Noah and the Flood

The heavy-metal story of the Bible, the first word of grace, and the only shelter there is

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 19, 2021
PASSAGES	Genesis 6:5-9:3; Genesis 5:3-32; Genesis 4:17-26; 2 Peter 2:5; Luke 3:38; John 14:2; Matthew 3:16
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:59:48 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The flood is not a nursery mural. It shows what God's judgment on sin looks like when it is not held back. And in the middle of it, grace appears for the first time in Scripture: Noah found favor, and his family survived only because they were with him. We survive the same way — as stowaways in Christ, the only shelter there is.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A church shaped by "buddy Jesus" needs this story. It reminds us that God cares a great deal about sin.
- The genealogy before the flood is a genealogy of death — "and he died," over and over — interrupted once by Enoch, who walked with God and was not, for God took him.
- The odd details (long lifespans, the sons of God, the volume of water) are worth a detour, but the main point stands either way: mankind's wickedness, and God's judgment on it.
- "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" is the Bible's first mention of favor, or grace, just as Cain's story held its first mention of sin.
- The flood is uncreation so that God can recreate — a billboard for the day he will make all things new.
- Noah's sons were stowaways in God's rescue. So are we: hidden in Christ because of our connection to him, not because we earned it.

- The floodwaters didn't care that you were slightly better than that guy. There is no shelter in moral comparison, only in Christ.

▶ 0:59:48

This was meant to be a rainy week, Matt admitted, and he'd taken that as confirmation for preaching on Noah. Then it didn't rain. He preached on Noah anyway — the third in the series on major figures of the Old Testament.

Why preach Noah at all

▶ 1:01:35

When he told friends, the reaction was: why? We associate Noah with children's classrooms, fluffy giraffes on murals, nursery rhymes, or a Russell Crowe movie. "This is one of those stories that in the Bible is kind of — it's heavy metal, if you will. There's an intensity to it that I think is corrective for us in our context."

▶ 1:02:08

That context, he said, is an evangelical church that has largely become "the cult of kindness, the religion of buddy Jesus and sweetness." This story is in our Scriptures as a reminder that God cares about sin, "and it shows us what unmitigated wrath looks like." Besides, he asks people to read their Bibles, and they will meet passages like this: "I may as well help."

▶ 1:04:17

So far the series had seen Adam's expulsion from the tree of life and Cain overtaken by sin as a croucher. Noah is "a crescendo of this tale that's also tragedy." Matt promised a couple of detours into the strange parts — "because I know that people are curious, and if I don't, they will find it on the internet anyway" — but to keep the main thing the main thing.

A genealogy of death

▶ 1:05:26

The genealogy lists Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared — and after every one, the text adds what it didn't need to: "and he died." If it gave only the age you would assume as much; instead it says it every time (Genesis 5:3–20). Then, in the middle:

▶ 1:07:10

> "Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."
>
> GENESIS 5:23–24 ↗

"A strange sermon in a genealogy," Matt called it. In the reign of death, "the one who walks with God lives." Then the refrain resumes with Methuselah, 969 years — and he died.

Detour one: the very long lives

▶ 1:08:22

About twelve years ago Matt resolved to read every footnote on Genesis in an apologetics study Bible. At the patriarchs' ages, one note pointed to the Sumerian king lists, which record kings before the flood reigning for tens of thousands of years — one for 28,800 years, "when kingship was lowered from heaven."

▶ 1:11:09

The cuneiform used circles and wedges, not numerals, and scholars read them in base 60 because Sumer counted in base 60. Some have asked whether Sumer inherited the list from an older culture that counted in base 10. Read that way, the reigns become long but comparable to the biblical ones — about ten men from the first king to the flood king, as there are ten from Adam to Noah. "What does that do for your faith? I'm not sure. You could do nothing with that; that's fine with me." But someone with no theological axe to grind was recording that people once lived much longer, "and the Bible's like, I've been saying that. Okay, move on."

Two lines diverge

▶ 1:13:14

Cain's short line, back a chapter, ends with Lamech boasting to his wives that he has killed a young man for striking him: "If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold" (Genesis 4:23–24). Cain is not an exception. "This is who we are."

▶ 1:14:33

Then the line of Adam starts over with Seth, and with his son Enosh, "at that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:25–26) — worship by name, perhaps even covenant. The author seems to be showing two paths diverging.

Detour two: the sons of God

▶ 1:15:12

> "The sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. … 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."
>
> GENESIS 6:1–5 ↗

▶ 1:16:18

Matt set out two main readings. In one, the "sons of God" are Seth's line, who had covenanted to God by name, taking wives from Cain's line, and the Nephilim are simply mighty human warriors; Adam himself is called "son of God" (Luke 3:38). "I wouldn't want you to choose that just because it makes it less weird," he added. In the other, the phrase means celestial beings, as it does elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and old Greek translations render Nephilim as "giants." Both readings have pedigree: Ephrem the Syrian held one, Clement of Alexandria the other.

▶ 1:18:25

It isn't important to decide. Even the ancient Jewish writers who said these were angels taught that they made people "more efficient with our own self-destruction," not that they introduced evil — "because we had that down." Either way, we cannot blame a spiritual force outside ourselves. "This is mankind's wickedness, and mankind is going to face judgment."

The first word of grace

▶ 1:18:58

Now the hints of rescue. Lamech names his son Noah, "saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands'" (Genesis 5:28–32). Noah's life mission is prophesied by his dad.

▶ 1:20:09

> "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."
>
> GENESIS 6:8–9 ↗

Cain's story held the Bible's first mention of sin. This holds its first mention of favor — "favor that we also translate grace." And it seems to be Noah himself, not his whole family, who found it; they will benefit from it. Like Enoch, Noah walked with God, and walking with God in a reign of death is "a grace for life."

