

How God Saves the Planet

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[0 : 00] Well, here's a question. What would it take to save the planet? If we got on top of our recycling, perhaps, we think that would help.

Then there are carbon emissions, perhaps. If our cars went electric or hydrogen-powered, perhaps we think that is the answer. Or maybe our hopes hang on governments, keeping pledges that they have made, businesses turning to renewable energy, or indeed preachers printing their sermons, double-sided.

There are a thousand ways, aren't there, that we are told we must save the planet. And there's certainly something good in learning to steward our resources and creating technology that will help us to care for God's world.

But here's the question. Will that save the planet? The question surely behind the question is, well, save the planet from what?

What is the problem our planet needs saving from? And is recycling or planting trees or better health care or good education or anything we can think to do?

[1 : 16] Anything? Are those things the answer to that problem? We, over the past several weeks, have been seeing in Genesis who God is, what kind of world he designed, who he is, who created the world, who we are in God's world.

And in the last few chapters, what has gone so wrong with God's world? And we've seen that the big problem that Genesis has uncovered at the root of all other problems is the problem of sin. Since the first humans turned against God in the beginning, we've seen this desperate tale spin into deeper and deeper depths of rebellion against God.

We've traced the poison from Adam and Eve who listened to the serpent and they distrusted God and pushed him away. Down to their son Cain, who ignored God and killed his brother.

And through Cain to his sons to Lamech, who seemed not to know of God whatsoever and boasts about becoming a serial killer.

[2 : 24] And then to humanity at large, who we saw at the end of last week, ended up marrying the sons of God and gave birth to warlords and warriors who roamed the earth, filling it with violence.

Until at the end of our passage last time, we read this. If you just glance down there at chapter 6 and verse 5. The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

Here's God's verdict on the problem. He sees the symptom, great wickedness, and he gives us the diagnosis. That his heart's full of sin, rebellion against him.

And so to rephrase the question then, if total and uncompromising sin is the problem with our world, then what is it going to take to save the planet? Well, that is what Genesis turns to now.

How God does step in to redeem his world, but in a way that none of us would dare to expect.

Firstly, then, Genesis shows us God's plan to deal with sin.

[3 : 49] His plan to deal with sin. Reading from verse 11 in chapter 6. The earth was corrupt in God's sight and full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all people on earth had corrupted their ways.

So God said to Noah, I am going to put an end to all people. The earth is filled with violence because of them. I'm surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

It is a devastating plan. But if that sounds less like a plan to save creation than to destroy it, we need to see the logic behind God's judgment.

Firstly, why is God doing this? We need to see because it is right for him to do it. Genesis really stresses this. If you just glance down at verse 13, see what God plans to do to the world is destroy it.

But in Hebrew, that is the very same word as the word we see three times in verses 11 and 12, look to describe what the world has become. Corrupt, corrupt, corrupt.

[5 : 03] That word could be translated as ruined. And so it's as if God is saying, since the world is now ruined through and through, and since humanity have ruined themselves with sin, so I will now bring to ruin human beings and the world that they have created.

We say sometimes, don't we, the punishment fits the crime? Well, that is what Genesis is saying of God's judgment here. The sentence fits word for word with the seriousness of the offense.

And the Bible, and we ourselves indeed call that justice. That matching up. God is perfectly just.

But hang on, we think, is this justice or is it judgment? Here in our culture, we love to talk, don't we, about justice?

We generally frown on the idea of judgment. You know, we want justice, but we don't want to judge. And yet, in Hebrew, it is the same word.

[6 : 16] It's the same word. Without judgment, says the Bible, there can be no justice. Or to flip that round, justice demands judgment. Here we see occasionally, don't we, don't we, the trauma that it causes a family when a person who perhaps killed their son or daughter or loved one gets bail or is released early from a life sentence in prison.

Your hearts know when we see their pain that whatever the courts say, justice has failed. But there's probably still part of us that wonders, you know, is God wiping out all life?

Is that not an overreaction? Does the flood and its devastation really fit this problem? Is it justice?

You think of the scale, the severity, perhaps the hardest thing of all is the finality, that this is not restorative or reparative as such.

There's no sense of kind of putting things back. Is God going too far? Well, Genesis would suggest to us ever so gently that he isn't.

Just think for a minute how God has responded to sin before in this book. What did God say when Adam and Eve sinned? Where are you?

[7 : 48] Where are you? He came. Did he not, in grace and love, to find them? He brought them out of hiding. He covered their sin with a sacrifice. He promised that their sin would not get the last word.

What did God say when Cain sinned? Well, he held out, didn't he, the chance to be right with him again. Cain rejected that. He killed his brother.

And even then, God promised to protect his life. He said he would not be killed in the wilderness. So friends, let's not imagine for a moment that God does not know how to be gracious.

