

A New Start for Humanity?

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[0 : 0 0] Well folks, wonderful to see you this morning. Why don't we just spend a moment and let's commit our time as we turn to God's living word. Why don't we just pray and let's commit our time to him. The words of Psalm chapter 8. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him. Our Father, we pray that as we come to your word now that you would help us as we've been singing to be still and know who you are. You are the living God.

And so Father, I pray that as we turn to your word, as we hear your voice, that you would help us to listen well. And Lord, that our hearts would be drawn to your son Jesus in whom there is abundant life. And so we pray these things knowing that you hear us because we pray in his precious name. Amen. Well, let me invite you to have Genesis chapters 8 and 9 open in front of you. We are at Noah part 2. I've been done part 1 last week and as we dive into Noah part 2 today, let me begin by taking you back to the London 2012 Olympics. So maybe just show of hands, who watched the opening ceremony? Everyone remembers London 2012? Everyone watched the opening ceremony? So you were one of, well, there was 62,000 people in the Olympic Stadium in London watching this opening ceremony and you guys, unless you were there, I don't know, you were one of 1 billion people who tuned in to watch the opening ceremony. One of the greatest events in the last few years, according to many. Many of us watched the opening ceremony. I wonder how many people, raise your hands again, watched the closing ceremony? A few of us watched it. Now, if you watched the closing ceremony, you'll know that one of the songs that featured was Imagine by John Lennon. Okay, and if you know that the lyrics to that song will overlook the fact that it talked about Imagine There's No Countries, we'll graciously overlook that one. Don't know how nobody picked that one up at the time. But here's what John Lennon sang in Imagine, and this is what the world heard. Okay? Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people sharing all the world. You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday that you will join us and the world will live as one. So John Lennon's pitching for a vision of a brand new world, isn't he? Brand new worlds, where people are selfless, where there's no more war and strife, where harmony and peace reigns, where people are at one. What he's singing about is almost like a brand new start for humanity. Brand new start. So here's two questions for you to chew on as we get into this text today, and you can rhetorically answer these in your mind. Okay, here's the first one. We think about this world that he's singing about. First of all, would you want it? Does it sound good to you? Right? Sound pretty good. Second of all, is it possible?

Is it possible? She has the question that hangs over chapters eight and nine of Genesis. Can there be a brand new start for humanity? Can there be a brand new start for humanity? Because here's what we saw last week. What did God see? And you'll need to have your Bibles open in front of you because we'll be dipping in and out of verses today, okay? What did God see when he looked at the people of the earth? Chapter six, verse five. 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. So what did God see? He saw wickedness. Where did he see it? He saw it in the human heart.

He saw sin in the human heart. He saw human beings who, having rejected their creator, who are now living with each other in a world marked by anger, violence, injustice, oppression, cruelty, and murder. This is what God sees. The world that he made so good, Genesis one and two, has come this far, slid in this far, chapters six and seven. This is what God saw when he looked at the earth, and he brought a cataclysmic flood to justly deal with the wickedness that he saw on earth.

[4 : 58] And by his grace, he's preserved this righteous man, Noah, whose name means, we thought about this last week, whose name means rest. He's preserved him, his family, and the animals, and he's kept them in the ark, both keeping them from judgment and taking them, as it were, to a new creation.

We saw it last week, judgment and salvation. And so when we're thinking about that question, we have to say at this point in the story, that's looking pretty good. And in chapters eight and nine, here's what we need to see. Noah, I don't know if you've noticed that as we read it through. Noah is being presented to us here as a new Adam. Look at the command God gives him, chapter eight, verse 17. And ask yourself if you've heard this somewhere before. What does he say?

He says, be fruitful and multiply. Heard that one before? Be fruitful and multiply. Chapter nine, verse one. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

Chapter nine, verse seven. And then we'll stop jumping around again. Chapter nine, verse seven. As for you, be what? Fruitful and increase in number. Multiply on the earth and increase upon it. So we have to ask ourselves, there's three times God has said, given the command to Noah, be fruitful and multiply. And we hear, don't we, echoes of Eden. We should think about Adam and Eve, the command that God gave to them, and ask ourselves, is this playing out in a new start with Noah as the new Adam? Could this be it?

