

Noah

Nursery rhymes are weird.

We have a set of wooden blocks for Deacon that all have nursery rhyme sayings with illustrations on them - I've got some here with me this morning. Some are innocent and fun, but some get *strangely dark*.

"Mary had a little lamb, her fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went, that lamb was sure to go" - How cute, right?

Then we've got another familiar one - "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water - Jack fell down and BROKE his crown (painful) and Jill came tumbling after" (Yikes, no real happy ending to that one).

Even worse - "It's raining it's pouring, the old man is snoring (who doesn't love a nap on a rainy day) He went to bed and bumped his head, and couldn't get up in the morning..." Is he OK!?

The worst one I couldn't actually find last night, we must've thrown it away or something:

"Ladybug, Ladybug, fly away home, Your house is on fire and your children are gone! All except one and that's little Ann, for she crept under the frying pan."

See what I mean? There's something strangely sinister under the surface of many of these - and for good reason. Many of the nursery rhymes we tell actually have origins in plagues, medieval politics, religious persecution, and worse. In their beginnings, they were a method of subtle protest and education where free speech was limited. You could make a silly rhyme and teach it to your kids, while the adults knew what was really going on.

Over time, the childish rhyme survives but the meaning gets forgotten.

This morning as we continue in our study of the major figures of the book of Genesis, we encounter Noah - whose life events often get portrayed in nurseries, yet the details of his life are pretty terrifying.

Most of us hear Noah and think - cute animals and rainbows - a crucial part of his story - but we conveniently leave out God's wrath poured out on a wicked world through a global flood that kills EVERYBODY except Noah and his family... y'know that cheery bit.

On that Note, Turn with me to...

READING

Genesis 6:⁹ This is the account of Noah and his family.

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

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. ¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ 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.

²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

Let's Pray.

We don't know a lot about Noah's life prior to the flood. We know that he was a man of faith and integrity, seemingly the only one on earth at the time.

We also know that he's a farmer, particularly that he's a vinedresser - and that at least once in his life he partakes of a bit too much wine (Though we don't know whether that's a result of an alcoholism problem or simply because the whole SEEING-THE-ENTIRE-WORLD-DESTROYED -BY-FLOOD event shook him so badly). More on that at this Wednesday's bible study.

There's also quite a bit that we THINK we know about Noah that isn't actually in the text at all.

- First of all, you'll often folks talk about how everyone mocked Noah for his faith in building the ark - but it actually never says that. In fact, when Jesus talks about Noah, he indicates that folks were mostly unaware and paid him no mind at all.

- We also have little idea of what the ark actually looked like. For all the dimensions given, we don't know if it was a traditional boat shape, or more like a big box that floated on the water.
- We also don't even know for sure that Noah and his family were the only ones to work on the boat. Did others help? Some cinematic depictions actually have animals helping out (why not?) We honestly don't know.

The biblical text is unconcerned with these details, because there are bigger truths being communicated. Those are the truths I want us to reflect on this morning:

I. The Wrath of God II. The Faithfulness of Noah, AND III. The Hope Beyond Judgment

I. GOD'S WRATH IS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE.

Let's start with Wrath...cause why not?

We do an interesting thing in church circles where folks either NEVER talk about wrath and judgment...or they talk about it WAY TOO MUCH. But the more I read scripture, the more I'm convinced that our love-hate relationship with the nature of God's wrath really boils down to our lack of understanding.

God isn't wrathful in spite of His mercy...nor is He merciful in spite of His wrath.

God's wrath is an extension of God's love.

One of my favorite Christian thinkers, a Croatian named Miroslav Volf, describes it this way. He used to reject the concept of God's wrath. He thought that the idea of an angry God was barbaric, completely unworthy of a God of love. But then his country experienced a brutal war. People committed terrible atrocities against their neighbors and countrymen. In one of his books, called *Free of Charge*, Volf writes this:

My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry...

Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love.

Gen 6:5-6 says, "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.

The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. “

If God did not love us, He would have either turned His back and left us to our own devices or else wiped us out cleanly without thought.

But God SEES us. God CARES ABOUT us. Enough that God GRIEVES over our mistakes and takes the time to do something about it.

Hebrews 12:6 tells us that God disciplines those whom He loves. Even this discipline is rooted in God’s patience and loving-kindness.

There is a Greek verb - *orgáō* - that can be used both of anger and of the swelling of buds as the sap rises. It points to the kind of anger that results from a settled and consistent disposition, and not to losing one's temper.

We get squeamish about wrath and anger because for us it entails lack of self-control, irrational outbursts, and doing or saying things you later regret. Not so with God.

God is long-suffering and patient. His righteous indignation grows and swells like a plant in bloom...and if we nourish it with unfaithfulness and wickedness, it will eventually burst forth with a tenacity which will overwhelm.

God’s love expresses itself both in perfect justice and perfect mercy. God’s perfect justice saw the depth of corruption and violence and knew that He couldn’t let it continue.

And YET God’s perfect Mercy searched for any faithful person, any tender shoot from which He might restart His Garden with...and He found Noah - the Faithful One.

