*<sup>13</sup> On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. <sup>14</sup> They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. <sup>15</sup> Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. <sup>16</sup> The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.*

*<sup>17</sup> For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. <sup>18</sup> The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. <sup>19</sup> They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. <sup>20</sup> The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. <sup>21</sup> Every living thing that moved on the earth perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. <sup>22</sup> Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. <sup>23</sup> Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. (Genesis 6:9-22, 7:11-23)*

### **God's Judgment is Real**

Have you ever made a threat you didn't really mean? You say to your kid, "If you do that, I'm going to spank you so hard you won't sit down for a week!" Or about someone you supervise who's just created a huge headache, "I'm gonna kill that guy!" Most parenting guides and guides to being good managers frown on empty threats. Even exaggerations for effect are a bad idea the experts say. Why? Because they undermine your credibility. Once a child or a subordinate begins to doubt that you'll really do the things you say you'll do, they push you further and further to get their way. Obviously, that's a bad thing. But what about when you're totally serious about a threat, but you can't decide if it's time to lower the boom yet? What if you're being patient, giving a person a chance to reflect on their behavior and do the right thing on their own? Even then, some people will keep pushing, thinking that patience means weakness, never realizing that the day is coming when they will suffer the consequences.

In all our lessons for today, God tries to get us to see that his patience is not weakness. It's not human indecision. It's certainly not exaggeration for effect. It's love. But that love does not mean that we can continue to do whatever we want without regard to what's coming. Noah in particular teaches us a truth that every human being needs to understand: **God's judgment is real.**

#### **I.**

The great flood is one of the best known stories in the Old Testament. I bet almost every child here today can tell us the basic outline of the story. But it's not a children's story. The great flood was the greatest act of judgment the world will see before Christ comes back. It demonstrates that God is totally serious when he says that we will have to give an account for our lives. My friends, **God's judgment is real, but most people don't expect it.**

You may have noticed when I read the text this morning that there are two parts to it, about half of it is in chapter six of Genesis and the other half is in chapter seven. Well, that first half took place one hundred years before the second half. Long before the judgment came, God told 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."**

The earth was corrupt and full of violence. It wasn't always that way. After God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, their descendants split into two groups, believers and unbelievers. But eventually the two groups came back together and the unbelievers gained control of the thinking of their society. I'm not talking about politics or government. We know nothing about that at this time. I'm talking about attitudes. The society indulged its sinful desires and it stamped out the faith of almost the entire human race. As faith died, corruption increased. There was nothing to check the sin in their hearts, so the society became more violent, more evil, more dangerous to faith.

Does all that sound familiar? It should. Before the flood God said that every inclination of the human heart was evil from birth. After the flood, God said the exact same thing. Human nature has not changed. People are born evil and human societies are always corrupt. They always encourage the sinful desires in our hearts and they always try to stamp out true faith. But God has a judgment coming for all people. The flood shows us that he is totally serious about that judgment.

The funny thing is, it's easy for people to ignore it. Jesus said in our gospel lesson, **"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; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."** The people of Noah's day assumed that life would always be the way that it was. On the very day that Noah and his family entered the ark, young couples were promising to spend their lives together and were dreaming of children and grandchildren. Even when the rains started, people were going about their daily routines, working, playing, eating, drinking, totally unaware of the destruction that was about to fall upon them.

Now, they did have warning signs. They had their consciences, which God put in us to warn us that he hates and punishes sin. But they had managed to stifle them. They could see the violence and corruption in their society, but they had decided that was a good thing or at worst, just part of life. So they ignored every effort God gave to wake them up. Then his judgment came and they all died. And they went to hell.

It's no different today. Our society is totally oblivious to the end that's coming. In fact, Judgment Day is a joke in our society – which many people use to dismiss the message their consciences send them. Even though people wring their hands over what they see on the news, on the day Christ returns, people will get up and go to work. People will be planning weddings and business and what they're going to do tomorrow. They will be caught totally off guard. That in spite of the signs Jesus promised for the whole New Testament age – war, famine, earthquakes and disasters. Those things have been happening since he left. Every one of them is sign of his return. Every earthquake is supposed to warn us. But people today see them as natural geological phenomena that have nothing to do with God. Every war is supposed to warn us. But people today see them more in terms of history and current events and pretty much leave God out of it.

But God didn't let that go. He gave us one more warning, in fact, he gave us his greatest warning: he told us what is coming. God told Noah. And then he commanded Noah to spend 100 years building an ark. As it rose to 45 feet in height and 75 feet in width and 450 feet in length, God was warning to the people of Noah's day about what was coming. No doubt, people asked Noah why he was building that ship. Every time Noah told them, they heard God's warning. Now they didn't believe it. Only Noah and his sons did. But their lives of dedication to the Lord were also a final word of warning from God to an unbelieving generation.