Could this be it? A brand new start for humanity. A world where there is no more violence. A world where sin and suffering and tears and pain are no more. A world where there is peace and just not, not just playing happy families, there is peace and there is rest between God, man and creation.

[7 : 16] And if you stop and think about it, surely that is the world that we all want to live in. It is. So could this be the time for humanity 2.0? Could Noah be the guide to lead humanity to this new beginning? That's our question. So let me just seek to answer that question by quickly taking us through the text and picking out the three images that are the heart of the text.

So here's the first one. The first one is the dove. And the dove, this is verses 1 to 19, if you want to have it there, speaks to us of peace. Chapter 8, verse 1, key verse in the whole account. If you want to debate that one, you can come and talk to me afterwards about it. That's what I think. Okay, God remembered Noah. God remembered Noah. Now that's not like God put Noah and his family, the animals on the ark, and then went away, put the kettle on, made a cup of tea, got into deep thought, and thought, hmm. And then all of a sudden, there's a guy on the boat, I need to save him.

That's not what it means when it says God remembered. Okay, what does it mean? It means that God made good on his word. God looked out and he said, now's the time. Now's the time. Right, remember that promise to Noah, verse 17 of chapter 6. 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. 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 what? Kept alive. God said that he would get them to the other side. God knew where he was taking them, and this is God making good in his word. For God to remember means that what he says he will do, he will always do. Remember just before Christmas, just before we, the four of us and our family flew down to Bristol, the night before we're about to go, burst pipe in our house. I say burst pipe, probably just like exaggeration, dripping pipe, right? You get the point. So Alex goes online, and she says, anybody know enemy, enemy with a contact from an emergency plumber. Instantly someone replies on the phone to this guy, out he comes, very late at night. And he did an incredible job, incredible job. Pouring rain, he was there, fixed it, went out to the street, checked the mains, came back in, fixed it. And just before he was about to leave, he turned to us and he said, here's my card. Would you mind telling people that I did a good job?

That was really strange. We'd never heard that from somebody before. And then he proceeded to say, because people in our trade, we so often get a bad name. And I want people to know that there are good ones of us out there. Isn't it interesting, isn't it? That's why in business that recommendations are so important. You probably, before you bring anybody out to your house, you check online, don't you? Can these people be trusted? But it goes to show, doesn't it, that we live in a world where trust doesn't come naturally to us. Taking somebody at their word does not come naturally to us. People, and we can think of people in trades where we think, can we really trust them? Do we really know what's going on?

[10:53] But the thing about this God is that he always delivers on his word. He always delivers on his words. Now you imagine the first readers of this are the Exodus generation journeying in the wilderness, thinking about, can God get us to that land that he promised? Well, here's the proof that God delivers on his word. God remembers Noah and everyone and everything on that ark.

So God's judged the wickedness of the world. Now what? Well, what the text is telling us here is that it's not like the waters magically drain away. This is not Mother Nature doing her thing. Okay? This is God quite deliberately and actively causing the flood to stop and the waters to drop. Okay? Verse 1, God made a wind blow. Verse 2, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth. What? Continually. Verse 5, the waters continued to abate. In other words, God is making this happen. He is making this happen. He is making good on his word. So is it time to come off the boat? Noah sends a raven? No, it's not time. Noah sends a dove.

Is it time to go off the boat? No, it's not time. Noah sends the dove again. Verse 11, and it comes back with the branch. Presumably that means that the waters have dropped below the level of the trees. But notice that it's not just any old branch that the dove brings back. What is it?

It's an olive branch. It's the symbol of peace. Is it time? It's almost time. And nearly after a year in the ark, you want to add those days up. That's kind of what it comes to. Verse 16, God says go.

[12:41] And at the end of verse 17, there we get it again. Be fruitful and multiply on the earth. Is this the brand new start for humanity? Well, let's move from the dove to the rainbow. And this is verse 20 to chapter 9, verse 17. And the rainbow speaks of promise. So now notice the first thing that Noah does when he gets off the ark, verse 21. What does he do? He sacrifices. It's interesting, isn't it? He sacrifices. He's offering his gratitude to God. And I guess as I've mulled on it this week, I wonder if in his heart, he knows his own heart. And we'll see that in a minute that he does.

