

Series: Stories from the Past
Title: Floods, Followers, and a Faithful God.
Text: Selected passages from Genesis 6-8
Key Word: Promises
Proposition: Everyone will realize God's heartbreak because of sin and respond to His promises with obedience.

May 1989 was a month that many will not forget. Beijing, China was the site of a carnival-type demonstration for democracy. People joyously walked to Tiananmen Square which featured a huge poster of Chairman Mao. A homemade statue of the Goddess of Liberty was erected by students in the center of the square. Chinese tanks flooded into the area crushing the democracy movement.

Many of us can not forget the image of tanks blocked by a single Chinese man standing three feet in front of the first tank. This one person serves as an inspiration to courageously stand up for freedom and justice. His witness testifies to the cost of moral conviction and to courageous faith.

Sometimes we are compelled to take a courageous, but lonely stand against all that opposes freedom, justice, love and mercy. The flood of infidelity, hypocrisy, poverty, terrorism, deterioration of the family and greed threaten to erode the foundation of society. Standing against the tide of public opinion or spiritual and moral decay can make a difference. When we take such a stand, even it means standing alone, we'll see God's kingdom come on earth as it heaven.

We see another lonely man in history standing up for the cause of God's kingdom in Genesis 6. Noah's story reveals **two types of floods. He shows us two qualities of a follower of Christ. His story reveals two characteristics of a faithful God.**

We see the flood of immorality. Humanity had blatantly turned away from God. They ignored God's commandments, rebelled against his good heart, and trampled on his plan for relationships. Hatred bred violence and murder. One time, *"God saw all that he made and it was very good."* Now *"God saw how great man's wickedness had become."* This flood of immorality controlled actions, thoughts and imaginations. All flesh had been ruined from the inside out. It's like a spoiled pot in the potter's hands. It can't be fixed. The potter must begin with a new lump of clay.

This dim view saddens our heart. History proves that we human beings and our communities can not save ourselves. We are held captive by self-interest which leads to self-destruction. Even after Tiananmen Square, the falling of the Berlin Wall, and Rosa Park's stand on a bus, our world is still in a mess.

How did people respond to this flood of immorality? Genesis 6:1–2 shows us that most people in those days responded with outright apathy and indifference.

Jesus noted such apathy and indifference. *"As it was in the days of Noah so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. 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. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."* (Matthew 24:37–39) It seems to me that people are still indifferent to God's consistent call to change.

Many are stuck in the everyday nature of life, knee-deep in things that don't really matter, without any vision for something great, wonderful, and beautiful. I believe that the

world is much worse because our lives are cluttered with distractions and frivolous things. We're significantly tempted by—trivial conversations, fights, agendas, reading, TV, movies, praying, and views of God. I've been guilty of it.

One's preoccupation with the trivial makes it easy to leave God out of decisions, attitudes, business, home, marriages, leisure time, plans, out of life. Much of our world is not wicked in the sense that it is criminal. It is wicked because it leaves God out. We take God's mercy for granted by neglecting Him.

When the flood of judgment finally appeared in the time of Noah people were shocked and outraged. God had had enough. God's heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:5-6)

God says, "*I will blot out man whom I have created...*" The Hebrew word for "blot out" means "to erase by washing." It's a total cleansing act. So God washes out sin, violence, and indifference because God cares. God's heart is for us. God doesn't like the destruction of his good creation. Many like hearing about God's love and grace. But what kind of loving God never stands up against the world's wrongs? What kind of God would watch evil triumph over good, winking at human violence, brutality, arrogance, greed, and apathy, throwing up his hands and chuckling, "Oh well, *whatever?*" God's judgment though, proves that He cares. The opposite of love is not hate, it is apathy.

