

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Paul Callicott

Old Testament Types of the Lord: Warning of Coming Judgement - Noah

[NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Introduction

Today we need no introduction because we are going to look at one of the most well-known stories from the Bible, Noah's Ark. We all know how the story goes, don't we?

- Noah builds a big boat.
- Pairs of lots of animals are put into the boat.
- The boat is shut with Noah's family and the animals inside.
- It rains a lot, causing a flood.
- The boat floats on the water, keeping those inside safe.
- After a while, the water goes down and Noah releases some birds.
- When one bird does not come back, it is time to get off the boat.
- God puts a rainbow in the sky.

This story is so well-known that it has given rise to many different things that are based on it. There are songs about it and lots of families have some kind of children's toy set which depicts Noah, the ark and a selection of animals to go in it. Thankfully, the rain does not come as part of the set! A film was made about it a few years ago – although I would say that I think the closest it came to the biblical account was the fact that there was a boat, so we will not go much further into that one. Someone has even built a full-size replica of it in Kentucky.

Many images and ideas are invoked when this story is considered, many of which are likely to be far from the actual reality of the biblical account. For Christians, this story is a wonderful example of the salvation of God and His care for those who are faithful to His ways.

But what of our subject today – Judgement. It is probably not the first subject that springs to mind. But let us pick out a few verses. First, we have verses 5, 6 and 7 of chapter 6 of Genesis:

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.””

Verse 13 of the same chapter reads:

“And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.””

And then in verses 21 to 23 of Chapter 7 we read:

“And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.”

And finally, in chapter 8 we have the following words in verse 21:

“And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.””

Perhaps the scale of the judgement and the death here is such that we try not to really contemplate it, but it is there. We speak of biblical events, catastrophes and such. This is biblical judgement being spoken of, the like of which has not been seen since. Millions of people wiped from the face of the earth because of the wrath of God.

How do Christians deal with a topic such as this? The reality of a subject such as this is most unpopular in our society today. There are, no doubt, many who would suggest that it is an exaggerated story designed to scare people into believing in God. Should we shy away from it and hope that it does not come up? Perhaps it is good to leave it as the dressed-up children’s toy with cuddly animals and the friendly old man who depicts Noah?

To deny, ignore or avoid a portion of the Bible is never advisable. All scripture is given from God and is therefore of value to us, and I hope to bring out some of these things during the rest of the talk. But I would point to the references in Matthew 24 (verses 37 to 39) and 2 Peter 2 (verse 5), where this story is specifically mentioned in the ministry of Jesus and in the teaching of Peter. It does not form the main theme of their ministry – although you could argue that it is a key theme of second Peter. But neither is it ignored and therefore it is something that we should be mindful of.

Is it True?

Just before we go on to look at some of the things that we can gain from considering this topic, I would like to briefly digress. This passage of Noah is not without controversy. The biggest question is whether the story is true at all, or rather a hyperbole to put over a point. I happen to believe that it is a true and literal account, but there are many different ideas about it. I only want to put one point forward for this and that is again the reference in Matthew 24. The Lord Jesus refers to the story Himself. For me that is a good indicator of the authenticity of the story. But whatever your thoughts are on this story, I hope that you will appreciate all the points I make regarding it.

A reminder of the Perspective of God

But let us move on. I want to look at the first aspect from this story, and that is getting a better understanding of God’s judgement. The impression that many of us have when we think of this story is that of a debauched society doing all sorts of dreadful things. But let us have a look at the statement from the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 24, verses 37 to 39:

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Let us consider the description here - eating, drinking, and marrying. Nothing too untoward there. Even the descriptions around the Genesis account would not suggest that it was too bad a place. People had trades and skills and by all accounts it was a thriving society, cities were built. Perhaps not as big as our metropolises of today, but people were coming together to advance themselves. If we were to measure it up against our own societies today you could say it was similar. So, what is the problem? A clue is given in verse 38 where it says, ‘until the day that Noah entered the ark.’ The Ark took over 100 years to build. As it was completed all sorts of animals had miraculously gathered to enter it and a man had preached righteousness for all that time. It would even suggest in what the Lord says that even when it rained, they didn’t notice. They only realised when the flood came, and by then it was too late.

They were just not interested. Their pursuits were simply their own enjoyment and benefit, with no thoughts of God. Now, it is not as if they had no help in knowing who God was. Adam was still around only 700 years before the ark was started. People like Enoch had disappeared to be with God, and they would all have known about Cain and Abel. But they were not interested in God whatsoever. Not a thought except one man.