And he thinks to himself, but by the grace of God, that should have been me. And by faith and trust in this God, it wasn't. So Noah's sacrificing to God. And the aroma, do you see it, is pleasing to the Lord. Things are right. And even though God knows that the human heart is still evil, he promises not to strike down every creature again. And let me just pause at this point and just tell you what I've been reminded of this week and encourage you to remind yourselves of it as well, maybe even for the first time today to know it, to know the character of this God, that he is gracious and that he is kind and that he is unbelievably patient.

It's the constant refrain, isn't it, of the, that we read in the Psalms, that praise God that he doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. And it comes up that often in the Psalms that you think to yourself that we as Christians shouldn't get over that fact. It should never cease to blow our minds that he doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, but rather he treats us according to his abundant mercy and grace. What an amazing God.

Verse 22, he will show his common grace to humanity, that is, to every single human being, regardless of whether they acknowledge him or not, he will show his grace and his kindness to every human being in the seasons. Do you see it? Seed time, harvest, cold, heat, summer, winter. This is what God's going to do. My little four-year-old girl said yesterday, she said, and this was at 11 o'clock in the morning, right? She said, Daddy, we've had all the weathers today. It's a great observation, wasn't it? All the weathers today. And as I say, that was at a two, three hour window. We really did have them all yesterday. But see, with this text in my mind, I've been reminded that, do you know what?

I praise God that we do have all the seasons. We have seed time in harvest and we have cold and heat. We have summer and winter, right? Okay. We sometimes get them all in one day, but do you see how that's so important? That God shows us his grace in the seasons. Now, what that means, you just back that one around in your mind. What that means is the fact that you and I had breakfast this morning is a sign of his grace and his love towards us. That we had homes to go to. We had jobs to go. We've got jobs to go to tomorrow. That we've got friends and family. That we're breathing is a sign of his grace and his love towards us. That means that when you take your meal at lunch, and let's practice this at lunch afterwards, that we don't have Tesco to thank for that meal. We don't have Kellogg's to thank for that meal. We don't have the truck driver to thank for that meal. We don't have the farmer to thank for that meal. First and foremost, we have the Lord to thank for the meal.

[16:27] Summer and winter and springtime in harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

God's commitment to his creation. And you see how verses 1 to 7 of chapter 9, he reestablishes the sanctity of life. That life is precious to him. So everyone from the first lady in the white house to the fetus in the womb is a life precious in God's sight. And here he is, laying it down once again, every human being, every human life has been made wonderfully in his image.

And you see how God is here acting to protect the vulnerable human beings who are suffering the effects of violence previously. Seeing that we understand and there's a system in place that we see the seriousness of murder and taking a life made in the image of God.

God says again, go forth and multiply and he makes his covenant promise. And this is beautiful. And you'll notice in this little section, verses 8 to 17, if you want to glance at it there, that the word covenant comes up seven times. Covenant, covenant, covenant, covenant, covenant, covenant, covenant. Seven times. I mean, to see this, it's God's cast iron promise that he won't bring another devastating flood on the earth. What is the sign of that covenant? The bow's in the cloud.

The rainbow. Now you read many commentators, they talk about how that's symbolic for the fact that God is hanging up his bow. He won't do it again by his grace.

[18:18] So is this the brand new start for humanity? Is this the one that we all long for? Well, from the dove to the rainbow to finally, verses 18 to 28 to the vineyard. And the vineyard shows us the problem.

Noah gets to work. He plants the vineyard. He's cultivating God's creation, right? It's all going great at this point. It's looking great on so many levels. But this man who's been portrayed to us all the way through, right? In my head, as I've been studying these passages, I've given them nicknames, okay?

Righteous Noah. Blameless Noah. Walking with God, Noah. Man of faith, Noah. Built the ark, Noah. But, verse 21, what does he become? He becomes naked, Noah. Drunk as a skunk, Noah.

