

+ Genesis 6:9-22, 7:11-23 + Prepare, for the Lord Will Come Unexpectedly +
+ 1st Sunday in Advent + 1 December 2013 +

He didn't know when it was coming. In fact, at first, he didn't how it was going to happen. All Noah knew was that God had warned him of coming judgment on the wicked world around him. ***"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... Everything on earth will perish."*** Yet the Lord in unexpected mercy also promised to show grace to him and his immediate family. ***"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. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you."***

What had happened to God's once-perfect creation? It had all started with Adam and Eve's first disobedient act in the Garden of Eden, but ***"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."*** Violence and lawlessness, sexual immorality and trampling the rights of others were part of daily life. Sin and unbelief had so thoroughly ruined God's creation that it was beyond repair. The world had become so degenerated that God gave humanity 120 years to turn from their sins and live, but no one cared, except a believer named Noah.

"Noah was a righteous man..." He didn't just live an upright life in the midst of a godless and wicked society. He didn't just have a generic faith in a merciful God. As an early believer, Noah was saved by faith in the woman's Seed—the Savior promised as a descendant of Eve. That Savior would one day come to crush Satan and free his slaves from eternal death in hell. Through faith in that coming Savior, the Lord made Noah righteous in his sight. Yet Noah also believed in God's promise to destroy the unbelieving world and to preserve his descendants. By faith, Noah surely realized that that promised Savior would have to come through his line. By faith, he trusted that the Lord knew what he was doing and would fulfill his promises to not only preserve Noah, but the human race through his family.

For good reason, then, Noah was ***"wholly devoted to God"***. That doesn't mean he was morally perfect, but instead his whole life, his whole heart, his whole soul were devoted to his God. He lived as a child of Light in a world full of darkness. He ***"walked with God"*** and wore his saving faith on his sleeve, even as he carried out God's business in a hostile society that thought he was an absolute fool at best and loveless at worst.

You see, God wanted Noah and his family to be prepared for what was coming. So God started Noah on a massive, very public building project. He was to build a gigantic floatable rescue vessel that was going to save his life, the lives of his immediate family, and the lives of every kind of land animal on earth, but this would be no inflatable raft. No, the ark would be 450 feet long (about 1 ½ football fields long), 75 feet wide, and about 4 stories tall. It would weigh around 14,000 cubic tons and could tilt as far as 45 degrees without capsizing.

It was quite a rescue plan, but why would the almighty Lord go to such exacting detail and effort to rescue a family of 8 and countless animals? Judgment was coming to the world from the hand of the holy Judge himself. The Lord told Noah, ***"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."*** All humanity with the exception of Noah and his family would be wiped off the face of the earth, as well as every other animal not on the ark. Noah and those with him would have to stay on that ark for a year. As Noah built the ark, he served as a ***"preacher of righteousness"*** (2 Peter 2:5) sounding God's warning to repent, but no one listened. The need for such an enormous vessel seemed ridiculous. Why listen to crazy, old Noah? People scoffed at him and went about their business, ***"eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage..."*** (Matthew 24:38)

...But Noah knew that judgment was coming, even if it wouldn't be for another 120 years. So he kept watching. He kept waiting. He kept preparing. ***"Noah did everything just as God commanded him."*** Using a flexible, yet sturdy kind of wood, Noah built the ark according to the Lord's specifications. As God had commanded, he waterproofed it ***"inside and out"***. He gathered ***"every kind of food"*** to be stored away for himself and his family and all the animals that would be in the ark for that year.

Early on, he even fathered three sons named Shem, Ham, and Japheth, as God had promised, and the Lord provided them with wives when they grew up. Yes, judgment and destruction were coming, but the Lord was going to preserve them. They would lose everyone they knew and loved outside their immediate family and their world would never be the same, but the Lord would save them to care for all the animals and grant them a long life to repopulate the world after it all. Why would God do all this? Purely because of his undeserved grace—love that would save them then and for eternity.

