

Genesis 6:1-9:17

Valeria Greene

Having grown up in a Christian environment, I have been taught the story of Noah and the Ark more times than I can count. I have drawn numerous pictures of rainbows and an ark resting on a mountaintop. I have seen countless pictures in storybooks now engrained in my mind of Noah hammering and nailing, as he built a huge boat out of gopher wood. I have learned and can still sing today fun and happy songs about the animals going into the ark two by two. While all of this is part of this biblical narrative, it has also caused me to overlook the bigger and deeper meaning in this story. A meaning that I now find to be sobering, yet leading to rejoicing. Noah and the Ark is a story of a terrible tragedy and a glorious rescuing.

The beginning of our passage in Genesis 6 contains a gloomy, desperate state of the world. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (6:5,6). “And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt...all flesh had corrupted their way...for the earth is filled with violence” (6:12,13). This was a crisis of the worst kind, a true offense against a holy God. These phrases indicate a betrayal of man towards his Maker, a world so full of sin and wrongness that God was grieved “to his heart.” Let’s pause and ponder on this. We can almost picture our Almighty God, the one who created us to be in perfect communion with Himself, in tears, with deep sorrow and pain. A true heart-breaking condition. Our sin shows our rejection of God and that grieves our Lord.

A severe rejection only demands a severe judgment. This is possibly the hardest concept to grasp from this passage. I am grateful that my understanding of the judgment of God has grown over the years, yet I know that I have not grasped it in its entirety. Phrases like, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land...I am sorry that I have made them” (6:7) and “I have determined to make an end of all flesh” (6:13) are so difficult to take in. Yet they indicate a truth that we ought not to ignore. Our God is holy and cannot have anything to do with sin. The more we realize this, the more we know God truly as He is, and the more we can understand His judgment to be right and pure and even good. Perhaps if we struggle with this idea of severe judgement, we are only showing that our view of God is too small and our view of ourselves too large. Oh how we need the Holy Spirit’s help to see Him more clearly! Psalm 89:14 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.” Because our God is right and just and pure we can accept his judgment as right and just and pure.

But praise God that the story does not end there! Praise God that there is a glorious rescuing! Praise God for the sweet, hope-giving words in this story! “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (6:8), “But I will establish my covenant with you” (6:18), “But God remembered Noah” (8:1). The condition of the world is severe, which causes the judgment to be severe, which highlights the extreme, glorious mercy given. I say this in present tense because the days of Noah are mirrored so vividly today. There was a desperate deliverance needed then and now, and the Lord’s mercy was not and is not withheld. The Lord remembered Noah and caused the waters to subside (8:1) and the Lord remembers us and has proven it by sending His Son, Jesus, to rescue us.

This Advent season, let us not remember the severe rejection and the severe judgment to mourn and be depressed, but let us ponder on the severe rejection and the severe judgment in order to realize our great need and may that bring out a deep, inexpressible rejoicing in the great mercy of God. We can revere God and be in awe of his power and justice, while also trusting in Him more because of His glorious mercy. We desperately needed deliverance and we graciously received mercy. May our response mirror Noah’s when he finally came out of the ark and built an altar and worshiped (8:20). All praise and worship to God for Jesus, our Rescuer!