

Roy's Sermon for November 14, 2021

1 Peter 3:20a-23 'The Flood; and Baptism In The Flood!'

Last week's message was from 1 Peter 3:15b-28 "The Conscience Noah And the Spirits. And "Men are without excuse." Verse 15b-16: "But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience." So Peter calls us to testify about the hope that we have in Jesus, not with pride and arrogance and vanity, but in humility and with wisdom! Because our desire should be to lift up the Name of Christ and point others to Him, not to, in our vainglory, alienate people from Him. "Wise as serpents and gentle as doves" Jesus said. And I said that we "keep a clear conscience" by always speaking the truth about Him, and live not in hypocrisy.

V19-20 a "Through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." The question is: What did Peter mean? And how did the Holy Spirit do that? And I explained that the question is often asked, how can God fairly judge someone when they haven't heard the New Testament Gospel message? These people who died during the flood, how can God judge them? There were no scriptures. There were no 10 commandments!

To answer this question we looked at the example of Job in chapters 16 and 19. In ch.16 Jesus is Job's Intercessor who "pleads on his behalf as a man pleads for his friend." In ch.19 He is Job's Redeemer who "lives and in the end will stand upon the earth." At the physical resurrection as Judge, whom Job will "see with his own eyes." No instruction, no scriptures. How could he know God like this? Without doubt by God's Holy Spirit.

And yet, all of humanity has been given God's common revelation of Himself in creation Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities and divine nature have been clearly understood from what has been made. So that men are without excuse." So the whole of humanity is accountable to God even if no one preaches because His Glory and Majesty are revealed in His Creation. "So men are without excuse!" How did the Holy Spirit preach to those long dead? Through the sermons of Noah's labours. 2 Peter 2:5 "preacher of righteousness." The Holy Spirit didn't go and preach repentance to those long dead souls. God's judgement had already been declared upon them. No, it was through Noah's testimony and his God honouring witness, did the Holy Spirit preach, that judgement was coming. But they rejected the message!

And that's where we pick up the text today. 1 Peter 3:20b-23 'The Flood; And Baptism In The Flood!' 1 Peter 3:20b-21 "In it only a few people, eight in all were saved through water and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also."

Friends before I begin, can I just encourage you to do yourselves a favour? Go to YouTube and look up Noah's Ark. And you will find the modern day replica built to full scale size. You can listen to the commentary as they take you on a tour. The sheer size of it will astound you. It truly is amazing!

Anyway, brothers and sisters, if you are anything like me, then you most likely have spoken of, have referred to, or have thought of the Flood that the Bible speaks of, at some time. Perhaps even in passing. But firstly, what is interesting, is that it is referred to by most Preachers and teachers (biblical ones at least) as the Flood! Not a flood but the flood. Now yes there perhaps have been even millions of other floods throughout the millennia. But none of them are referred to as the flood. Because there was only one Flood of which God said, in Genesis 9:11 "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. V13 "I have

set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” Yes God has even confirmed this with His covenantal sign of the rainbow, that He would never again bring such destruction by a flood. The rainbow.

Beloved, I wonder how many of us, when we do see a rainbow, actually thank God by remembering His mercy upon us in the preserving of humanity through Noah and his family? Or perhaps more likely, we simply say something like ‘wow, a rainbow’. Even forgetting its covenantal significance from God! Friends, next time you see a rainbow, try and remember to thank the Lord. That's why it's there: so that we remember His mercy in the midst of judgement!

Now Brethren, I'm sure that most of us remember that devastating tsunami some years back which took the lives of around a half a million people! From India, throughout Indonesia and other countries. All of those mind-blowing images of the total destruction in so many nations. Whole villages with many generations of families gone forever. They were almost Hiroshima like visions from so many places beamed from around the world.

But friends, whilst not wanting to be disrespectful or appear heartless about that tremendous loss of life and property, that was nothing compared to The Great Flood. The Flood of the Bible! The word for flood in Greek is kataclysmos, and listen to how it is defined: Catastrophe. An overflow. A sudden and violent alteration in the earth's surface. And of course, it's where we get that word cataclysmic from. In the case of the biblical Flood it literally means, that the whole world was taken hold of by God and shaken. This wasn't just a Flood. This was a worldwide universal catastrophe!

Genesis 7:17-23: “For 40 days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens was covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than 20 feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished, birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out, men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.”