Let's not pretend he has been unforgiving. Let's not question his incredible patience with a world that has turned against him and pushed him away.

Instead, let's consider what it would take for this God to declare an end of all human life. What would it take to bring this God to the end of his patience?

[8 : 58] What would it take to provoke him to execute that great judgment in full that sin truly deserved? Well, it has come to this, the total corruption of every human heart, a world filled totally with violence, the uncompromised ruin of his very good creation over ten long generations of human life.

And so, brothers and sisters, this is not God flying off the handle. It's not God being overly sensitive. His plan to deal with sin is the result of his holy and long suffering and yet uncompromising anger against the evil that sin has inflicted on his world.

Okay, we need to see God is not the bad guy in this story. And if there's a part of us that still suspects perhaps that he could be or that the flood isn't perhaps fully deserved, then I'd suggest probably we haven't yet come fully to terms with just how evil our sin truly is.

there's even a kind of logic in the way that God brings the earth to ruin in this plan of his. Notice how God dealt with sin back then is with water.

Well, where have we heard about water before in this book? Remember when God created the world in the beginning, it began as a watery chaos and then God, he majestically formed the world and he filled it.

[10 : 41] He formed it by separating, remember the waters, into sky and sea. He formed it by gathering the waters so that land appeared and then he filled the sky and the land with all kinds of life, with birds and creatures and with human beings.

Well, the way that God deals with sin here is to, in effect, undo his creation, to return the world to a watery, lifeless chaos, to unform it and to unfill it.

And ultimately, that is a reflection of what sin has done to his creation in ruining his world. We, in effect, picked a thread loose in his glorious cosmic tapestry and pulled and pulled and pulled until nearly the whole thing was reduced and unraveled back into a heap of thread.

And so now God's punishment, in a sense, is to unravel those who have done that and return them to dust. And so we need to see that the flood is a very fitting judgment.

But buried in it, there is also a sense of restoration, in effect, God is pressing reset, you taking the world back to its original state, to its original watery, chaotic, primeval, beginning, ready, perhaps, to be recreated afresh.

[12 : 19] And so we need to ask again, is God really not saving his world? Or, or is he saving it by destroying the ones who have destroyed it?

That is a sobering thought, friends. But God's judgment brings home to us just how deep the problem is at heart. We cannot possibly fix it, solve it, fight it, do our bit, because the problem is us. The world needs saving from our sin. And there is nothing we can do to deal with our sin. God has to deal with our sin, and he plans to.

So then, what hope do we have before this perfectly just and holy God? Well, although we often think about this section of Genesis as being about a flood, actually most of it is about a family.

And it is the family that gives us hope in this section, coming to our second point, God's promise to save from sin, to save from sin.

[13 : 35] Let's see over and above this flood narrative is the headline, which by now we're used to there in verse nine, Toledot. Toledot.

This is the account of, or the family history of, for the generations of Noah. We had a little trailer, didn't we, of this family history last week.

We saw Noah comes tenth in the line of Seth from Adam, Adam's third son. That is the line we saw of promise. And remember, Noah's dad had very high hopes as he uncorked the champagne on the day of his birth.

He called him Noah, or rest. And he said, this one will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands, caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.

And where we left off after that really devastating verdict on human sin in verse nine, we read, but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

[14 : 36] And so there is a lot riding on Noah as we get further into chapter six. And we find that what is riding on him is hope for humanity and the promise of God's redemption.

Verses 11 and 12 give us those three corrupts, but then verse 13 begins, so God said to Noah.

Notice, God is not kind of speaking from a megaphone from heaven to all human people.

He's speaking and dealing with one man, Noah. Now why does Noah need to know what God is planning? Because, well, he is part of the plan. God is sending a flood, but he says to Noah, make yourself an ark.

And then he gives Noah a blueprint for building an ark. Now, two things about this. Firstly, what is an ark? I have no idea.

But, here's a clue, the only other time this word is used in the whole Hebrew Bible is in Exodus chapter 2 verse 3, to describe what do you think?

[15 : 46] To describe the little basket in which Moses is placed when his life is threatened to keep him alive. Which could help you kind of join the dots in your mind as an Israelite in the wilderness, that the way God is dealing with Noah to save is the same way that he has dealt with Moses to save.

Which for people who had just been rescued by God through Moses is a big massive deal. It says that Noah is a bona fide mediator between God and human beings.

The second really interesting thing about this is that this is the only other time in the writings of Moses that God gives specifications or dimensions for something to build.

the only other time he does that is to give dimensions for the tabernacle which is itself as we've seen a mini version of the Garden of Eden which again as an Israelite in the desert could make you wonder could it not whether the ark is not itself a similar sort of place.