But how does this help us? It reminds us firstly not to think about what is righteous in terms of our own thoughts. It is not too different from what we see in our own society and people are more than happy with that. So much so that they think they do not need God. The judgement of God was on the fact that people were not interested in Him; they did not want to think about what God wanted. The morality of Cain, which was to offer God what he thought was good, had developed into a full-blown disregard for God, simply looking to please themselves and the society was happy with that. We are challenged here not to allow the society around us to guide us as to what is right and wrong. We must look to God and see what He deems righteous.

Alas, developing this point reminds us that a true consideration of this shows we are well short of His standards. We naturally may not have thought the people in Noah’s day were that bad, but God did. Jesus then says that His generation is just the same in Matthew 24. Peter shows that things had not improved by the time he wrote his second epistle. We can be fairly confident that in our day we have the same problem, if things are no better now, then that is the same condemnation that the world in which we live is still under. We are a part of this world and fall under that same condemnation, except we can have faith in the salvation of the Lord!

What about the love of God?

Now, we can move onto a common thought that people have whenever you mention the topic of judgement. People worry that this may be confrontational and would rather focus on the love of God. I do agree that it is essential that judgement is not the primary topic in our witness and ministry. That place is certainly to be given to the Lord Jesus Himself. But note that point. It is not simply the love of God. It is the Lord Jesus. A number of things then come to mind: The first is that it is said of Him in the Gospel of John, chapter 5 verse 22, “that all judgement has been given to [Him].” So we are not to think that Jesus and judgement are mutually exclusive – the opposite is actually true.

Secondly, judgement is what caused the Lord Jesus to come into this world in the first place. Had it not been for the fact that judgement is hanging over the whole world – a judgement that has already been determined and is such that we would all be utterly destroyed – the Lord Jesus

would not have had to come and show His love to us in the way that He did. It is that judgement that has allowed God to show how great His love is, in sending His Son for us.

Finally, on this particular point, a greater understanding of God's judgement shows us how much the Lord Jesus took upon Himself. If we ignore it, we don't necessarily appreciate what He went through for us as much as we could do. This is not any idea of having to have a greater sense of guilt, but more a greater appreciation of His love for us. The more we look into this, the more we see that all the judgement that should have been placed upon us, He took upon Himself. This should stir our hearts up in wonder that He cares for us so much that He was prepared to go to the depths of Calvary. The One who knew no sin, not deserving of any judgement, took ours from us.

Are you ready?

I am compelled to give a short section of Gospel. Our subject speaks of the warning of coming judgement. That warning is most grave for those who do not know the Lord Jesus as Saviour. Judgement is coming one day, and all are going to receive it. The only hope is the work of the Lord Jesus. He came into this world, living a perfect life where no thought or word was out of place. That meant that He was able to be that perfect sacrifice, giving His life for us on the cross of Calvary. He took upon Himself the wrath of a holy and righteous God for this fallen creation. He was raised from the dead as a confirmation that His finished work had provided the required remedy for sin, dealing with death and judgement for all who believe on His name.

The coming judgement cannot be negated by our own efforts. It can only be avoided because of His saving work and that is all we can rest in. My challenge to everyone is are we truly resting in the salvation of the Lord? Christianity has never been about a way of life, a set of rules or a level of morality. It has been about accepting our fallen state, resting in the finished work of Christ, and coming into a new relationship with God. None of it is of ourselves. I trust that all who are listening know this, or now realise the importance of this, especially given the warning of coming judgement that we are considering today.

Shaping our walk

I would now like to think about how our topic impacts our lives as believers. There is no avoiding the topic of judgement as both of our New Testament references were spoken to those who already belong to God. The Lord Jesus was speaking to the disciples in Matthew 24; 2 Peter is written to believers. There is a definite aim to teach believers through this consideration of coming judgement. What a contrast to the typical thought that the judgement of God is to scare people into believing in Him. Clearly these quotes are for the building up and help of those who follow God. With this in mind I have two specific points that I want to bring out.

The first is one of encouragement during difficult times. This is especially necessary when we suffer and are persecuted for being followers of the Lord Jesus. I am reminded of Psalm 73 from Asaph when I bring this one up. The psalm contains the thoughts of a man struggling with the fact that those who do not follow the ways of God still end up doing well in this world, often crushing those who are faithful to God. The first 15 verses are a person despairing of the world around them, but 16 and 17 change the perspective of them. They only do well for a time before they come face to face with God.