Creation scientists actually believe that it was through the biblical Flood that God first brought into being the four seasons of the year that we experienced today. Yes, that is that God literally tilted the earth on its axis during the flood so that we experience the four seasons of our calendar year. What is also interesting, is that just about every culture around the world in their verbal history, has some kind of reference to a great Flood that covered the earth out of which a small group of people or perhaps a family, were delivered upon a great ship.

Friends these are not Christian histories, they are cultural histories from around the world! “In it only a few people, eight in all were saved.” How many people lived at that time? We don't know. But I am convinced that there were millions. And the reason being, that over a 400 year period, the Israelites in Egypt grew to a number of two million strong! Yes out of those millions “eight in all were saved.” So what do we learn from this? Well firstly, God is Holy and He will not tolerate sin forever. He foretold a day and set that day for judgement and on that very day Genesis 7:16b “then the Lord shut him in.” In Genesis 7:11-15 we read that “on that very day Noah and his sons, Shem , Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, and livestock according to their kinds, every creature that

moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark.”

Yes, on that very day God the Holy Spirit shut them in, and then rains came! Judgement for sin proclaimed, and then it comes. Humanity was destroyed for rebellion and sin! So first we learn that God is Holy and He will not tolerate sin forever. We also learn that He keeps His Word. He proclaimed the coming judgement, and then it came. But friends, what we can also see here, is that God is merciful. What do I mean by this? Well ask yourself: would you tolerate, (if you had the power and authority to put an end to it), would you tolerate the mockery and ridicule? The sheer and utter contempt and rebellion from that which you had created from the dust, and had challenged and had defied you to your face?

Well may I suggest that I am quite sure that you would not. Dare I say, that we barely tolerate someone who cuts us off on the road, or squeezes into a parking space in front of us, let alone the outright defiance to our face of our lawful authority over them! Well this is what the Lord God did. He tolerated the rebellion and defiance of sinful men, for 120 years while Noah was building the ark. Yes, 120 years. For 43,830 days God tolerated this rebellion having mercy upon the whole world each day, that Noah and his family faithfully laboured to save that very world, if they would but come. And while he did so, the Holy Spirit preached through those labours of the coming destruction. Until that 43,830th day. When God the Holy Spirit had called the animals and they had come to the ark, and they ended it with Noah and his family. Yes Genesis 7:16 “then the Lord shut him in.” and then the rains came!

No ignorance is not bliss Beloved. And even if it were the scriptures tell us that humanity is not ignorant of God. As we saw last week Romans 1:20-21: “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Brethren, it is no different today. The coming judgement for sin and rebellion has been proclaimed and declared upon mankind, and “men are without excuse.” Jesus gave this warning in Matthew 24:36-39: “no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will 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. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” And v44 “so you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Two things just very briefly. When Jesus said that the Son didn't know the time, of His coming, he meant that in His humanity this had been kept from Him. But of course, nothing could be kept from His Divine nature. We need always to remember that the two distinct natures existed in simultaneously. Completely man but also completely God!

And in v39 where it says, “and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.” They knew it was coming, because as I explained last time, the Holy Spirit had been preaching through Noah's labours for those 120 years. It's just that they in their vanity and arrogance didn't believe, (even as do people today) they didn't believe that it would come to pass. So nothing has changed! Only 4000 odd years of the downward spiral of humanity into evil and depravity. And the ongoing longsuffering and mercy of God!

But Beloved, though God has promised “to never again destroy the world with a flood,” nonetheless, the fires of His judgement are coming! V20a-21 “in it only a few people, eight in all were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also.”

Now brothers and sisters, there are those who falsely claim, that what Peter is actually saying here, (and those same people even falsely claim that Peter was there first Pope) yes Roman Catholicism would tell us that Peter is saying that the act of physical baptism is what saves us. Pagans throughout the world have their children baptised. They don't call it baptism they call it christening. Indeed the world even christens ships and boats etc. But yes many pagans have their children marked by some priest, (while not believing in God themselves) they have I guess, a kind of each way bet just in case for their children. And physical baptism, or christening, they are led to believe is the key!

But is that what Peter is really saying here? Be marked by some priest as a child, (now don't get me wrong, I am all for infant baptism I completely believe in Covenant theology) but yes be marked by some priest as child or as an adult, and all will be well? Is that what he is saying? No. A mere surface profession by ourselves or on our behalf by our parents, means nothing to God. When called by God to go and anoint the next king of Israel, (having rejected Saul for disobedience) Samuel sees Jesse's first born son. Big and strong, and perhaps even good looking, even as king Saul was, and Samuel thinks to himself, ‘This guy has got to be the man!’