The world, however, ***"knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."*** (Matthew 24:39) Everyone around Noah and his family went on with life—until they were caught completely off-guard when water became the bearer of God's judgment and the deliverer of the Promise. Noah was 600 years

old—a relatively common age at that time. It was planting time and the fall rains would soften the earth for plowing, but instead **“all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.”** No one had ever seen anything like it. Noah and his family—eight in all—entered the ark, as did all of the land animals and birds which the Lord had brought to Noah. **“Then the LORD shut him in.”** The Lord of grace preserved and protected those within the ark, but no others.

What then took place is unimaginably severe. Our word “cataclysm” comes from the Greek translation of this event. No one was spared from the utter destruction of the worldwide floodwaters. No animals. No birds. No moms or dads, no husbands or wives, no children or grandchildren, no one young or old—except those within the ark. No one could hide from God’s holy judgment and no one could escape—except those within the ark. All that was left was desolation. **“Every living thing that moved on the earth perished... Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.”**

Unexpected judgment and unexpected grace. Noah and his family had prepared according to God’s command, yet also trusted in God’s promise to deliver them, to restore life to the world, and to above all, provide a Savior who would crush Satan’s power. A year later the Lord delivered them from the flood and placed the rainbow in the sky as a sign that he would never again wipe out the earth with a flood. Centuries later, the Lord, who had shown such unexpected grace to Noah and his family, would provide a Savior from the line of Noah’s son Shem. The Lord would fulfill his promise to save Noah and his family eternally through the coming of a Savior who would conquer sin and death by his own life, death, and resurrection.

That Savior came and delivered his people through a perfect life under God’s holy Law in place of all sinners, an innocent death as payment for all our sins, and a glorious resurrection defeating death forever. Now the same Lord calls us to prepare our hearts because he is coming again—not to pay for the sins of the world, but to judge the living and the dead.

We live in a world that seems more and more like that of faithful Noah. It seems more and more like the number of those who remain faithful to the Lord is shrinking while those who scoff at and openly oppose Christ and his Word are growing exponentially. Like Noah, we don’t know when the Lord will return, so we wonder, “How long, O Lord, until you deliver us?”

How can we possibly prepare, then, if we don’t know the day or hour when Christ will return? How can we possibly stand firm when we struggle to live in a world and in a moral climate that is distressing and distracting at best and openly hostile at worst? Remember how Noah was able to be **“righteous”** and **“wholly devoted to God”**, how he **“walked with God”**, living out his Christian faith in the public eye rather than behind closed doors. It wasn’t because he was so morally superior to others. It wasn’t because God thought he deserved blessing. It wasn’t because he knew some secret to better moral living. No, God’s loyal and undeserved love led him to bless and save Noah and his family from the flood and through the flood. God’s loyal and undeserved love led him to save Noah from his sins. God’s loyal and undeserved love helped Noah to prepare and stand firm.

That same loyal, unconditional, undeserved love moves the Lord to help us prepare our hearts for his coming again. His good news, his Gospel message that comes to us in Word and Sacraments enables us to stand firm in a world vehemently opposed to him and those who follow him. This same Lord will deliver us, just as he delivered Noah, and as he has promised, **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”** He saved us through the waters of Holy Baptism, just as he rescued Noah and his family through the flood. Surely he will bring us safely to our heavenly home on the Last Day.

So we prepare for his return. We don’t have any idea when he’s going to come back, but he will, as we watch and wait. We faithfully serve the Lord in the callings he has given to each and every one of us, seeking to glorify his holy Name and to let our lights shine in this dark world.

At the same time, we realize that souls are dying all around us and when Jesus comes again in glory, there will be no more opportunity to repent and live. So like Noah, we faithfully proclaim the saving message of righteousness through faith in Christ alone. People we know and love may not want to hear that, but it’s the message they desperately need to hear before Christ returns and their opportunity ends.

The Lord will come again unexpectedly. He will come to judge the living and the dead in glory and holiness. For many, his return will be as final as the Lord shutting the door of the ark when the floodwaters came, but for us who remain faithful to him who loved us with an undeserved love, Christ will come to deliver his people and bring us body and soul to eternal life in heaven. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and bring your people home! Amen.