In a way I am offering a similar encouragement here with the consideration that there is coming judgement on this world. This is not in any way a sense of wishing people to get their comeuppance or a sense of being glad that people get what we may think they deserve. Such thinking would constitute a misunderstanding of key principles of Christianity. It is an encouragement to know that we have faith in a God who will deal with injustice, evil and suffering in this world. It helps us to endure persecution and trials in this life. The contrast between being

well set in this life and being judged after death is so stark that the consideration of it should cause us to have a desire that those who utterly reject God could be saved. After all, God Himself would rather people not face His judgement, as we read in 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 9.

Additionally, it is an incredible witness to have evil persecutors of the Church of God saved, as well as providing further evidence of the wonderful nature of God's salvation. The apostle Paul is just one of the fine examples of this. In more recent times, I suppose you could look to someone like C.S. Lewis, and there are many others. How often lives that are turned around so greatly have an even stronger appreciation of the salvation of God because they understand more what it is they have been saved from. In the western world we do not see a level of persecution that the early church did, or indeed in many other places around the world today. However, it will not take much for things to change. Knowing these things will stand us in good stead to endure when persecution does come.

My second point to bring out is again regarding perspectives but with an emphasis on how we view things that would normally occupy our time and our everyday dealings in life. When we consider how the world around us works, it is constantly looking to achieve more than it did before, or at least look like it is! Everything has to be better, bigger, faster, etc. Wealth, popularity, and influence are all pursuits of the world around us and it is really easy for us to get involved with such things. These can all be categorised in the description of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life which we find in 1 John chapter 2 verse 16. These were the ways in which the Lord Jesus himself was tested by the Devil. His correct perspective of things meant that He had no trouble dealing with them. But what about us?

Knowing the coming judgement of God is just one way to help us deal with such problems. One day everything in this world is going to be judged and done away with. So how does that make us feel about the grand project we are working on, our career or our hobby. We see many grand projects and ventures that attempt to be noticed around the world. They are impressive when we see them completed. I was once on the top of an aircraft carrier when it was close to completion – I was just a visitor – and it was a most impressive sight. The mere scale of it was difficult to contemplate. However, for all the effort put into these things, what is their end – it is judgement and destruction. None of these grand things are going to last, let alone endure the judgement of a holy and righteous God.

When it comes to our own lives then we must be conscious of this fact. I am not advocating a life of ease or ceasing to work hard. We know that we must do all things as if we are doing them for the Lord. Perhaps the choices and compromises we may be asked to make should have a different tint on them. Do I need that promotion if it means more of my time is gone? Do I need to stretch to a bigger house, car or holiday when it will mean I need to work overtime to afford it? There are many more examples and questions that could be asked with regard to this. Some of these things we can say yes to and much will depend on circumstance. For instance, I needed a new car because I could no longer fit my family in my old one. But all of the decisions we make need to consider where our effort goes. If they cause our efforts to be poured into things that will not last in this world, at the detriment of our service for God, then perhaps it is not a decision that is being made with the right consideration of the coming judgement of God. These are very personal decisions in most cases, so no one rule fits every circumstance, but the coming judgement of God does give us a constant thing to weigh our decisions against. Being a great and successful person in this world will not result in great success with God unless it is in line with His will for us.

A wonderful contrast in message

As I draw to a close, I hope to end on an encouraging point. There is a great difference between the three mentions of the story of Noah when it comes to persons who gave them. Noah preached

righteousness to those around him as he worked on his boat. But as he preached, he had a knowledge that he too needed to be saved from the judgement. The ark that he built at the command of God was as much a means of salvation for Noah, as it would have been for those listening. Peter taught perseverance because judgement is coming. He too preached as one who needed that salvation as much as anyone else. But then we come to the Lord who also gave a warning of coming judgement. As He taught about the judgement of God, He could teach it with more authority as He is the one who will be responsible for carrying it out. But He could talk about the salvation of God with the same authority because, like the judgement, He was the one who was going to provide it.

How wonderful to know that as we consider the judgement of God, we know that it has been given into the hand of the One who has first provided the way to be saved from it, by taking it on Himself. He is the only One who has been able to provide such a message. Let that be an encouragement to us.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Old Testament Types of the Lord: Warning of Coming Judgement – Noah, talk number T1191.

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