

To God Alone Be The Glory

IT WAS VERY A BAD YEAR. Things were as low as they could get. The family lost everything they had: their jobs, their homes, and their church. They would miss their favorite restaurants, stores, and entertainment places. Actually, they would miss their homeland: it was gone too. And their relatives—they wouldn't be heard from ever again.

IT WAS VERY A BAD YEAR. All the technology of the country was now worthless. All the great architecture, scientific advances, and transportation marvels were now useless. And the food supply? The crops were wiped out entirely, and almost all the animals died. Collectibles lost their value. The family could have thrown all their valuables out the window of a moving ship—they were now worthless. All the family had left was God and each other. Oh, yes—and a boatload of potential trouble.

If you noticed what portion of the Bible this sermon is based on, maybe you figured out who I've been talking about: Noah and his family. The year the great flood hit WAS A VERY BAD YEAR.

Our nation has had a bad year too. By comparison it wasn't nearly as bad as the very bad year Noah and his family had. But it was a bad year. Many people worried about their health enough to avoid crowds or travel or restaurants, especially this month as the delta variant made a steady advance through Lake City. Some folks felt frustration with how others were

responding to the pandemic. "How can you care so little?" "How can you make so much of it?" Some people lost loved ones to the virus. Others lost friends or relations with close relatives over whether to vaccinate or not. Raises received during the economic recovery have been spent on rising prices. Political decisions generated more heat than light. Instead of looking to the Lord for comfort, and to his promises for hope, lots of people turned to the things of this world for temporary relief from this very bad year. But the things of this life can give only momentary happiness, and when that's gone, the problems of this life rush back in, bringing the same sadness and disappointment.

How did the Noah clan handle their very bad year? If we study their situation, we might learn some valuable lessons for our daily walk with the Lord.

Imagine a world where only eight people believe in the true God. Imagine a church with only eight members. Talk about a little flock (Luke 11:32)! Imagine the pain in God's heart as he grieved over the ruin of his creation, not from the climate getting too warm or the environment too polluted, but from the earth being too full of sin. In his wisdom God decided that it would be better for every living thing on earth to die. He would start over with Noah and as many animals as could fit on a barge 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. By comparison our worship area is almost 45 feet wide. It's about 75 feet from the altar to the comfy chairs at the back of the worship area. It's about 300 feet from 6th St to Prairie St, so

figure a block and a half for the length of the ark.

Once Noah's family and the animals were all on board safely, the rains came down and the waters gushed up from the deep. The waters kept coming for 40 days. The Bible reports: *"Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark"* (Genesis 7:23). IT WAS VERY A BAD YEAR. The flood waters prevailed on the earth for one hundred and fifty days—five full months—picking up sediment in one place and laying it down in another. But that's for geology. Do you get the spiritual point? God is serious when he says, "Stop sinning. Repent. Change your ways." God is just. He is righteous and holy. He is not like the parents who let children or like the governments who let adults get away with wrongdoing. If we refuse to turn away from evil and do what he says is right, there will be consequences. He told us about the Great Flood so we could learn this lesson. You see, God is not only just. God is love, as we shall see next.

At the end of the 150 days, we're told: *"God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded* (Genesis 8:1). It's not that God had

forgotten Noah. The Bible phrase "God remembered" helps us understand that God always remembers his promises. He always keeps them, even when he must stop and deal with people who are not sorry. God remembers his promises. God remembers us when he allows us to have a bad year. As God wills, things will improve.

After those first 150 days of flooding, the water kept receding until the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4). When the very bad year had ended (8:14), *"God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.' So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another"* (8:15-19).

Can you see hope marching out of the ark along with the animals? Usually when God sends disaster as a wake-up call to sinners, he follows up with blessings which restore or replace what was lost. After World War I the vegetation slowly came back to the battlefields in Europe where trench warfare had denuded the land. After tornadoes came through this area, the trees grew back. After the Great

Flood in Noah's day, the earth sprang back. We aren't the first to notice this pattern of hope. King David encourages us in Psalm 30:4-5: "*Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*" For this reason we have hope that this very bad year will come to an end.

