Jesus is with you always

*For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

 Matthew 5:20

This statement by Jesus would have shaken up those who heard it. The religious leaders, in general, made a great show of righteousness. All they did was calculated to give the appearance that they were holy and far above the common people in their relationship with God. And the people believed this; they didn’t know any better.

The common people had no hope of attaining to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees; with that in mind, Jesus just told them that they had no hope of entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

For those who stuck with Jesus, they would learn that God does not look at the outside actions of people, but instead looks at the heart. We must be careful with this, because the Bible tells us that the heart of mankind is only evil. By God looking at the heart, it means that He is looking at the motive. Why is a holy action being taken?

The religious leaders had a bad motive; they wanted honor and recognition from other men. God was not part of their concern. Those who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven will have the motive of wanting to please God by their actions; it will not be to receive honor from men.

Unfortunately for us, because of our evil hearts, our motives will never be pure. Fortunately for us, as Christians, we have the righteousness of Christ bestowed upon us. His righteousness is perfect and acceptable to God. This righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees; so, by the righteousness of Christ, we will be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Christ’s love

John

 7-3-22

Genesis 7:10-24

The flood comes upon the earth. In a horrible worldwide calamity, water was unrelenting in covering the earth. At one time, a mist used to arise to water the land. Now, “*the fountains of the great deep burst open.*” The wording indicates a violent catastrophic release of water from the underground stores. Picture geysers erupting without stopping or easing their flow; spewing rocks and dirt into the air as they open up.

It is likely that the people had never seen rain before. Now water pours from the sky in a torrential downpour that matches the worst that any of us have ever experienced. And it wouldn’t stop. Flash flooding would have occurred quickly and everywhere. Homes and buildings would have been crushed and swept away; along with people and animals. Those who made it to higher ground would have only prolonged the inevitable as the water eventually covered the entire earth. And their short existence would have been miserable in the constant wetness of the storm.

So often we think of the drawings for children of a smiling Noah on his ark with all the animals; and that’s alright. For children, we want to focus on how God saves his people and cares for them. We want to understand that also. But, the mature Christian needs to recognize and understand that this account is about judgement; it is about God’s wrath. His wrath is real and terrible and He will not hold it back forever.

As we have read, the human-race turned farther and farther away from God. Finally, God gave 120 more years for people to repent, during which time, Noah built the ark. You can imagine that a man building a giant ark in the middle of the desert would attract a lot of attention and since it took place over a 120-year time span, the news of it would have spread everywhere. The attention would have given Noah plenty of opportunity to spread the word of the coming destruction. And 2 Peter 2:5 tells us that Noah was “*a preacher of righteousness*”.

The people of the earth were without excuse. They were warned about what was coming. They had the visual display of what God was providing as the means of escaping His wrath. They heard the word that Noah preached: that God requires righteousness and He will punish those who don’t turn to Him.

How similar things are today. The ark available to us is Jesus Christ. It is only by Him that we can be saved from the wrath that is coming. The visual offered to the world is the cross. Upon it, our Saviour atoned for our sins if we will only look to Him for forgiveness and salvation. There are preachers of righteousness throughout the world, telling people of what is coming and of the only safe place to be.

From the creation of Adam to the flood was 1,656 years. I can’t help but to compare that number to how long it’s been since Jesus came to the earth. We’ve lasted a while longer than the ancients did. But how much worse does it have to get? By the common grace God gives to all mankind, people aren’t as evil as they are capable of. But, in Romans 1, Paul tells us that those who insist on reviling God will have common grace removed and be given over to a reprobate mind.

Paul lists many evils that they will participate in, including murder, strife, deceit, slander, arrogance, and disobedience to parents. Then in Romans 2:2 it reads, “*And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.*” It came in Noah’s time; it is coming again. Be ready. Even if Christ doesn’t return in our life time, we still need to be ready for when we stand before Him.

In the last week before the flood, Noah gathered his family and the animals God provided and they all moved into the ark. God Himself closed up the door behind them.

It is interesting to note, that of the eight people on the ark, only Noah is recorded as being righteous. We don’t know if the wives came from the line of Seth, the line of Cain, or some other line of Adam and Eve. The continuing account after the flood lets us know that Ham had some issues. The other two sons are recorded performing a righteous act, but we really don’t know about them. What we can say is that Noah’s family was saved on account of him.

We will see this elsewhere in the story of Lot. He was the only one in the valley of Sodom who was found to be righteous and he was saved from its destruction. But also, his wife and daughters were spared the devastation on his account, even though they ultimately proved themselves unrighteous.

We must never underestimate the effects that being righteous can have on our family and those around us. This is especially true of a husband and father. In his leadership role in a family, his righteousness can have a great effect for good on the lives of his wife and children. It doesn’t guarantee their salvation, but it certainly increases the odds dramatically. While our righteousness comes from Christ, we are called to actively live righteous lives. These are the lives God will use to bring others into His Kingdom and glorify Himself.

Let’s make sure we understand that the flood was a worldwide event. I bring this up because the account is so beyond our comprehension, that many try to explain it as a local event. They try to say that there was a flood, but that it only covered a limited area; it was a large area, but not the whole earth.

There are several problems with a limited flood view. First off, it is plainly contrary to what the Bible tells us. The wording is very clear; the word “all” is used many times throughout the account: “*all the high mountains everywhere*” were covered, “*all flesh that moved on the earth perished*”, “*all mankind*”. We are specifically told in verse 23, that the only living flesh left were those who were in the ark.