Some might be thinking, "*This is exactly why I don't come to church; I get beat up with judgment!*" You're partially right: God's judgment in this passage is real. But in the flood of God's judgment, there are **two very surprising twists**. Remember: "*His heart was filled with pain.*" Humanity's behavior and the needed judgment were like arrows that

pierced God's heart with grief. The Hebrew word for grief is an intense word. This word was used when a group of brothers discover their sister had just been raped (Genesis 34:7) and when King David was told his oldest son, Absalom, had just been murdered (2 Samuel 19:3).

This describes God's heart. God looks at the brokenness, the deterioration of all His creation he must now blot out, and he grieves as if his sister has just been raped or his son has been murdered.

The God of the Bible feels. When God appears in human flesh—in the person of Jesus—he demonstrates the vulnerable heart of God. We see Jesus weep at the gravesite of a good friend, Lazarus. He cried over a fallen and fractured world where death brings pain. After He rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, His heart broke because this great city simply failed to understand who He was. He wept knowing that this city failed to realize that He came offering peace. (Luke 19:42-43)

We all would avoid a God who is always angry and disappointed with us. But what do we do with a God who weeps, a God who stands beside our graveyards, over our city, a God who surveys our life and the brokenness of our world, and shares our tears? That's the God you find in the Bible! **God's judgment is flooded with tears.**

Secondly, in the midst of judgment and cleansing, **we find God making a way out of the mess: He finds a follower.** *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."* Genesis 6:8
Noah becomes the bearer of Grace.

Grace is receiving what we don't deserve as a free, gracious, lavish, and over-the-top gift. Noah is an ordinary guy who happens to know of this grace. God takes the initiative in choosing him to provide a way of salvation.

The Bible is, at least in part, a story that shows us how seriously God takes our sin. But the Bible is also a grand, beautiful story about how God has provided a way out of the mess we have created. All throughout the Bible, we see hints about a grand story of how the good God of creation can be both the world's Judge and the world's Savior. This story introduces God's chosen follower who takes the form of a savior. First, there was Noah, then Moses, ultimately were introduced to His only Son, Jesus, the Savior.

What are the qualities of such a follower? First a follower **accepts costly obedience?** When you're chosen and loved beyond your wildest imagination, you will love God in return. When you love him, it changes everything. You will live a life of costly and messy obedience. Genesis tells us *"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."*

The word for blameless meant free from defect, wholesome, sound. It does not imply Noah was perfect or sinless, but it does imply something special about Noah: he was consistently obedient to God. We know that... *"Noah did everything just as God commanded him."* (6:22) Chapter 8 tells us, *"Then God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark' ... So Noah came out."* 8:15-16, 18 Noah's motto was, "Just do it—God's way."

Obedience will cost us something. This was a massive project! Imagine what obeying God cost Noah. It wasn't a hobby; it consumed his time, money, energy, and life for 120 years. When you're in love, it affects everything about you.

What does our faith cost us? Does it cut into our lifestyle? Does our worship cost us anything? When King David entered a worship service, he said, *"I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God offerings that cost me nothing"* (2 Samuel 24:24). I trust we're offering to God our costly worship.

Noah's obedience was also messy. Genesis describes Noah as one who simply, *"walked with God."* Sometimes we get the image that walking with God means that everything will be neat and clean. We think that God leads us away from the messiness of life. Noah walked with God right into a messy, stinking ark.

The Bible paints this picture of Christian spirituality. It reveals walking with Jesus into a hurting, broken, messy world. The Son of God left a neat and clean heaven and immediately entered into a stinking, messy stable. The King of kings was raised in a Nazarene carpenter's shop. Jesus healed those who were sick, cleansed those with leprosy, raised those who were dead, was anointed by a prostitute, and partied with tax collectors and sinners. He sent out 72 of his followers as lambs among wolves. He told them to heal the sick and to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. He told the crowd *"You are the light of the world...so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

At this point, you may be thinking, *Costly, messy, obedience—why would I ever want that?* Perhaps that's one of our fears about obedience: it's ugly, hurtful, and painful. We've all probably heard stories of people who said, "God told me to do this." In other words, obedience can create pain. Yes, Noah's obedience was costly and messy, but it brought life. Obedience brings life. God's call and Noah's obedience produced a blessing for Noah, his family, and the whole earth. After Noah followed God's instructions, doing everything He said, including leaving the ark, God promised that Noah, all his descendants, and every living creature would never be destroyed by a global flood. Since that day God has been faithfully maintaining life on this planet.

We see characteristics of God's faithfulness in both his justice and his graciousness. A faithful God is just. This is the first story of many stories in the Old Testament that makes us feel uncomfortable because of the severity of God's judgment. In reading the OT though, we see God's patience in spite of people's abuse of His love, the abandonment of His presence, and rebellion against His ways. Given half a chance, God will extend another chance. During the 120 years that Noah was building the ark, the people were continually warned to change their ways. When Abraham appeals on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, God agrees to spare the city if only ten righteous men can be found in the whole valley. When Jonah wants God's judgment to reign down on Nineveh because of how wicked they are; he refuses because of the children. God's decision to eliminate the Amalekites came after 400 years of repeated warnings. His decision to judge the northern ten tribes of Israel came after 300 years of blatant rebellion.

Peter wrote, *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* ^{2 Peter 3:9} What we have in Genesis is, after 120 years of patience, God has decided—in his perfect knowledge—to judge a rebellious, sinful, selfish people who have done all they can to abuse his love. God shows great patience with us as well. He is giving us time to quit living our way and begin living like Jesus. God does not owe us life. In fact, He owes us judgment for our rebellion and selfishness. Life is a gift he can give and take. He has authority over all things. All things belong to him because He has created and maintains all things. Friends, our time may be running out. Someday we will all be held accountable before a holy God.

While I am sharing the harsh reality of what Scripture says, let me put it all out there—this is just not an Old Testament matter. When Jesus was asked where God was when a tower fell and 18 people were killed—in other words, when Christ was asked, "Where was God when bad things were happening to good people?"—he said, in essence, what makes you think they were good? What makes you think that they deserved life when they were guilty? Jesus said. "But they were no guiltier than you are. And unless you repent you too will perish," He later says, *"Do not fear him who is able to destroy your body but unable to destroy your soul. Instead, fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."* In other words: Respect God.

You may be wondering about the next characteristic of God's faithfulness. Yes, I do believe in a God of grace. Our God is gracious. Because He is a God of grace He does

not give us what we deserve. He welcomes the wayward back home with arms of love wide open. He knows us personally. He listens to the cries of our hearts. He sent His Son to die on a cross so that we can be clothed with His holy, pure, love. This same God saves us by His amazing, costly, yes even messy grace, for there is nothing more costly and messy than the Lamb of God being slain on a Roman cross. What truly is amazing is that God loves humanity so much that He patiently waits for people to turn back to Him.

Some people say, "I've heard this before; I want to move on to the 'deep stuff.'" I'm sorry, but there's nothing deeper than the Gospel. Nearly every problem in the spiritual life—pride, elitism, a failure to love others, joylessness, impatience, lust, greed, and a failure to be generous—can be traced back to a failure to apply the work of Jesus on the cross and the anointing of the Spirit. When we understand God's grace we are never left the same. Jesus is the one who set you free from the power of sin. He redeemed you when you were utterly lost, and as a result, you love him. When you're in love, it changes everything about you—your actions, attitudes, motivations, and affections.

I want to offer an invitation and a challenge. First, let me offer the invitation. Do you know God's grace? Let's marvel at the love the Father has for his children like the apostle John who said, *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* (1JN 4:9, 10)

God is waiting for us right now.

Secondly, because God loves us, I want to issue a challenge. Where does your obedience refuse to go? Where do you say, "Sorry God, but that's too messy, too costly, too inconvenient?" Let me say it bluntly: if you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, if you consider yourself to be under his loving authority, where are you in active or passive disobedience? As you have put your faith in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you—the one who empowers you to make an impact in our world. So allow him to use you to take a stand. 2731