

July 13-17, 2020 Edition

The "Big Story" Of The Bible

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

The Flood & A New Beginning

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July 11/12, 2020



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're talking about Noah and the great flood. Now just a heads up- I'm not going to talk much about the actual flood. Why not? It's been done. Over and over and over again. And to be honest there's just so much controversy surrounding this topic it's tough to win with this story. People who believe this is a historical event want me to talk about the proof for the flood. People who don't think this was an actual event but a story of faith will roll their eyes if I start heading down that road and I don't think I'm going to change anyone's minds with what I say today.

So I'm not going to talk about the flood much with this one exception- like I've said over and over throughout this series with creation and then with Adam & Eve- if God is the One Who created everything (and I believe He is) then it wouldn't be hard for Him to create the universe in 6 literal days and it wouldn't be hard for Him to create the universe over a period of billions of years by shouting "BANG" on the first day of creation. And if God made everything then starting with two human beings from whom every creature on the face of the planet traces their family trees is not a big trick.

So today I'll say that if God is the Creator then sending a flood that covered every inch of dry land on this planet wouldn't be a big trick either. Now there are scientists that will try to prove or disprove that there's even enough water on the planet to make that happen but if God decided that's how He wanted to do it it wouldn't matter if there wasn't enough water on the planet now or then... He'd just turn on the faucet so to speak until like a bathtub the water level was where He wanted it. And then after the flood He could make it go away. Because the first law of thermodynamics may be that matter can neither be created or destroyed but the Creator who wove that universal law into the very fabric of creation isn't bound by the laws of thermodynamics.

So did the flood actually happen? I say, "why not?" I believe it did but if you don't I'm not going to argue with you because to me there's a much bigger question here than whether it's scientifically possible for a world wide flood to happen and that is- why did God do it? Isn't that kind of cold? Or maybe a LOT cold? How could He wipe out the entire population of the earth and save only 8 people? What kind of God does that? A God that cares about His children and is looking at the BIG picture. God sees things from an eternal and infinite perspective. We see things from a much more temporary and limited perspective. When I look at the story of the flood and think about all those people that died that day I don't understand how God could do that. Aren't these His children? How can He just wipe them out?

Well, first of all because He loves all of us. Judy wrote a devotional a few years ago where she talked about her perspective of the flood changing when she became a mom. Suddenly she started to understand what it must have been like for God to watch what was happening on this planet:

The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. Genesis 6:5-6 (NLT)

What would you do if your kids started being horrifically cruel and evil to one another and you KNEW it would never end and it would just get worse. God decided to do something about it. I don't know why He had to do it at this point in history and he didn't have to do it again later but

I believe there was a reason. Maybe it was because of that incredibly strange place in Genesis 6 where we are told that the "sons of God" came down and married the "daughters of men" and created these sort of super humans:

The sons of God saw the beautiful women[a] and took any they wanted as their wives... In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times. Genesis 6:2-4 (NLT)

I don't know if that's why or not but you've got to admit- it's strange. And all the talk of how evil people had become is all wrapped up around this talk of the Nephilim. Very strange. We may never know why God felt like He had no other choice but this I believe to the very core of my being- He did feel like there was no other way and so out of love for all of Adam & Eve's children who would ever be born on this earth He sent the flood and saved Noah and his family.

But that doesn't mean He was finished with those evil people who died in the flood and we'll get to that a little later. Did the flood really happen? I believe it did. What if you don't believe it did? That's ok... I didn't used to believe it either. But after turning my life over to Jesus because I had no where else to turn I started to see God's power at work in my life and suddenly the crazy stories in the Bible didn't look so impossible anymore. So I don't want to argue with you or tell you that you've got to believe the way I do or you can't move forward with Jesus. So let's walk together down this road that has the footprints of Jesus already on it as we follow Him together and all of the rest of this will surely take care of itself.

So for this week we're going to look at what the story of the flood means for us in the greater context of the story of the Bible and see what kind of lessons we can learn from this story that will help up become better at following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Tuesday Reflection: I sometimes find it a little jarring to read out of the Old Testament, especially the first few books. I learn a lot about human nature from Genesis, but I don't feel like I learn as much about God. I see what the people were up to (and shudder a little) but the pictures of God through the eyes of primitive man seem distorted and incomplete (and sometimes just down-right confusing).

I guess that's part of why God sent Jesus to live among us. Before Jesus came the Israelites were the best spokesmen for God available. And frankly, God had gotten a bit of a bad reputation! It isn't until Jesus that we have someone speaking for God who has actually seen Him. Maybe that's why so many of Jesus' early listeners were dumbfounded by His descriptions of God – the Father Jesus talks about can almost seem like a different God than the one the Israelites had in mind!

Jesus told his disciples "God the Father loves you." And Jesus' closest follower wrote,:

"Love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God - for God is love." 1 John 4:7-8 (NLT)

It took me years to "see" and put my faith in a God of love. In my life that has meant choosing to trust that whatever God does is loving (even if I can't understand how yet) because love is

who God claims to be. For me that leap of faith came down to a matter of choice. I chose to believe that God is love. On the good days and the bad days, I embrace the belief that God always does what is most loving (whether it feels that way or not). After all, in Genesis, sometimes the most loving thing was the Garden of Eden, and sometimes the most loving thing was the flood! I have chosen to believe that God's actions are always motivated by love, that love is who God is.

As a child I couldn't grasp how a generous God could send the flood. I was somewhat horrified that God would wipe out most of the human race in a torrent of water. How could a loving God cause people to die? Now as an adult, and as a parent who begins to comprehend what it means to live with the consequences of free will in the world in which my son walks, the flood is reassuring. I'm relieved to know that God almost couldn't stand it watching His children brutalize each other. The cruelty and violence that occurs because of human free will is sometimes incomprehensible to me, and I do not see as much as God sees. I believe that, as a loving parent, God feels every slight and injury against each and every one of His children. Have you ever asked yourself what you would do if your children were constantly hurting each other and being cruel to each other and you knew it would never get better- ever? We can't know that for sure but God did. And He did what He did (I firmly believe this now) because of love.

And it wasn't like God was washing His hands of those people for all of eternity- we see things from a very limited and temporary perspective- God sees and acts from a perspective of eternity. And He had a plan even for His children who were so evil on this earth that He couldn't think of anything else to do other than wipe them from the face of the earth. Look at what Peter says about those people:

Christ himself suffered for sins once. He was not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God. His body was killed, but he was made alive in the spirit. And in the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison who refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. God was waiting patiently for them while Noah was building the boat. Only a few people-eight in all-were saved by water. 1 Peter 3:18-20 (NCV)

What does that mean? I can't say for sure but it certainly looks to me like God had a plan for those children of His that He felt like He had no choice but to wipe off the face of the earth. But His choice to send the flood didn't mean they were without hope. I don't know about you but that's just crazy to me and I have a tough time wrapping my head around it but there it is. So let's move on before our heads explode.

God sees and experiences our pain; He counts our tears because He loves us more dearly than I have ever loved my son, even in those breathtaking moments when I watched him sleep as a tiny child. God never steps away from His role as our Father, never shields Himself from our pain or loss. He is there for every moment of tragedy and every moment of triumph. He is the very definition of faithful and unconditional love.

The belief that God is loving is the foundation stone for my faith. Do I ever doubt God's love? Sure. I am skilled at doubting, especially when I'm having a bad day! But my moments of doubt can't overcome the faith I've chosen. In fact, they often serve as a reminder of why I continue to believe what I believe. When I act as if there is a God of love, life works and feels so much

better! I can't prove that God is love, but I can tell you how powerful putting my faith in Love has been for me. How about you?

For many of us our view of God has been shaped by our experiences with authority figures in our childhood – parents, teachers, churches. I find it helps to spend time reminding myself what I believe about God and reviewing the results (or fruit) of those beliefs. Sometimes I find that I'm ready to let go of another false view of God that's been holding me back. If you don't like the faith you inherited, ask yourself where you'd like God to show you a bigger and kinder view of His nature.