A place where God had come to dwell to give life to human beings. you could certainly pass for a kind of garden couldn't it with its pairs of every kind of living thing you two of all living creatures and

lavish provision of food every kind of good food that is eaten and of course into that sanctuary God places a man and a woman and their offspring to keep alive the creatures under their rule.

[17 : 33] Now none of that is explicitly stated it is only suggested but just following pulling those threads helps us I think to understand why Genesis calls it an ark not a boat or ship and why it bothers to give us a speck for how Noah was to build it.

I suspect those details are not simply there to satisfy our curiosity or to give us a plan to build our very own ark but to help us to see the huge huge redemptive significance of what God is doing with Noah and his family.

In short to sum up this is part of the story of God's rescue going back to the garden and going forward ultimately we will see to the cross and if you stick with us till next week to the new creation if you're still in doubt about that just glance down at verse 17 in chapter 6 God says I'm 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 but verse 18 I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark you your sons and your wife and your sons wives with you now that is the first time in the bible we get the word covenant covenant a relationship God makes with human beings via a promise that he makes but notice God isn't here creating a new covenant it's not a brand new thing he says he's establishing one or upholding one an existing covenant which covenant well surely surely it is speaking about

God's promise from chapter 3 verse 15 the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent God's promise to send a serpent crusher to redeem us from sin and to bring an end to death forever and so Noah is indeed the heir of God's covenant promise so then how will Noah carry that great covenant promise into the future to humanity what we see is by obeying God perfectly and by bringing a family safely through the waters of judgment perhaps you noticed as we read together Genesis really stresses that Noah was a righteous redeemer in contrast with the whole rebellious world that he lived in how many times have you heard something like this in the Bible verse 9 Noah was a righteous man blameless among the people of his times and he walked faithfully with God if you've not read much of the Bible that is very very rare indeed in fact with most people in the Bible the Bible makes the point that they were not like that not righteous Noah seriously stands out certainly considering that the world is three times corrupt and all throughout the building project Genesis tells us Noah obeyed the Lord in everything follow this thread with me verse 22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him 7 verse 5 Noah did all that the Lord commanded him the animals went in in verse 9 as God had commanded Noah and then again in verse 16 everything happened as God commanded Noah see what sets Noah apart in his generation is his righteousness that is why God saves him if Noah hadn't been righteous he surely would have been left to face God's wrath with the rest of humanity but Noah found favor in God's eyes because of his righteousness and perfect obedience and so he is chosen to bring his family through the flood did you notice that not only

[21 : 49] Noah his wife his three sons and their wives Genesis does not say that they also were righteous and blameless but simply that they were the family of the one righteous man who lived and so Noah's righteousness saves a family from God's rightfully deserved just judgment on sin I hope you can see where this is going what hope do we and you have then sinful as we are in the face of God's holy anger against sin is it to be like Noah if he was saved because he was righteous and blameless won't we be saved by being ever so good no we won't because we cannot be no what Noah teaches us is that we need to be connected united the family of the one who is righteous whoever we are tonight our only hope is in

God's covenant promise to rescue sinners from the punishment we so deserve through the one righteous blameless perfectly obedient rescuer now that is not of course Noah but a distant distant son of Noah's family the Lord Jesus Christ he is the one who lived by every word that came from the mouth of God the one who was tempted in every way that we are and yet without sin one who obeyed his father even to his death and death on the cross one who has secured for us through his perfect life a perfect righteousness not our own friends Jesus Christ he he is the rescuer we so need and it is his righteousness his perfect obedience his spotless sacrifice to turn away God's wrath his death to take on himself the punishment for our sins that is what brings us safely through God's just and holy judgment against our sin rightfully we should be left should we not to face God's rightful anger for our every smallest lie for our every most hidden sinful thought to the most horrific crime but united with Christ through faith we are clothed in his righteousness our every

sin is paid for by his blood and so we are brought into the refuge and the hiding place of the presence of God safe now from his holy anger so friends we see that Noah is merely a pale shadow and an outline of his distant son the Lord

Jesus himself and if your trust is in him tonight then you need to hold on tight to him for this next section picture yourself if you like following him into the ark picture yourself clinging to his cross as we turn now to see what our sin cost him if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here tonight we're so glad that you are here let me say to you then that Jesus is the only way out of what we are about to look at Jesus is no less your hope or your rescuer than he is mine and so as we stare into the storm of punishment for our sin that we deserve well let me urge you tonight to put your trust in him and to escape from the wrath that God is sending against all sin yours mine because that is what Genesis shows us thirdly and finally God's great punishment for sin God planned the flood remember to wash sin off the face of the earth he has promised to save Noah and his family bring the hope of rescue through the flood God but now both those things are in place the description in Genesis of God's punishment for sin is completely catastrophic and uncompromising this is chapter 7 verse 11 all the springs of the great deep burst forth the flood gates of the heavens were opened and rain fell on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights and then just have a glance at the start of verses 18 19 and 20 the waters rose they rose greatly the waters rose it is giving us this sense of a rising tide and the result is there in verses 21 to 23 again just notice the first words of each of those verses every living thing that moved on land perished 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 only

