

3 Flood – Judgement & Rescue

God Judges evil

In the mornings we tend to have Radio 2 on – apologies to those of you who have instantly judged us as too uncool because we don't listen to radio 1, or too unsophisticated because we don't listen to Radio 4. Anyway, in the mornings we listen to Radio 2 and every morning Chris Evans (the breakfast show DJ) gives his show a little motto and on Tuesday last week he announced that "Today's show is brought to you by the saying; only judge people by their actions".

I guess that was lost amongst the toothpaste and the toast of a million households heading off to school and work, but it's quite a powerful thought isn't it; only judge people by their actions? On the one hand it saying, "Don't judge people by what they think or say – those things are private", but on the other hand, most of us would rather not be judged by our actions either – we'd prefer to get away with it all, please.

More than listening to Radio 2, judgement is not cool, nor is it high on our list of priorities – unless, of course, we're the ones doing the judging.

The thing is that people do judge us by what we do, and our outward actions spring from our inner thoughts and feelings – you can't judge one without the other. Jesus himself flagged up the problem in Mark 7, "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

Have you ever picked up a piece of fruit with a bruise on it? You thought, "I'll just cut that bad bit out and it'll be OK." But as you cut into it you find that the bad runs all the way to the heart –

the whole thing is spoiled and useless. Well, that's what humans are like; the bad on the outside comes from the inside – even if we are only judged by our actions they reflect what is going on in our hearts.

And so, in Genesis 6:5-6 God looked at the good world he has created and the one thing that he has made which grieves him was the one thing which he loved most – humanity; “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”

Do you see that? Read that verse carefully because it doesn't say “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with anger” or “bitterness” or “vengeance” or even “wrath”. God looked at sinful humanity and his heart was filled with pain. People sometimes read the flood story in Genesis as being all about a terrible god who is full of malice but that isn't true, is it? He is grieved and his heart is filled with pain.

Again we see a contrast with the other creation myths of the Ancient Near East. The Sumarian Epic of Gilgamesh written in around 2000BC (about 500 years before Genesis was) tells how the gods became weary with the constant chatter of humanity. It says that we basically stopped the gods from getting to sleep, so they decided to get rid of the problem by drowning all human beings in a cataclysmic flood. It's like those terrible people who can't be bothered looking after puts and so they tie them in a sack, weight it down and throw it into the river. We are nothing more than dumb, annoying animals to the gods.

However, one man; Gilgamesh, is the firm favourite of one of the gods so this god tips off Gilgamesh who builds a boat and saves himself.

Do elements of that story sound familiar? Heavenly powers, global flood, humanity destroyed, one survivor? But look what the Bible does – it says; God didn't decide to wipe out humanity because he found us annoying, he realised the seriousness of our sin. He wasn't casually psychopathic in his behaviour, he was grieved that our sin had so spoiled us, so cut us off from his loving presence. God didn't wash away people because we were inconvenient to him, he was actually judging our sin.

Now there's a big difference there, isn't there? Genesis 6-9 tells us that God isn't tyrannical – he's just and righteous.

This week at Christianity Explored we were thinking about the fact that God judges evil and we reflected on the thought that many people seem to hold two opposing views of God; on the one hand they want a God who does something about all the bad things in the world; a God who will judge evil, but on the other, they don't want a God who will judge them.

A God of justice is fine as long as it doesn't extend to me. But as we saw the other week when we looked at the Fall – we are all sinners, we all deserve God's judgement. We might not all be murderers, or thieves, or adulterers, but it is only us who try to rate sin on a scale, only we who try to excuse our sin because its not as "big" as someone else's. The point is not we have sinned less than someone else, it is that we have all sinned and so we all deserve God's judgement.

Now, although that's an uncomfortable thought, as we were reminded at Christianity Explored, it's actually a good thing, because if God didn't judge our sin, then it would mean;

- a) that anything goes and
- b) that God didn't care about us and he does - as Genesis 6:6 reminds us God's heart is filled with pain because we have become sinners – God cares!

And because God cares he acts and he acts in a way which removes sin. God is grieved that he has made mankind who have become sinful and so he judges them and penalty of sin is death. But look, here's an interesting thing, God decides to save Noah.

And that leads us into our second point; **God rescues his people.**

So God has decided to rid the world of sinful people, but verse 8 of chapter 6 tells us that Noah had found favour in the eyes of the Lord and so God decides to save him. So is this God behaving like the gods in the Epic of Gilgamesh? Does he just save Noah because he is his favourite?

Well, I think that there is a world of difference between being a favourite and finding favour. You see the next verse tells us why Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord and it wasn't because Noah pandered to God, or was his lackey, it was simply that Noah was "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."