Wednesday Reflection: So then what are the lessons of the flood for those of us living all of these thousands and thousands of years later? Well first of all the flood is a story about faithfulness. We see it in Noah and we see it in God Himself. Genesis chapter 6 starts out telling us that everyone on earth had become corrupt, evil and cruel. Everyone that is except for this one guy (and I'd imagine his family):

But Noah was different. God liked what he saw in Noah. Genesis 6:8 (MES)

The very next verse tells us that Noah "walked with God." What does that mean? I've always wondered about that. The Bible says that there were a few people who seemed to have a special relationship with God. Enoch we are told "walked with God." Noah "walked with God." Abraham was called God's "friend." Moses was also called a "friend of God." David was a "man after God's own heart." What does that mean? What does that look like? I don't know about you but that's something I'd like to learn to do in my own life. I would love to think that I "walked with God" and was a "friend of God." I don't know for sure what it means but I know this- being a friend of God or walking with God meant that the person was faithful to God. They did what He asked them to do. It did NOT mean they were perfect but it did mean they lived their lives with God in mind. They wanted to live life with Him and not just trying to get something from Him. So God was impressed with Noah and decides to start over again with him and his family:

Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you. Genesis 6:17-18 (NLT)

What covenant? Well, do you remember after Adam & Eve had sinned and God told the serpent that the offspring of the woman would crush its head? It was the first prophecy in the Bible and it pointed right at Jesus. That covenant was going to come true now through Noah. God's faithfulness to all of mankind did not change because of the flood- in fact I think the flood must have been a necessary thing in order for God to make sure that His covenant would be fulfilled.

I don't claim to understand it all but I will say again here today (and if you've been reading these devotionals since we began this series you've heard it before and I'll keep saying it hoping to drill it into your consciousness like it's been drilled into mine), whenever I see something that seems out of character for God and hear that voice asking "why would God do that?" I choose to trust that He must have had His reasons. I choose to believe that whatever God does that seems harsh or even brutal must have threatened His promise to send a man who would crush the head of the serpent and He will not allow that at any cost.

And so God destroys every living thing on earth except Noah, his family and the animals that come to Noah to be saved. God told Noah exactly what to do and then we read this:

So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him. Genesis 6:22 (NLT)

So this is a story of faithfulness- God's and Noah's. God's faithfulness provided a way for His promise to come true and pave the way for saving all of humankind. Noah's faithfulness served the same purpose even if he couldn't see the bigger picture. I wonder how often the same could be said for me and you. Ever wonder why God does what He does (or doesn't do) in your own life? Ever think maybe what God is doing in your life might just be bigger than what directly happens to you because as a result. Yeah... me neither (at least not as often as God would probably like me too).

Maybe we should.

Thursday Reflection: So the flood is a story first off about faithfulness... but it's also a story about stewardship. After the flood waters have receded and Noah and his family have come out of the ark along with all the animals (including those two mosquitos that I wish had never found their way to the ark staging area) God preached the first post diluvian (a fancy way of saying "after the flood") sermon to Noah and his family. I contained three points- how we are to relate to the creation now, how we are to relate to one another now and how God is going to relate to us now. That's a pretty comprehensive outline, right? So God starts with our relationship and responsibility to creation:

Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. Genesis 8:1-2 (NLT)

This is extremely similar to what God tells Adam & Eve with one exception- the relationship with creation is now strained. Before the first sin there was no strain on the relationship between people and the creation. We all played nicely together. Heck, Eve was talking to a snake and didn't seem to think too much about it. But now the animals are afraid of us. The ground fights us as we struggle to live off the land. Our job is tougher now but it's still the same job- take care of the creation. It's not ours- it's God's. But He has put us in charge of caring for it. That's what a steward is- someone who's been given charge of something valuable to manage for the owner. But why should we care much about creation? Why should we not exploit the creation to our own ends with no thought for managing the resources we've been entrusted with?

That's a great question. If you ask people in the west why we should be concerned with the environment you'll get a strictly pragmatic answer- "we depend on this earth. It's like a space ship providing us with the atmosphere we need to survive in a universe where that kind of atmosphere is quite rare. So we care for our earth because if we don't we will die." If you ask someone in the east why we should care for this earth you'll get a vague answer about everything being sacred. I don't want to knock that because there's some truth to that but I will make this one statement about that- the creation is not God. God created everything you see around you including this earth and everything that lives in it. If you remember the story of creation then you'll recall (hopefully) that one of the main themes of the story of creation was

that we as humans- the pinnacle of creation- are to rule over this earth and everything that lives in it. People in the ancient world had taken to worshipping the creation and God was trying to show how ridiculous that is. Don't worship anything that's been created including yourselves.

The creation is sacred but not because it contains God- the creation is sacred because God has said it's so. He cares about the creation and has asked us to care for it. But not only that- God has also entered into a covenant relationship with the earth and every living creature that inhabits it:

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Genesis 9:12-13 (NLT)

This is so strange. Any time God enters into a covenant relationship it is always a saving relationship. He agrees to save someone (or in this case something) from the consequences of sin. This is the only time He makes a covenant (that I know of) with something other than people. He makes a covenant with the animals, fish, insects, reptiles and anything else that lives on the earth but then at the end of verse 13 He also enters into a covenant with the earth itself.

What does that mean? That God wants to save the creation from the consequences of sin. When we sinned it didn't just short circuit our relationship with God- the curse that should have by all rights fallen on us fell upon the ground and cursed the creation. In Romans 8 Paul says this:

For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Romans 8:19-21 (NLT)

If you are a follower of Jesus then you have a much more radical reason to care for this planet than anyone else who lives on it- because your Creator and Savior not only asked you to care for it but because your Creator and Savior also cares deeply about this planet. So much so He made a covenant with this planet and everything that lives in it that one day He will redeem it just like He's promised to redeem us.

Now I'm not here to tell you what that should look like in your life. Everyone has a different idea of what caring for this planet should look like. I'm not here to tell you what it needs to look like in your life- but I am here to say you and I both need to be asking that question: what will caring for this planet look like in my life?

Friday Reflection: So the flood is story about faithfulness (Noah's and God's) and stewardship. But it's also a story about justice. God takes justice quite seriously:

And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image. Genesis 9:5-6 (NLT)

Now over the years people have used this part of God's sermon to Noah and his family to justify capital punishment. Your mind may have gone there while you read that scripture. I don't want

us to get all tangled up in that debate today so I'll focus on the last thing God says in that passage- "I made human beings in my own image."

That's a staggering thought but what does it mean for justice? Lots of different directions we could take this but let's just think about this for a minute- in most of the law schools in the western world the prevailing thought is what's called "just law". I'm not a lawyer or a legal scholar but I've read a little about it and it's basically the idea that there is no objective standard of right and wrong. We can't use God's law because He doesn't really exist and so the only way to truly know what's right and wrong is by the will of the majority of the governed. In other words, if 51% of a populace says something is wrong then by definition it is wrong. And if 51% of a populace says something is right then it is right. Obviously the problem that comes up is, what if 51% of a populace decides that the other 49% should be killed? Well, if you're using the "just law" theory then you can't really say that's an unjust law. You'd have to say it is correct then to kill the 49%. I know... it's an exaggeration but you see what I mean, right?

