

Title: “Down River”

Chris Ryan

Genesis 9:8-17

7/25/2021

Service Readings: Gen 9:8-17; Eph. 3:14-21; Mark 6:45-56

Summary: The historic account of Noah is connected to the work of Christ and to our own Baptism. The river that once brought death has been mixed with the blood of Christ and now offers life everlasting.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

“But it’s just a cute children’s story about God’s love and rainbows,” she said. The man stood there, trying to process what he had just heard. He could understand where she was coming from. After all, it was a historic account that was hardly ever discussed outside of the children’s Sunday School program. His mind raced backwards in time, searching for a time when anything of substance was ever discussed about it, but all he could recall were Veggie Tale songs about Noah, picture books, and brightly painted rainbows. And so, if Noah was confined to the ears of little children, it was no surprise that the richness of the account had long been watered down until it became little more than a fairy tale about God’s love and God’s rainbows.

Before he could verbally respond to that statement she added, “I don’t mean that the story is fictitious. I’m just saying that there is a reason we teach it to our children and not our adults. It’s like God had one of those bad days we all have had and then promised never to do it again.”

The man stood silent, contemplating how he might respond to her. She was a lifelong Christian, attended the church’s Bible studies regularly, and even taught this exact story to the third-grade students every year. Her failure of understanding was a reflection on her church, *his* church, and not on her. How could he expect her to see Noah and the flood in the context of the larger, master story if it was never explained to her? How could he expect her to understand that not only did this very real event have meaning as it unfolded in real time but that it also pointed to a future event – to Jesus and his work on the cross? It was in that moment that he knew what he must do. He invited her on a field trip, one that would help her understand.

And so, that weekend, the two of them met at the church and together drove an hour until they reached the top of the Hoover Dam. As they both looked out across the ravine at this massive structure, he reminded her of some stats that she undoubtedly already knew. “This structure,” he began, “holds back about 9 trillion gallons of water. If it broke, it would flood an area larger than New Jersey in over a foot of water. That dam is the only thing holding back that water; it is the only thing restraining a massive flood.”

He continued. “On a microscopic scale, let’s pretend that the dam is God’s hand and he’s holding back the water from covering the earth. And let’s pretend that with his other hand he is reaching out to Noah and his family, offering them safety and salvation in the form of a wooden boat, a

wooden boat that they would have to build for themselves, but a boat that would save them from death and destruction.

“OK, so once the ark was completed and the animals stored, picture God removing his hand from the water and allowing it to flow freely and cover the earth. What must it have looked like for everyone? Just think how terrifying it would be if we were just talking about *this* dam and *those* people who lived downstream from it. How much more terrifying must the flood have been on such a massive scale!”

She interjected, the pace of her voice quick with enthusiasm, “Oh my! I never really pictured it in my mind. No wonder we skip over these details with the kids!”

He laughed quietly at her comment, picturing the chaos that would surely ensue in his office once the parents discovered that these horrific details had been described to their precious little children. “Yes. Exactly. And let’s keep it that way! The children don’t need the nightmares, and neither do I!” She chuckled at that.

“Anyway,” he said, almost in a whisper. “Picture, now the hand of God returning and, once again, holding back the water. What would you see behind his hand?” “Well, we would see water beginning to fill the reservoir once again,” she answered, and then almost immediately added “and we might even think of that that as God’s wrath. Building once again because the flood didn’t and couldn’t permanently satisfy it. Just like the Old Testament sacrifices.

“Exactly! It would take something much more than water to restore what mankind had destroyed. But God knew that another flood would not be the answer, either and so he made a promise to Noah that is recorded in Genesis:”

⁹“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

So, God promises not to move his hand but he also knows that he needs to provide a permanent solution for the corruption caused by mankind. Ok, so set that aside for a moment and look the opposite way; look downstream. What do you see?”

“Well, I see that the water is still flooding the land. God stopped *additional* water from descending upon the land, but the water that already flowed is still there, still flowing.”

“Right, again. The story isn’t over just because the breach has been stopped. The river that flowed from the mouth of that reservoir still continues to flow and still continues to bring death and destruction to everything in its path. So, what God in his wisdom decides to do is this: instead of *stopping* it, instead of building a new dam downstream to stop the flow that he released before, he *instead* turns it into a means of salvation.”

He could see the look of confusion on her face and so he decided to explain what he meant. “OK, so picture the downstream river flowing through the valley of time. Year after year it flows and destroys all that is in its way. Now picture Jesus. He enters the earth and brings with him not a dam,

not a way to *stop* the flow of water, but a way of *using* the water for God's glory. On the cross he willingly receives the full wrath of God - not just the wrath that was poured out during Noah's flood but the wrath that God has been holding back. He receives it *all*. The judgment for every sin is placed upon his shoulders. And as he hangs upon that cross, receiving God's wrath, his blood, the blood that pours from his body mixes, figuratively of course, with the flood water from Noah's time that runs through time and becomes not a source of death any longer but a source for life! The covenant that God made with Noah has been superseded by the new covenant that Jesus made during the last supper when he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

And so, the water, that judgement that flooded the earth during the time of Noah continues to flow through time, even today, but it now flows with the blood of Christ. And it is this water and *his blood* that we are baptized in. This river no longer brings destruction of the flesh but now it brings everlasting life for the body and the soul. And so, you can see how it is so much more than just a child's story and it is so much more than just a single, isolated historic incident."

She remained silent. Trying to take it all in, trying to comprehend the magnitude of what he just told her. The water that flowed for Noah flows for us but it is now mixed with the blood of Christ and offers salvation instead of destruction. "And the boat," she exclaimed, unable to keep her thoughts to herself. "The wood that saved Noah is like the wood from Jesus' cross that saves us! Wow, this makes so much sense. I wonder why I never saw Noah's experiences as part of God's complete story. Now I want to know how the rest of the Old Testament fits in and points to Christ. What about Moses?"

"Well," he said, "we'll have to take a drive into the desert for that one. Let's do that another time. For now, let's drive back. We can spend the time in contemplation about what all of this means for us and our own salvation. How does that sound?" She agreed, still overwhelmed with thoughts about how God's flood and his covenant pointed so directly to Jesus and even *through Jesus* to her. She welcomed the time she could spend in quiet meditation thanking God for all he had done for his creation, and specifically for her.

I would like to close with the Epistle passage from today. Please pray with me.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family^u in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.