II. CALLED TO FAITHFUL ENDURANCE.

The description of Noah as righteous and blameless doesn’t indicate that He was perfect by any means. We know that all have sinned and fallen short. Instead, we’re to understand that Noah had a good reputation among all. Whether they like him or not, folks knew that Noah was a man of integrity.

Most of all, Noah found favor in God’s eyes because he sought live earnestly and faithfully according to God’s way and repenting whenever he’d gone astray.

Because of Noah’s faithfulness, he’s able to ride out the storm. But we must remember that he was IN THE STORM.

God doesn’t promise that a faithful life will be rewarded in any significant way in this life. In fact, it may mean both rejection by the world AND endurance through the judgment of that same world. HOWEVER, those who endure will inherit the promise.

During our vacation out at Lake Erie a week ago, Lydia and I had an opportunity to take in some sights and visit some of the lighthouses on the peninsula.

On one of our tours, I was intrigued to hear that Charles Waldo, the first keeper of the Presque Isle Lighthouse spoke of his 7 year tenure as being the loneliest place on earth.

Until a road to the mainland was built in 1927 the keepers and their families were quite lonely, their isolation broken only by the arrival of a supply tender several times each year.

Waldo was living at the lighthouse with his family when on July 12, 1873 he wrote: "This is a new station and a light will be exhibited for the first time tonight. There was ONE visitor."

Early U.S. lighthouse service keepers like Waldo were required to "keep the light burning" from sunset until sunrise during the shipping season, April through November.

They liked to say they were SLAVES TO THE LIGHT - having to climb the tower at least every 4 hours each night to check the oil supply, clean the lens, and reset the rotating mechanism.

There's something haunting and yet inspiring learning about these individuals and families who gave up a normal life that they might guide others to safe harbor.

I think Noah had to have felt a similar ache of loneliness in his work. I mean, his family was the only one that survived after all. He was a SLAVE TO THE LIGHT - not literally, but to the LIGHT of God's Word, attentively obeying God's instruction which alone provides the way of salvation.

LIKE NOAH, WE ARE CALLED TO FAITHFUL ENDURANCE.

Jesus tells us time and time again throughout the Gospels to count the cost. Following Jesus does not guarantee an easy life, but it does guarantee REAL LIFE, RESTORED LIFE.

The Flood itself is called to mind through our act of Baptism. When we embrace the waters of baptism, it's a sign that we are being buried with Christ in the waters, and risen into to life through the power of His Spirit. It's as if we are being buried into the flood, but saved through the ark of Christ's righteousness and mercy.

III. CALLED TO EXPECTANT WITNESS.

So we've seen God's Wrath and the Faithful Obedience of Noah. Now the Hope Beyond Judgment.

The Flood narrative ends later in chapter 9 with a sign and a promise - a rainbow, symbolizing God's commitment to never bring this kind of devastating global flood upon the earth again.

One of the coolest parts of this story - a part that is easily missed - is that God literally says in 9:13, "I've set my bow in the clouds." Some have made the observation that at that point in history, the Bow and Arrow are likely the pinnacle of weapons technology.

God is literally saying, I'm laying down my weapons of war. Even more powerful, He's pointed it up at Himself - as if to say, If I break this covenant, it's on me.

From the Fall to the Flood, God has continually said, "I will not lose my Creation to Sin." And so there are consequences for corruption, violence, and broken relationship. But He has also never failed to provide a way for renewal and redemption.

Through the Flood, we see an act of UNcreation, and in the Promise we see the hope of REcreation.

Explanation - God promised not to destroy the world *by flood* again...but there is yet another judgment coming, the likes of which was only prefigured by the flood. The prophets and the New Testament tell us that the last judgment will be like a consuming fire.

2 Pt 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

And just like with the flood, Jesus says that it will come suddenly, without warning:

Matt 24:36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 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; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

LIKE NOAH, WE'RE CALLED TO AN EXPECTANT WITNESS.

Because of Christ, you don't have to fear that day. God has made a way. There is salvation from this corrupt world, and it comes only in restored relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ.

Every hostility, wound, and humiliation that we could throw at him - He took it. Every excuse that we have for our sinful behavior, he received it. Jesus - God in human form - lived through all our same trials and temptations without sinning - He was wounded, rejected, and condemned to death unjustly - and yet He responded with a word of Forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

How will you respond to Jesus today? In order to answer that question, you'll need to come to terms with the condition of your heart...

Because when we come before the Lord, in His awesome and mighty presence, we are brought to conviction. When we come face-to-face with the radiant purity of His holiness and glory - all our faults reveal how utterly unworthy we are to be at His side.

AND YET there is comfort in His promise of salvation.

The song we're about to sing has a wonderful pair of lines in the chorus:

“Jesus, You make the darkness tremble”

“Jesus, You silence fear”

It's the same Jesus - the Light of the World - who both causes darkness to tremble and yet silences the fear of the broken and hurting.

If you treasure the darkness. If you hide your sin from God because you are afraid of judgment, you will find the light of God to be a terrifying calamity.

BUT if you offer your whole self to God in humility and love, you will find God's light a healing balm that brings comfort and safety.

The choice is yours.