Also, if the flood didn’t cover the whole earth, it would have been much easier for Noah and his family to simply relocate. They had plenty of time, a hundred and twenty years, to move to another place that would have been unaffected by a limited flood.

We all know that in chapter 8, God says that He will not do this again; He will not destroy the earth with water again. If He is talking in terms of a limited flood, then God has not kept His word. We all know that the earth experiences local flooding frequently; sometimes devastating floods that destroy much property and take many lives. God always keeps His word, so He must have been talking about a flood that covers the whole earth.

It would take a huge amount of water to cover the earth; but we know from Genesis 1:2 that there is enough. *The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.* On day two of creation the LORD separated the waters: some He left on the earth and under the earth, and some He placed above the earth. That water didn’t disappear and God brought it all back to accomplish His will.

Let me give one more reason against the limited flood theory: It softens God’s judgement; it downplays His wrath. We have trouble accepting that we serve a God who would wipeout the entire population of the earth; both man and animals. We have trouble fitting that with our knowledge that God is love and that He is merciful. But we mustn’t let our emotions and our own desires get in the way of reality.

God is absolutely holy; He is, by His very nature, set completely apart from sin. He is absolutely just; He cannot let sin go unpunished. To do so would be to change who He is and He is unchanging God. That God is loving and merciful is undeniable; that is the only reason that any of us are still here; that is the only reason He sent Jesus Christ as the means of our salvation.

God sent a flood upon the earth that wiped out all flesh in which was the breath of life, except for those who were on the ark He provided. In the same way, He will send those to hell who do not accept the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. We can be grateful that God is just and unchanging, that is our assurance that He will save us. We simply have to go about it His way.

Verses 21 through 23 make it abundantly clear that all living flesh that was not on the ark perished. The accounts that are in the Old Testament are there for our instruction. Here is the picture that God will judge evil, and that the only means of salvation is by that which He provides.

We sometimes think of the flood as God cleansing the world of sin; but that is not what happened. The ark contained eight people who were still sinners. Noah was righteous in the eyes of God by faith, and he was blameless in the eyes of men; but he still had a sin nature. It is easy to look at our world today and see that sin was not removed from the earth by the flood.

Noah was saved by faith. He was saved from the flood because he had faith in God and believed Him. Because he believed God, Noah built the ark even though it seemed to be a ridiculous thing to be doing. Noah’s salvation from the flood is a picture of the spiritual salvation he also received. He received that salvation also because of his faith in God. As we’ve mentioned before, the Old Testament saints were eligible for salvation because of their faith in God. Their salvation was ultimately brought about by the work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus’ work of substitutionary atonement was retroactive back to them.

In Luke 14, Jesus lets the people know that they need to count the cost of following Him. Actually becoming saved is relatively easy: God calls you; the Holy Spirit gives you enough understanding and enough faith to accept Christ; and all you have to do is say “yes”. But the cost of saying “yes” is extremely high, and your willingness to pay that cost is the evidence of whether you truly accepted the gift of salvation.

Consider the earthly salvation of Noah. Imagine the difficulties of getting all the wood necessary to build the hull of that massive ship, all three decks and roof, and all the stalls and rooms. They had no chainsaws or power tools to cut and shape the wood; or railcars to haul all this stuff. The animals all came to him by command from God but enough food for everything for a year didn’t come by itself; he had to obtain it without the help of postal service or Amazon. He spent 120 years in the desert heat working and overseeing everything.

And let’s not forget that while all this was going on he was a preacher of righteousness. This is what every Christian is called to; we are to work with our hands, in other words, earn an honest living. At the same time, each of us has the great commission: to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You can also imagine the ridicule Noah endured. Everything from open hostility to merciless teasing to those who simply shook their heads believing that he was crazy. Jesus promised these same things to all of us who follow Him. It is part of the cost of being a Christian; don’t be surprised by it.

Then consider what Noah and his family went through while actually being saved; while actually being on the ark. There was a lot of space in the ark, but I’ll bet that by the end of the year and ten days they spent on board, it wasn’t nearly enough space. Surly at times they got on each other’s nerves, yet they had to maintain unity in order to perform the work God had laid out for them. I picture them much like a church family. We are close; both physically in church service on Sunday and we are spiritually connected through Christ. We are fallen human-beings who will get on each other’s nerves sometimes. But the unity of this church body is imperative to performing the work Jesus has for us to do.

The time spent on the ark probably had some moments of levity and peacefulness, but the cost was high: there was a lot of work and it wasn’t always pleasant. The time we spend here in this life as Christians contains some times of joy and peace; but much time is spent paying the cost of being a follower of Jesus. We are blessed to know that the cost will be worth it. What we receive in eternity will be far and above the price we pay now.

Prayer

Lord God, Your wrath is real and terrifying; Your word and history tells us so. Give us an appreciation of that wrath so that we will be in proper fear of You and subject ourselves to Your holy desires. Give us an understanding of Your holiness and justice so that we are not tempted to disregard Your hatred of evil. At the same time, increase our love for You so that our simple desire is to be pleasing to You.

Jesus, You know the cost of following You is high; so we ask for a glimpse of eternity to understand that the cost is worth it. We ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to persevere, because we are weak and frail, and we need divine help to make the payment of our very lives.

Help us also, Lord, to do the work You have for us. Give us the strength and discipline to do good physical work to provide for ourselves and our families. Give us the spiritual strength and courage to spread Your Gospel of salvation to all the nations. May we never take for granted the cost Jesus paid on our behalf; may we never shrink from our calling.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen