

25 January 2015

Christ Church

## The Flood

### Genesis 6:1-22

#### 1. The story watered down?

I guess the story of Noah's Ark and the Flood is one that we may have been taught at school at a very young age. After all it has got everything that a child wants in a story - boats, and animals. It all seems quite a harmless story.

The animals went in two by two

Hoorah! Hoorah!

The animals went in two by two

Hoorah! Hoorah!

The animals went in two by two

The elephant and the kangaroo

And they all went into the ark

For to get out of the rain.

For to get out of the rain?? This was a flood for goodness sake! And we know how devastating floods can be. Just about a year ago parts of our country were under water for months due to floods. There are people in Buckskin, yes, just a couple of miles away from here, who had to spend over 6 months out of their homes as they were repaired following flood damage last winter. And we also know how devastating the tsunami that struck so many communities in the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day in 2004 with a terrible loss of life.

You have to say that the story of Noah as it is known by so many people is - how shall we put it - a vastly watered down version.

When looking for images of Noah and the flood on the internet, in amongst the sweet pictures of animals in a boat, I came across this picture. Perhaps not the nicest way of putting the story. It does remind us that the story of Noah really is not a children's story. And it does raise the issue, what was the flood all about? And our reading today forces us to think about why God brought about the flood.

## **2. The impact for Noah's generation**

As we look at the passage, we will find that it is almost a reversal of creation.

- In fact, the first verse points us back to Genesis 1. So in 6:1 we are told, 'When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them'. This reminds us of Genesis 1:28: 'God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

This is about a God who blesses - At the start of the chapter, there is little to indicate what is to come. Just as when God created the universe, he blessed Adam and told him to be fruitful and increase in numbers, so at the start of Genesis 6, that blessing is still there.

If you like, this is God's default position. It is his desire to bless men and women and has been the case from when he created us.

- It is about a God who sees - in Genesis 1:31 we have these words: *'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.'* But by Genesis 6 there is a difference: *'The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.'* V5.

At the time of creation everything was just as God wanted it to be. But by Noah's time this had all changed. Man's wickedness had spoilt God's perfect creation.

He sees what people have become. And it does not look good, in fact it looks terrible. We don't know what kind of wickedness God was seeing. But the perfection of creation had now been made imperfect as we have seen in the last couple of weeks, when we thought about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and about Cain and Abel. Instead of being in the image of God as God had created them, human beings had started to put themselves in the place of God. In essence that is what sin is all about.

We might think that God is being a bit harsh on people. Were they really all that wicked? Every single one?? The answer has to be yes! Because God did see one man who had not fallen into this state. *'But Noah found favour in the eyes of God.'* V 8. God is not indiscriminate. It is as if he was striving to find some part of his creation that was still as he had intended.

- It is about a God who grieves - '*The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*' V6

This is a long way from how God felt about human beings in the creation story, where they were the pinnacle of his creation, given stewardship over the earth.

But the thing is, that what is to happen is not the result of a god who has got so angry that he has lost control of himself. We see a God who grieves over the state human beings have got themselves in. It is in fact the mark not of a god of anger, but a God who loves with a passion. In fact, God not be a God of love if he was not capable of grieving. It is something we will all feel at some time about those people we love most - whether it is when we are bereaved, or whether it is due to some kind of rift that has happened between us.

It is also a mark of a God who has not simply created the universe, set out the rules and formulae which enable it to work, and as it were leaves it then to fend for itself. God is totally involved with his creation. He passionately wants the best for it. And when it goes wrong, he grieves. Don't you find that immensely powerful?

- It is about a God who judges. - This is not so much a judge in a criminal court punishing people for their wrongdoing. It is far more the kind of judge who is able to see exactly what has gone wrong and is the one who has to decide what must be done to put things right.

There are some verses in the passage that brings this out - but more apparently in the Hebrew, rather than in the English translation. Take a look at verses 11-13: *'Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 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.'*

The word 'corrupt' appears 3 times there. It is in connection with how human beings have spoilt the earth. But what you don't see is that the same Hebrew word is used in verse 13 when God says that he will destroy them and the earth. You might say that all God was doing was putting an end to a world that was on a road to self-destruction anyway. The end is inevitable. This is God's judgement.

- This is a God who acts. His judgement is not just about destruction. It is about rebuilding, recreating. So in verses 14 to 21 we see God giving Noah instructions to build an ark - he gives precise instructions on how big it must be, what it is to be made of, what design it should take, who and what he should find to fill the ark. Even before the destruction takes place, God is making provision for what will follow the flood.

The flood is therefore not the act of an angry god just bent on destroying. This is a God who sees what has gone wrong in the world and who is prepared to take drastic action to put things right.

### 3. But what does it mean for us?

So if that is what was needed for Noah's generation, what about for us? How does God see us today?

- It must first be said that the underlying desire of God is to bless us. That was what he did when he created the universe, it is what he did in Noah's time. God hasn't changed his nature. His intention remains to bless us as his created people.
- God still sees. It isn't just the physical that God sees. He sees what really makes us tick. He sees us wherever we are and whatever we are. It's not a case of big brother watching us. It is rather that God is desperate for us to be the people he intended us to be. So he is forever present with us. Just take a look at Psalm 139 - just a few verses here. *'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.'* vv7-10
- God still grieves. I don't know about you, but when I see the terrible things that people do to each other on the news I know there is part of me that grieves. Whether it is some terrorist atrocity, or conflict, or how one person has treated another. It may just be that we see the mess people can get their lives into, it may be the mess we get into ourselves. If we grieve over these things, how much more will God grieve. He is still a God full of love, who sees

how far we have strayed from the human beings he intended, we have distorted so terribly the image of God.

- God still judges. But his judgement is different. He points us to this difference in Genesis 6 - verse 18: *'But I will establish my covenant with you'* The word used for covenant can also mean 'shackle'. So God commits himself to be shackled to us. For Noah, the covenant takes the form of a rainbow, confirming that the status he gave to human beings at creation is reconfirmed to Noah. We have a new covenant, a covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus. *'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'* Matthew 26:28 (as an example). So God's judgement now is that we have got into such a state due to our sin that we cannot get out of it ourselves. The only way for us is through the blood of Jesus, shed for us on the cross. It can only be through his grace that we can know God's forgiveness. We cannot earn it for ourselves, it has to be through the blood of Jesus.
- God is still acting. Jesus has died and is risen. That is an event whose impact will last for all time, or at least until Jesus returns. It is a covenant that will not be broken. We can still know that all our sins are forgiven, yes even ours, yours and mine. All we have to do is to place our trust in Jesus - to stop trying to act in our own strength and to place ourselves into his hands. That is the way in which we can once again be the kind of people God intended us to be when he created us - formed in his image. Have you placed your trust in Jesus? God has not given up on you - he is still shackled to you through his new covenant - the blood of Jesus - poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.