Now, that is not to say that Noah was perfect, we certainly see later on in Genesis that he wasn't – but Noah made an effort; he walks with God, in other words he listens to God, he meditates on God's word, he tries to live a life which honours God and in contrast to those around him Noah stands out as godly and so because of that Noah and his extended family (whose righteousness is not recorded) are given a means of rescue.

God instructs them to build an enormous boat – the size of a modern day ship and inside to gather seven of every single animal and bird (not just two) and then two things happen; the sinful people who reject God die and face God their judge and Noah and his family are saved by God's grace.

“Well, that doesn’t seem very fair!” you protest. But the point is this – Noah is a sinner; he’s righteous, but not righteous like Jesus, he’s blameless amongst the people of his time, but not before God, he walks with God, but even he sometimes stumbles and falls, but because he has a love of God first and foremost in his heart when God speaks to him, even with an outrageous instruction – build a ship in the desert – “Noah did everything just as God commanded” (Gen 6:22).

Now, do you think that this all happened overnight? Of course not, it would have taken years to build something that size. People around Noah would have had an enormous visible warning quite possibly for decades that God’s judgement against sin was coming. People must have asked Noah why he was building an ark in the desert and yet despite the fact that people knew that Noah was righteous, blameless amongst them and walked with God, no one would listen to him, no one, it appears, took any notice and repented of their sin, or turned back to God.

Noah is the only one who will listen to God and trust in God and so Noah is the only one who is saved, everyone else chose to ignore God’s rescue plan and so their sin resulted in death and judgement. Does that sound like a society you know?

We too are sinners, you and me, just the same as the people of Noah’s day and we have a choice; we are surrounded by churches, our calendar, and shops and TVs tell us about Easter and Christmas, our time off is called holy-days, we see crosses on rooftops, round people’s necks, we have “thought for the day” on the radio, “Songs of Praise” on the TV, we know people who go to church, we come ourselves to weddings, baptisms, funerals, blessings, thanksgivings and when something enormous happens in our nation we hold a special service.

We look at creation and marvel, we burn with anger when we see injustice, we weep with pain when someone we love dies.

There are signs upon signs to warn us that God is holy and just and righteous and we are not and yet many, many people choose to ignore them and continue to live lives which are not righteous and not in step with God. The Bible tells us that if we reject God, he will honour that and in turn reject us and so the end of that life-choice today is the same as it was in Noah's time; death and judgement.

Sometimes people say that God is different in the Old and New Testaments, that in the Old Testament he is angry and judgemental and in the New Testament he is gracious and loving. In fact, as we seen, God is all those things in both Old and New Testaments.

In chapter 9, when the flood is over, God sets the rainbow up as a visible sign of his promise that "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."

But that does NOT mean that God will never judge sin, does it? It just means that never again will God cleanse the world with everyone dying as a result of floods. God will still judge sin, Hebrews 9:27 reminds us "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment", that is the action of a just and righteous God, but just as he was gracious and merciful to Noah, he is gracious and merciful to us too, if we will hear, if we will obey.

Do you remember the other week when there were floods in Australia? The TV news described them on more than one occasion of being of "biblical proportions" – well, first of all, they weren't, they didn't cover the whole earth for 40 days extinguishing all life.

But why is it that only bad things are ever described of as being of “biblical proportions”? Why is a rescue ship never described as being of “biblical proportions”? Why is love and grace and mercy and forgiveness never described as being of “biblical proportions”? It should be.

God’s grace is enormous and in the story of the Flood we see how seriously God takes sin, but also how serious he is about rescuing the humanity he loves from the consequences of sin.

Have you ever wondered what the Ark was called? We don’t know, but all ships deserve a name and there is no better name that could be given to the Ark than “Jesus”, the name which means “the Lord saves” because the Ark of Noah is a picture to us of Jesus. Noah and his family certainly didn’t earn a place in that rescue ship, they simply had faith in God and trusted in his provision and so God rescued them from his just wrath against sin.

Let me ask you, are you safe? One day you and I will be judged by God on our actions which have flowed out of our hearts. We will rightly deserve his condemnation on that day because our sin has grieved him and our holy God cannot just dismiss our sin as if it didn’t matter.

But because our sin has filled his heart with pain God, who loves us so much, has called us into his rescue plan. Jesus is such good news, because more than a boat which could only hold a finite number of people, Jesus reveals to us that the Lord saves everyone who comes to him. If we will be like Noah and listen to God and trust in his rescue plan then we too can be saved from the penalty of sin which is death by God’s loving and gracious mercy.

What a great God we have! Amen.