We're saying at this point that the fruit of the vine, that alcohol here is not a sin in itself to enjoy God's good creation, but to abuse it and drunkenness absolutely is wrong in God's sight.

Here is Noah. And you see how the, it's interesting, a little parallel, isn't it? Here's Noah, naked, shame comes with it. And of course, what did we see in chapters three when sin entered the human equation with Adam and Eve? They knew they were naked and there was shame. So we're meant to see that history is repeating itself here. Okay? And given the breadcrumbs of optimism that have been laid for us in the last few chapters, see verse 21, it's meant to hit us like a bullet train.

[19:52] And do you see how it's not just Noah who sins on this occasion? Noah's youngest son, Ham, the father of the people who will become the Canaanites, who will be the enemies of God's people down the generations. What does this guy do? He humiliates his father. So instead of being broken for his father over his sin, instead of leaping to his defense and trying to help him out, which by the way is what we should do when we see brothers and sisters fall, that we should grieve, we should come alongside with the aim of restoring. What does this guy do? He almost, he revels in it and he gets a thrill out of going back to his brothers and saying, lads, get in here. You'll never guess what I've seen. You'll never guess what I've seen. Here he is. He's out with his camera phone. He's on the phone to the newspaper. How much will you give me for the scoop? Because this ain't any old bloke. This is Noah who's done this. How much will you give me?

And when Noah realizes what's happened, when he sobers up, verse 24, do you see how he is livid? He's livid. He's angry. And you see that anger and rage are alive and well in the human heart. And how does the story of Noah end? Quite literally, what is the last word of chapter 9? Verse 29 is death. Noah died. And so here's the point of the whole account, that there was one other thing that survived the flood. The human heart did. Sin did. Why did the flood not work?

Because of where the problem is. We love to think, don't we, that the problem is out there. If only we could change out there, then we'd be fine. If only we could change our external circumstances, it would be better. This passage tells us that the problem is not an external one.

The problem is an internal one. That's where the problem is. It's an internal problem that we have. I don't know what you make of all this. I was trying to think on it this week.

[21:55] I do know the question in my mind has been all week. Why do you not just edit this bit out? Right? You're putting this together. You're Moses putting this together. Why don't you just edit this bit out? Why not stop a couple of verses earlier? Everything is going great. He's off the ark. Okay, he's not perfect, but he's giving it a shot. And there he goes. Why let us know about this?

Because here's the thing. No one's putting verse 21 of chapter 9 on their Instagram account, are they? They're not. You know, you can get these apps on your phone. You might go and check it out

afterwards.

I don't know. You can get a picture and you can put it on your social media, whatever it is, and you can get a lovely picture and you can put a verse to go with the picture. Right? So I'm thinking this week, I'm thinking, imagine our picture, okay? The flood's stopped. There's a lovely sunset. There is a beautiful waterfall. There's a silhouette of a person with their two hands in the air like that. Right? And in verse 21, nobody's putting it. No one became drunk on their Instagram, are they?

Nobody's putting it. So my question is, why not edit this bit out? Why is this here? Well, it's to help us answer the big question, yes, absolutely, that we've posed.

[23 : 04] And we'll come back to that in a second. But here's another reason. Surely it's to show the first readers and to show you and I that Noah's just like us.

That he makes mistakes. That here's a guy who gets it wrong. And here's a guy who knows the same old, same old in his heart. And although the specifics of Noah's walk of faith might be different from ours on one level, on another level, do you see how they're exactly the same?

And the lesson from this, surely, is that Noah's saved not because he's a perfect guy. He is saved because he's found grace with God. And he's walking in light of the promise that God would send the serpent crusher.

Remember the serpent crusher that God promised in chapter 3, verse 15. What that means is that when we fail in the Christian life, when we fall in the Christian life, well, sorry, rather that the question is not will we fall in the Christian life?

The question is where will we run when we fall in the Christian life? Because what, if you think about it in this account, what is Noah's only play here? When it comes to being right with God, what are the only two things in this chapter that suggest that that is going to be a reality for him?

[24 : 18] Two things, surely, are sacrifice and covenant promise. The only two plays that this guy has got, he can't plead his own righteousness.