[27 : 26] Noah was left and those with him in the ark it is a total judgment you are either safe in the ark or you have died in the flood there is no halfway house there is no gray area there is no talking our way out of this God is holy he cannot be bribed into handing down an easier sentence he cannot be fooled into thinking that our offense is not so bad after all his judgments cannot be argued with or questioned or commented upon or doubted he is holy and in the face of such pure and uncompromising justice well our sin is as serious as it gets and his judgment is promised as God flooded the world before so says the Bible he has set a date in his diary when he will judge the sins of the world in righteousness for the last time this is

Paul speaking in Acts chapter 17 he has set a day he says when he will judge the world with justice by the man he is appointed he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead Jesus resurrection was the day he was appointed as judge of all the world and the Bible keeps its most terrifying language for that day Jesus himself who died who rose again who ascended who is coming he speaks about being thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth he speaks about an eternal fire that will never be put out pictures merely pictures of an eternal and unending punishment for sin and we call that reality hell and if we doubt that that is what our sins deserve mine and yours let's not forget who says that it is what our sins deserve it is Jesus himself the most gracious most forgiving most patient person who has ever walked the face of the earth Jesus was never never slow to forgive those who turned to him said sorry for their sin who trusted in him he is still not slow to forgive sins in fact the Bible says he is slow to anger slow to judge slow to punish instead says Peter he is patient with you not wishing anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance he is ever ever so patient friends but the Bible says his patience will run out God has set a day when Jesus will come again not this time to pay for our sins himself but to wipe those whose sins are not forgiven off the face of the earth if that sounds harsh just remember why he died he was nailed to the cross and he suffered and he died to take that very punishment away from us so that we would not have to face it he was pierced and crushed for our sins he was wiped off the face of the earth buried in a tomb for our wrong doing he took our place in hell so that we would never have to go there and so

Christ God himself is not some evil tyrant who loves to inflict punishment he is a holy and gracious king who loves justice and offers mercy who forgives the sins of many but he will not let the guilty go unpunished and so as then we are either safe in the ark or we are standing before the wrath of God so now our sins will either be dealt with and put away through his death when we turn to him for forgiveness or they will be dealt with in full upon his return when we will face him as judge and folks is this not why we want people to know him now because this this is how God saves his world through our simple words telling people to turn to the

Lord Jesus and be saved in the light of judgment day everything we do everything we do for other people pales in comparison to this we can meet temporary needs but our one great calling is to

have people's eternal needs met we seek their eternal everlasting good when we point them to the Lord Jesus and so if you do not know him tonight do not wait until his patience runs out do not wait do not put it off he is able to save completely all those who draw near to God through him so turn to him from your sin trust in his rescue through his death and you will be saved and that will be it no more judgment day no more fear of hell no anger of God instead salvation eternal life and the love and grace and friendship of God forever and if we do know him today if your trust is in him well let this reminder of what

[33 : 34] Christ has spared us through his death grow our love and praise and adoration of him you the blacker the backdrop the clearer the diamond shines and so let Christ shine this evening in your heart against the pitch black backdrop of our sin and of the reality of hell and let him shine there for all he is worth for all he has done for ye for by his blood he has turned away the wrath of God and spared us the punishment we so richly deserve let us praise him together as we pray now let's pray together God our father we tremble before your words love love not in fear but in awe for you our father are far beyond all that we could ever imagine

Lord our attempts to measure your patience to scale the heights and the depths and the widths of your love towards us or to comprehend the full scale of your justice all these things are beyond us for you are beyond us father we thank you that as high as the heavens are above the earth so far higher are your ways than our ways and we confess our father our need to be able to trust you with your ways help us to do that we pray Lord when we struggle to understand why you do things the way you do but above all we pray our father that you would bring us to our knees in worship of you for you are indeed not only just but the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus and we praise you for him tonight for he who took away our sins he who indeed took your punishment that we rightly deserve and we pray our father that even as we stare into those depths that you would lift our eyes up to him to see him seated above all things and interceding for us

Lord for those who as yet do not know him we pray grant faith to trust him Lord to escape your wrath and how we pray our father for open doors for your gospel that we might proclaim the inexpressible riches of your love to a lost and a dying world Lord help us not to be complacent we pray help us not to be indifferent but Lord in the face of judgment day help us to be zealous for your glory help us to be compassionate towards the lost and help us to be bold in proclaiming Christ as the Lord and Savior and judge for we pray in his name Amen unto the God
God