Yet God says to him in 1 Samuel 16:7 “do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” No outward signs mean nothing to God Beloved. To the world, what's on the outside, the appearance of things is what matters. But to God, it's what's on the inside that matters. And though others seem to omit this truth. Peter alludes to that here! Look, “not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge, (or a better word here is the response) of a good conscience.”

No friends, what's going on, on the outside means nothing to God. Unless, it is reflective of the evidence of what is going on, on the inside of a person! Because “the Lord looks at the heart.” Yes we can fool one another and convince those around us, but as I explained last time it is the renewed conscience, through which the Holy Spirit works, in the light of the scriptures. Even “transforming us by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2). No, “not the removal of dirt from the body but the response of a good conscience toward God.”

But brothers and sisters, why is Peter drawing this comparison with what happened to Noah and his family during the flood, as pointing toward baptism today? Well both are outward “responses,” of an inward conviction to the proclamation of God's Word of pending judgement!

Yes in essence this is the gospel. Judgement is coming upon humanity for sin, but mercy is available in the midst of that judgement. So turn from sin and come to Me and live, God says! Friends, think about it. What did those floodwaters symbolise? Death, and a world of sin, in the judgement and wrath of God! So Noah and his family were carried through those waters of death to the other side. Yes they were saved from and symbolically carried through death itself by God, again, having responded to His Call. And this symbolises baptism. But how? Well, when someone is saved, (born again having heard the message of the gospel preached) as the Holy Spirit comes into them, they respond toward God, as Noah did with a convicted conscience to come. As that world of sin into which we are born, is washed away.

Friends, as those waters of God's wrath symbolised the washing way of Noah's sin and the delivering of his soul, even in effect those external signs of spiritual salvation. So too does physical baptism, (if received by a convicted conscience through God's grace) symbolise, the deliverance from death to life. Having been washed by Jesus' Blood! And Brethren, both Noah's deliverance, and believers' physical baptism today, do point us to that one thing. "Not the removal of dirt" or the outward stain "from the body," but the washing of the eternal soul clean, from the stain and power of sin. By the blood of Jesus!

Even as Noah and his family were carried through those waters of death (those waters of God's wrath into new life) so too is the believer, through that symbolic washing away of sin in physical baptism, carried from death into new life, but for eternity! Beloved, the imagery is so powerful and so clear. They entered the ark by faith in obedience trusting in God, not only for deliverance, but also that His judgement would come. And when those waters fell upon the whole world, God in his mercy and grace as I said, lifted them up above that judgement and symbolically carried them through death into new life. Even into a new world.

Brothers and sisters clearly what Peter is getting us to see here is that what happened to Noah and his family, all pointed to what Jesus would do upon the Cross. Because those who trust in Christ are also lifted up by Him upon the Cross above God's judgement and wrath, and carried by Him, through that death into new life. But this life is eternal! In Mark 10:38 after James and John through their mother asked, "To sit at Jesus right and left in glory," Jesus replies, "You do not know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?"

Brothers and Sisters, we know that Jesus is not talking about physical baptism here. Because he has already been baptised by John the Baptist, and who is now himself dead. No He is talking about the "cup and baptism" of suffering for His people, that He is about to drink at the cross! When seeking to explain to the Roman Christians about the need to be turning from sinful ways and actually living the new life, Paul puts it this way in Romans 6:3: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death."

Beloved true baptism, (that which is performed by the Holy Spirit) comes through being washed, yes cleansed from sin, by being united with Christ in His death. In that, we are brought from death to life. Even new life eternal. Again, it is the Blood of Jesus that washes us clean. And we are confident, that His work in us is efficacious, yes it is effectual, because the tomb was empty! Our place in heaven is as assured as this. That Jesus has gone on ahead of us! "Not the removal of dirt from the body but the response of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand."

Yes friends both Noah's deliverance through those waters of judgement and death, and believer's baptism, (when received by a convicted conscience) are both signs which point toward, and find their fulfilment in, Jesus' baptism of the Cross! Both speak of deliverance from sin and God's wrath, and they both point to the cleansing of the sinner, by the Blood of Jesus. The Only One, through whom can anyone be saved. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' Blood and righteousness! Let's Pray!