He can't plead his own perfection. He can only plead sacrifice and covenant promise. And fast forward many, many generations from this one down Seth's line, comes one who would not just speak about sacrifice and covenant promise, but who would become both for us.

This Jesus who says in Matthew 26, quite literally that giving of himself will become, will reach his climax rather in his self-giving of himself on the cross.

This Jesus who says in Matthew 26, While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he'd given thanks, he broke it, and he gave it to his disciples, saying, Take and eat, this is my body. Then he took a cup, and when he'd given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[25 : 42] Here is Jesus strong and kind. Here is Jesus compassionate and in control. Here is Jesus great and good.

Do you see how Noah's only hope in faith is the person and work of Jesus? His life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his return.

And friends, our only hope is Jesus. He's our only hope. In one level, he is all we have. Isn't it? He's all we have.

But in another sense, so beautifully, he is all we need. Love it. Our only hope is Jesus. And so in our lives, when we run around from thing to thing, when we run around hoping that things are going to get better, when we run around trying to do things, trying to better ourselves, but we end up where Noah ends up, knowing in our hearts the same old, same old.

Jesus says, come to me. Come to me. And the thing is that he is not a personal trainer whose job it is to stand by our side, watch us perform, and say, go on, you can do it.

[26 : 55] Go on, you can do it. Go on, you can do it. Helping is trying to turn over a new leaf. Jesus is in the business of being a savior who says, come to me on my terms. Deny yourself.

In other words, stop trying to win yourself right. Deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me. And you will find that to lose your life is to find your life.

Because it's with me, the only one who can give you living water. Here's the heart problem. And incredibly, and you read this all the time in the Gospels, don't you, as people encounter Jesus.

They don't leave the same. They leave changed. And here is a savior who is in the business of giving new hearts to all those who would come to him in faith. I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest.

Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad. I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.

[28 : 05] This account of the flood throws us to Jesus. You know, humanity longs for a new beginning. You and I, we long, we do, for everything that this flood narrative has almost tantalizingly dangled in front of us.

A world where sin is judged and eradicated. Where there's no more murder, where there's no injustice, where there's no pain, where there's no suffering, where there's no war, where peace reigns and rest rules.

And I think in one sense, you can almost hear that coming through in John Lennon's song. It kind of seeps in there, doesn't it? Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man.

Imagine all the people sharing all the world. You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you will join us, and the world will live as one. You can hear it in his language. Sound good? Boy, does it sound good. Absolutely it does. Lennon might have a dream, but here's the thing. He doesn't have a solution. His solution is look inside yourself.

[29 : 13] Let's try and be better. But the Bible's take on us seems to be a lot more realistic. Telling us not to look in, because if you look in, you won't find a solution. You'll find the problem.

It seems to me that history is littered with movements and people who tried to lead us to this new, brave world, this new beginning, and every single one of them failed. Do you know what?

Here's another guy who, as it were, failed. Noah's not the guy. Noah's not the new Adam to usher us into this brave new world. So then, second question, is it possible?

Well, only in Jesus. The true and better and perfect Adam can be said that it gloriously is. Because every tantalizing promise of Scripture that God makes us finds its amen in him.

And the one who tells us in the book of Revelation, right at the end there, he who was seated on the throne said, see, I am making everything new.

[30 : 17] And it's Jesus who calls us to come to him and to know life. Life now, but life fully then. In this brand new world where he reigns as king.

So friends, why don't we just pray? Or rather, why don't we just have a moment of silence? And I realize there was a lot of stuff that has come out today. And I encourage you to take this moment to, as it were, to do business with the Lord.

And then I'll close this in prayer. And so, Lord Jesus, to you we lift our eyes. The giver of life.

Lord, I pray that as we almost finish our official time here together today, Lord, that you would be doing your work by your word through the power of your Holy Spirit in our lives.

Lord, I pray that for each of us, Lord, whatever we are at, whatever your word has found us today, thank you, first of all, that you know our hearts. And so, secondly, Lord, I ask that your word would do its work in our lives.

[31 : 27] Would you make us more like Jesus, we ask. Father, thank you for your great love for us. And we thank you that you hear us, because we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.