

Blandford Forum / Langton Long - Sunday 16 September 2007

Rev Tim Storey

"Noah - The First Type of Saviour "

Genesis 6:6-18, 8:14-18

We have moved house a few times in the past decade and each time we do so, we have a clear out of the rubbish we have accumulated over the previous 4 or 5 years. It also means working our way through the loving offerings which our children have brought home from school during the same period. Those blobs of clay which, to the trained observer, with an enormous gift of imagination, look exactly unlike a milk jug. Do we keep it for posterity - or, more to the point, do we spare the blushes of our children by not producing it at some late date like their weddings or the first time they bring home the boyfriend?

In Jeremiah 18 we find the famous story of the Potter, where the prophet is urged to go and witness the work of someone who moulds the clay, reshaping it with love and care when it does not seem to fit what is required. And we love that image of God doing that in us, as the ones who he moulded in clay - as the pinnacle of Creation. But the potter sometimes has need to do something else: To sometimes recognise the reality of what has happened. That the flaws in the clay mean that there is no other option but to throw it away and start again. He has tried to bring something good from the clay but it has not worked. The potter, someone with high expectations of himself and with a deep desire to create something good senses a rising feeling of frustration as his efforts are in vain. Until finally he shouts "enough" and the clay is violently discarded, and he starts afresh with a new piece of clay.

The story of Noah reflects that image. The God who created a perfect human being from the dust of the ground and had breathed his own breath into his lungs to give it life, got so frustrated at what his work had become that he wanted to start again. The story of Noah speaks of God's holiness and judgement as much as it speaks of the profound love he has for what he created.

It is interesting that the word used is "corrupted": Genesis 6:12 ***God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.*** Corruption is, for us, someone who has misused power and money. It is an extreme situation. In Genesis, it is used as a sign of the fallen world which God looked at and despaired of. And God wants to start again.

But one man stands out, like the way that Paul urges his readers to do in Philippians 2, where he says: ***Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe***

The image we have of Noah is of someone who stood out from the crowd, who was different and people knew it. No, he wasn't perfect, there is a story of him getting drunk at one point demonstrating his fallibility, just like the other fallible heroes of Scripture. But his lifestyle was different, noticeably so. He had faith in God: Hebrews 11:7 says ***By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.***

Noah stood out as a beacon in the world and God chose him to be the Saviour in that situation. Why? Because Noah was obedient and Noah had faith that a just and loving God would do what was right.

In our studies over the coming year we are looking at the Bible as a whole, looking at the Big Picture which the Bible paints of Creation, Salvation and Redemption. Too often we take the story of Noah in isolation: as a one-off story which involves animals and the rather fun idea of the ark, choosing to ask questions about whether there were woodworms on the ark or how he stopped the lions from eating the lambs.

The Story of Noah tells us things about the whole of Scripture and the whole story of Salvation. **Firstly, that God is just and holy.** The story of Noah begins in the 6th chapter of Genesis. Whatever the time scale of the chapters involved, it tells us that it only took a few chapters before God got frustrated with what he had made. A few pages earlier, God has created a perfect world and a sinless couple to look after it. To coin a phrase "All was rosy in the garden" And then it gets ruined by a snake and an apple pie. And it all goes downhill from there. Murder is not far behind. And the potter looks at his work and thinks "let's start again".

God is a just and holy God. He cannot stand evil and sin. The smell of it is like the smell of rotting death and the stench of excrement let's not beat about the bush. God hates it, he abhors it, because it takes away from his holiness in the way that the tiniest stain ruins a lily-white garment.

God wants his world to be good and for holiness and justice to be the norm, rather than having to be campaigned for. The story of Noah firstly tells of a God who wants the world to reflect his character of justice and holiness. And, secondly, it introduces the idea of **our need for a Saviour.**

Noah is what is called by theologians a "type" of Christ. Noah is someone who shows the sort of things that a Saviour would do: to be a good man, to stand out from the crowd, to have faith, and be obedient to God. Yes, it sounds like Jesus himself: Noah is the first of the forerunners in the Old Testament who get us ready to see Jesus as the ultimate Saviour, the supreme example of the "type" of Saviour which the world needed.

Noah is the means by which God offers a way out of the situation. When there is a disaster or a natural catastrophe, we often hear of people who have been a means whereby others have escaped: the man who became a "human bridge" on the Herald of Free Enterprise, the people in the World Trade Centre who ushered others to safety, people who are labelled heroes or Saviours because of their actions. Noah is a "type" of Saviour: he became the means whereby God was able to start the Human race again.

And he, along with others such as Abraham and Joseph, Moses and David, Elijah and others becomes a means of God's Grace, a forerunner of the Saviour to come.

I read something interesting about the Ark the other day: the ark was coated in pitch as a protective covering and the Hebrew word for pitch is *kaphar*. Everywhere else in the Old Testament the word *kaphar* is translated as *atonement*, usually referring to the process where a sinful person is reconciled to God and protected and saved from judgement.

The pitch on the roof of the ark was the Covering atonement, the protection for the 8 people in the ark against the wrath of God seen in the storm that washed away the world. As the first example of a Saviour, Noah introduces the idea of *atonement*, the covering over of sins to avoid the wrath of God. The story of Noah **firstly tells of a God who wants the world** to reflect his character of justice and holiness. Secondly, it introduces the idea of **our need for a Saviour.** And finally, **it speaks of God revealing his eternal love.**

At the end of Chapter 8, the story of the Ark concludes with these words: ***Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.***

God could have destroyed every single person, including Noah and his family. But he didn't. God could have decided to drown the world over and over again. But he didn't. God could have left us to our own devices. But he didn't. The Bible teaches us how God's love and plan for his Creation was unveiled, piece by piece, step by step, through the Old Testament, using "types" of Saviour to demonstrate how this love worked. Until such time as the "archetype" would be revealed for all Creation to see, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Noah provided the means for a temporary solution, whereby the world could start again and maybe learn a lesson, which, of course, it didn't learn. The rainbow is the promise of God's eternal love, and in scripture, the promise of that love and salvation in all the fullness that was and is Jesus Christ. Amen