The other main idea in the west as far as law goes is that we should follow God's law. That if God's law says it then it's right. Any law we make can be held up to the light of God's law to decide if it's a good law or a bad law. The problem with that is, murder isn't just wrong because God's law says it is. The problem with murder goes WAY deeper than that and can be traced all the way back to this sermon by God to Noah and his family. Here God says the reason we shouldn't take advantage of anyone else (murder being the ultimate case of the powerful taking advantage of the powerless) is because everyone you ever meet has been created in the image of God. Every law you ever read as we go through the rest of the Old Testament will revolve around this concept. It's what's at the root of something Jesus says when asked what the most important law in the Bible was:

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

Scholars have labelled this section of the gospel as the "greatest commands". And that's what they are- but even these commands are really just an expanding on what God told Noah and his family in Genesis chapter 6- people are precious because I made them in My image so take care of them. If you are a follower of Jesus you have a much more radical reason than anyone on the face of the planet to fight for justice for those who have no one to fight for them. No matter how different someone might look to you or me they have been created in the image of God. God has asked us to care for them and more than that- He cares deeply about them. So we should be active fighting against racial injustice, social injustice, financial injustice, class injustice. We should be caring for the elderly, the young, the sick, the poor, the disadvantaged in whatever way they find themselves disadvantaged. Why? Because it's God plan for you and me.

Now I'm not going to tell you what that should look like in your life and I'll just tell you right now- you can't be involved in every fight. But you can and should be involved in any area you feel Jesus calling you to get involved. Why? Because it's one of the jobs He's given us in this world. Care for the people who have been made in His image.

Saturday Reflection: So the flood is a story about faithfulness, stewardship and justice but it's also a story about hope. God takes a step backwards with creation in order to surge forward toward His plan for the salvation of human kind- a plan that if you remember seems to include the people who died in the flood according to 1 Peter 3:19-20. Hope is one of the most influential of human emotions- without it life just about ceases to exist. God makes sure that Noah understands that the flood wasn't the end- it was a new beginning:

I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds... Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth." Genesis 9:13-17 (NLT)

Before we move on and talk about the hope contained in this story I hope you'll spend a minute thinking about the word, "sign". God says His rainbow is the "sign of the covenant" that He is making with Noah and the earth, but what is a sign? A sign is something that points to something else. It can point backwards or it can point forwards or sometimes it can do both. God uses them all the time.

We are told that the miracles Jesus performed while on this earth were a sign pointing to Who He is. Jesus Himself gave us the sign of the Lord's Supper where the sign points to His sacrifice for us. Baptism is a sign of the New Covenant God made with His people at the cross and the tomb and is a picture of death, burial and resurrection to live a brand new life.

So what's the deal with the rainbow? What is it a picture of? Well, the word used here for "rainbow" is used 76 times in the Old Testament and in every other occurrence (other than in this section of Genesis where God is talking to Noah) it is translated as "war bow". It was the word used for a weapon- a bow and arrow. In fact if you read older translations of this verse in the King James or American Standard version this passage is translated as "I have set my bow in the clouds." If that's the case then what would you suppose God means?

I think (and I'm not the first... commentaries are filled with similar ideas) that God is telling Noah that He will no longer go to war against all of mankind and destroy them the way He did in the flood. And what fascinates me maybe more than anything is the way the bow of God is now pointing- not at the earth but straight into the heart of Heaven itself. So if the rainbow is a "sign" of the covenant and a sign is a picture of what God is going to do then would it be fair to say that the rainbow is designed to remind us that the next time God would go to war against the evil and sin that so fills our world that instead of the bow being fired into the earth towards humankind that He intends to fire that bow straight back at Himself? Is this a picture of another day when clouds would fill the sky and blot out the sun while a storm raged and the earth quaked? Is this a picture of the true and better Rainbow that one day would hang suspended between Heaven and earth on a cross taking the punishment for our sin and rebellion?

But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. Isaiah 53:5 (NLT)

I hope you never look at a rainbow the same way again. And I hope you never think of the flood the same way again. And I hope whenever you think of Noah you will ask yourself if you (like Noah did) am I "walking with God." Are you living a life that makes God clap His hands with

delight? Are you living a life of faithfulness, stewardship over the earth, justice toward those who are made in the image of God and are you living a life of hope because of the message of the rainbow? I'll leave you with this last verse- Noah was different- are you?

But Noah was different. God liked what he saw in Noah. Genesis 6:8 (MES)