But I hope our hopes are bigger. I would love for our country and our city and our church to consider their ways, measure them, compare them to God's Word, see what is out-of-line with God's will, and then repent of all sin and ask God for help to change. "But why would anyone go to the almighty God, the One who has the power to punish so severely? Wouldn't it be better to reach a settlement out of court and deny any wrongdoing, like so many groups do today?" Perhaps, if God were only a punishing god. But God is merciful too. As evidence consider the turkey dinners that will be enjoyed in households across this land. Why would God bless our land when only 15% or so of Americans attend worship in a Christian church in any given week. In other words 85% of Americans don't set aside time each week to worship Jesus as the Savior from sin. From a spiritually standpoint IT WAS A VERY BAD YEAR. Yet the good Lord has provided enough food for all the people to celebrate Thanksgiving

Day. Who in America will go hungry tomorrow?

Our God is merciful. As evidence consider Jesus the Savior. God didn't have to rescue us from sin. But he wants everyone to have his free gift of eternal life. So he put all our sins on Jesus the Savior in order to have Jesus pay the penalty for us. God is merciful. Noah and his family knew that God had promised to send the Messiah from Adam's descendents one day. The Messiah had not yet come by Noah's time. Therefore the Messiah was still on his way through Noah's family line. That's why Noah confidently built the ark. He knew that the Lord keeps his promises.

And so, after a whole year stuck on the ark, after losing everything except their lives and each other, what's the first thing Noah and his family did when they disembarked? They said, "Let's have church." *Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease"* (Genesis 8:20-22). This

means Thanksgiving has its actual source in the promise that God spoke after the Great Flood! We have harvests because our merciful God promised that the harvests will not cease. They will continue even if the climate keeps on warming.

But there's more we can benefit from here. The first thing Noah and his family did not do was complain about all the hard work ahead of them, all alone in the big, soggy world. They did not go looking for a Mesopotamian Walmart. They did not go digging for buried treasure from the world before the flood. They had church. They sacrificed animals.

Really? Animals? Do you realize how few animals there were? Never were animals so precious. Every animal they chose for sacrifice was on the endangered species list. Only 7 pairs of the clean animals and the birds entered the ark. Yet somehow, to burn up 15 percent of the world's Gross National Product of lambs, goats, bulls, and birds on that newly crafted altar seemed like the perfect thing to do. Never was it more expensive to worship the Lord and sacrifice to him than when the world was nearly empty of all living things. Any adviser from Lake City might have urged Noah: "Why not let the animals reproduce a while before sacrificing some." But for Noah the most important thing was thanking God for all his goodness and mercy. Like Noah we

aren't going to say, "It's too expensive to do ministry. It takes so much time and money. Isn't there a way to do ministry where we don't have to give so much time and money?" Instead we take the time to have a Thanksgiving Eve service every year. Before we fill our bellies with food, we fill our hearts with the good news of God's mercy, and we give God a thank offering so that those who have had a very bad year can hear the good news of God's mercy for them.

If this has not been a bad year for you (like most years are not), you have even greater reason to thank God and keep your heart from turning toward evil. Most of us have not lost our jobs, cars, homes, families, loved ones. Our church has remained open and available all year long that we might gather to pray, praise, and proclaim God's mercy at least once a week. We are in a good position to sacrifice regular thank offerings to the Lord and to give of our time and efforts for this mercy. God even puts it into our hearts to be content with what we have so that we don't complain about the costs of following Jesus.

Most years are good years. But even when the Lord sends us floating away in our troubles, let's be like Noah: ready to obey, ready to sacrifice, ready to return thanks to our merciful God. Then, even when it's a very bad year, it'll still be a very good year.