God has told us what is coming. It's our job to share that warning with the entire world. Judgment Day is coming. Every human being will appear before the seat of Christ. All those who did not believe in him will have to answer for their sins. Since all people are born evil, they never want to believe that message. So, most people will not listen. When Jesus comes, they'll be shocked and it will be too late. He will send them to hell.

But that is never what God wants. Even in Noah's day, God loved all people. He wanted all people to be saved. He didn't have to wait one hundred years for Noah to build an ark. He didn't have to give them that last chance to hear his word and to see the example of faith. He could've saved Noah in a different way. But he wanted those people to hear. The same is true today. Jesus could come back before our service ends. If he doesn't, it's because he still wants the world to hear his message. He still loves all people and wants all people to be saved.

## II.

Why have we heeded that warning? Why do we believe? Not because we're better than any of those other people. We were born sinners, too. Not because we grew up Lutheran. Not because we resisted the gospel less. We believe because the Holy Spirit came in the gospel and reached into our hearts and created faith there. It's all his work. But when someone doesn't believe, that's their fault. This is one of those teachings that we can't wrap our minds around. If we are saved, it's because God gave us faith. If we are condemned, it's because we refused to believe. The practical point here is that left to ourselves, we would not believe. Thank God that he gave you your faith! **God's judgment is real but we are saved by his mercy.**

The flood was real. People today struggle with that truth. Many people consider the description in Genesis just too hard to accept. It says that the mountains were covered by twenty feet of water. Most scientists would say that there isn't enough water on earth to cover Mt. Everest with twenty feet of water. But God simply says that it happened. He doesn't give us all the scientific details and there's no use arguing about it. God's point is that his judgment was real in the past and he is totally serious about it for the future.

Some people have a different problem with this account. Moses tells us that God exterminated every man, woman and child except for Noah and his family. To many people, that seems unworthy of God. They think that it makes God savage and bloodthirsty. But they fail to recognize that God is the judge of all the earth. The truth is God kills everyone. Whether you die at 90 years or 90 minutes, God decided it was time for you to go. Then you face his judgment. If you die without faith, you will spend eternity in hell. God the righteous judge determined to send the flood. We don't get to sit in judgment over him as if he had to answer to our ideas of right and wrong. Rather, we need to see this judgment for what it was: a foretaste of the Last Judgment.

My friends, the end is coming. Every human being deserves to die and go to hell. But the story of Noah isn't only about judgment. It's also about grace and mercy. God saved Noah and his family. Why? Moses says, "**Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.**" Now, don't misunderstand that statement. Noah was included when God said, twice, that every inclination of the human heart is only evil all the time. Noah was a sinner. In fact, you see that in the second most famous story about Noah. After the flood, he planted a vineyard, made wine and got drunk and passed out, naked in his tent. Noah was a sinner just like we are.

So what did God mean? Noah was a believer. And he lived his faith. Not perfectly, of course. Only Jesus was perfect. But Noah faithfully followed his Lord. When the time came, he did the hard thing and built the ark and testified to a world that didn't want to hear what he had to say. Even after his sin of drunkenness, Noah still repented and trusted in Christ to save him.

Even though Jesus had not come yet, Noah had the same faith we do, faith in Christ. So Jesus counted as righteous for Noah, just as he counts as righteous for us. Jesus never sinned once. He had no sin in his heart because he was the Son of God even while he was the Son of Mary. He was born without sin so he was the one perfect human being who ever lived. When we trust in him, we are trusting in his perfection. We are trusting God's promise that the perfect life of Jesus counts for us. And we're trusting that his death on the cross paid for us. We're trusting that Jesus died in our place, that he suffered our hell and now we don't have to suffer hell and even death now is only the door to eternal life. When we trust in Jesus we're trusting his promise that because he rose from the dead, all our sins are washed away and we too will rise and live with him.

And of course, we're trusting that he will come back for us. We're trusting that he will remake this world into a perfect place. And we're trusting that he will purify our hearts and our minds so that we live with him forever. Until that day comes, we're trusting that he will care for us here just as he cared for Noah and his family. What is the best known detail of the story of Noah's ark? Isn't it the animals coming two by two? God preserved nature because he made this world for us. God preserved what scientists call the biosphere – he preserved the balance of animals and plants, lands and seas that the flood could've destroyed so that we could

live on this planet for thousands of years longer. God has been caring for us for all that time. He will continue to care for us until we see Jesus.

When we trust in Jesus, we are trusting in all those things. We only trust in him because the Holy Spirit came to us in the gospel and he gave us faith. His great acts of mercy have rescued us from the destruction that is coming. God's judgment is real. But that should never cause us fear. It should remind us that the end of all that's hard in this world is coming. And so is the beginning of our life with him. Amen.