▶ 1:21:24

> "And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.'"
>
> GENESIS 6:13–14 ↗

▶ 1:21:58

Then, skipping ahead: "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him" (Genesis 6:22). "That's phenomenal." Noah was a "herald of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), so there were people around, and it is easy to imagine the mockery. "Noah is like the ultimate prepper." If a basement full of canned food is hard to justify, try a giant boat "just in case God floods the entire world." That took gutsy faith.

Uncreation, and a dove

▶ 1:23:40

> "On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights."
>
> GENESIS 7:11–12 ↗

▶ 1:24:23

Matt had read an article calculating how much water is in the earth's crust and the sky. Fine, he said — but it is like counting the quail near Sinai, or measuring the wind at the Red Sea. The quail and the wind were real, "but that was a miracle; that was kind of the whole point." Arguing local versus global misses that God is doing this by his own hand.

▶ 1:25:53

The imagery matters. At creation the Spirit hovered over the waters (Genesis 1:2); now God covers the earth with water again. "He's uncreating, so as to recreate things new again — a really ancient billboard brightly shining a future day where he will uncreate and recreate all things new."

▶ 1:26:36

> "He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 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."
>
> GENESIS 8:10–12 ↗

This is where the dove of peace comes from. The fresh olive leaf is creation made new; the dove that does not return marks judgment finished. Then God blesses Noah and his sons — "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" — and gives them every moving thing for food as he once gave Adam the plants (Genesis 9:1–3). Noah is a second Adam, pointing to Christ as the last.

God remembered Noah

▶ 1:28:14

Matt walked through the chiasm many find in the story: layers of parallel pairs — Noah and his sons; building the ark and leaving it; flood announced and no more floods promised; food in, food out; forty days and forty days; waters rising and falling; mountains covered and visible; 150 days and 150 days. At the center, the emphasis: "God remembered Noah" (Genesis 8:1).

Stowaways in Christ

▶ 1:30:11

The flood is the crescendo of the wages of sin from man's earliest days, and God's revelation, for every later generation, of what his wrath looks like when it is not held back — "the first paradigm of judgment." But it also carries the first mention of God's favor, found in a man whose name means rest.

▶ 1:30:43

Everyone in Noah's family survived, "not because of them but because of their connection to him — almost as if his sons are stowaways in God's protective plan." Noah built many rooms to shelter every kind of life, out of obedience. Through his family God recreated and gave a covenant of peace.

▶ 1:31:19

When Christ comes up out of the waters, the Spirit descends as a dove (Matthew 3:16), recalling the dove that told Noah judgment was finished. Christ, out of obedience to the Father, builds a shelter for all kinds from everywhere, and promises many rooms.

> *"We, because of our connection to him, are like stowaways in his shelter, along for the ride, because he is the central focus of God's favor."*

▶ 1:32:03

God has promised a final uncreation and recreation of the heavens and the earth, "and at that point there will be no other shelter but in him" — the Prince of Peace, whose name recalls a far distant ancestor whose whole life foreshadowed Jesus.

1. The foolishness of our moralism

▶ 1:32:42

Matt imagined Noah's neighbors justifying themselves the way we do: I lie, but I don't steal; I lie a little, not as much as that guy. "Maybe Noah is right, but it won't affect me, because I'm better than average — I might even be in the upper quartile." When the floods came there was no distinction.

▶ 1:33:55

Especially in a time of division, we are tempted to stick our heads out the window: "Lord, get that guy — if there's going to be wrath, it's obviously not me, but have you seen this guy?" It is natural, and we have to fight it, because it is foolish. "The floodwaters didn't care that you were slightly better than that guy in your own eyes."

2. The seriousness of sin

▶ 1:34:42

When God is not holding back judgment in mercy, you see how great man's sin really is. So we should not fool ourselves. "There is no shelter except for in the Most High himself. There is no shelter in our bargaining with God that we're relatively better than our fellow man." There is only shelter in him, by his grace, because of a work that was also ridiculed in its time yet was big enough for all kinds of life from all over the world.

3. Be grateful for your room

▶ 1:35:48

So be grateful "that we have found a room in him," that he is our peace with God and our new covenant — not "I've prayed a lot this week, I've donated a thing, I hashtagged, I'm probably one of the better people." The floodwaters won't care about any of that.

> *"We cling to Jesus. That is our hope. He is our peace. He's our source of life. That's it, nothing else."*

▶ 1:36:31

Shem, Ham and Japheth would have understood it standing in the ark: this is it. "We need to have that same realization: it's Christ or nothing." Matt prayed thanks for God's shelter, that he is their rest and peace, and asked him to teach them again to be grateful that he has forgiven "us stowaways" — and to awaken the city to it as well.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 5:3–20
- Genesis 5:23–24
- Genesis 4:23–24
- Genesis 4:25–26
- Genesis 6:1–5
- Luke 3:38
- Genesis 5:28–32
- Genesis 6:8–9
- Genesis 6:13–14
- Genesis 6:22
- 2 Peter 2:5
- Genesis 7:11–12
- Genesis 1:2
- Genesis 8:10–12
- Genesis 9:1–3
- Genesis 8:1
- Matthew 3:16
- John 14:2

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said the modern church has drifted toward “the cult of kindness.” Where do you see that in your own picture of God, and what does Noah’s story correct?
2. Enoch and Noah both “walked with God” in a world ruled by death. What would walking with God look like in your ordinary week?
3. Why do you think the first mention of favor, or grace, comes in the middle of a story about judgment?
4. How does seeing yourself as a “stowaway” in Christ change the way you think about your standing with God?
5. Whom are you tempted to point at when you think about judgment, and what would it look like this week to cling to Christ instead of comparing?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4bVM0-aJ2k&t=3588s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.