

**Foundations: In the Beginning... A Fresh Start
Genesis 6:9-22 (June 11, 2017--Bible School)**

Last Sunday, we talked about "Our Failures." Adam and Eve were the first to sin; but, friends, we have this same "freedom DNA" inside of us. We would likely have done the same as them.

All of us, just like that first couple, make mistakes that affect not only our lives, but also the lives of others. When we do, we might as well own up to them: God already knows about all our faults and failures anyway!

In the first chapter of Genesis, God brings order out of chaos; but in Genesis three, human beings like us start breaking God's laws. Sin begins pushing the world back toward that original chaos.

Then, as we continue to make our way through Genesis, we find that the situation doesn't improve. Genesis 4 introduces us to Cain and Abel, the very first siblings; and by the middle of the chapter, one brother, Cain, has killed his brother, Abel.

The rest of chapters 4 and 5 tells us about the descendants of the first family, including Methuselah, Noah's grandfather, who lived to be 969 years old, the Bible says. Then he died—how?

Anybody know how Methuselah died? Old age, maybe? At age 969, you have to at least consider that as a possibility! Interesting thing, though, some students of Scripture have suggested he drowned—in the Great Flood!

Genesis doesn't spell this out. It leaves it to us to do the math. In Genesis 7, we're told that Noah is 600 years old when the flood comes. That seems to be the same year Methuselah turned 969! Fascinating—but I'll leave it to you to figure this out, maybe during Sunday School this morning!

Our focus today is on Genesis chapter 6, where God has "had enough;" so the Almighty decides it's time for "A Fresh Start." Let's pick up the story with verse 9 (Gen. 6:9-22):

9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and

was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. 16 Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 8 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.

17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. 19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." 22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

And as everybody raised in Sunday School can tell you, the story continues with Noah loading the ark; and then the Bible says, "for forty days, the flood kept coming." Then, after several months, the ark comes to rest in the Ararat Mountains.

Noah sends out a raven, then a dove. After that, he sends another dove that comes back with an olive branch—remember—a sign of hope. Finally, he sends out a dove one more time; and this time, the dove doesn't return. He's found a new place to live—a dry place, where he can make a fresh start too.

Soon Noah, his family, and all the animals are able to leave the ark... and life on earth starts over. We may have lots of questions about this—how could we not?—but this was God's way of bringing about this new beginning.

We often quote these words from Romans 8:28—"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." We turn to this

verse in times of trouble. It reminds us that God is often at work even in the most disastrous of circumstances.

This is the message we hear in the story of the great flood. God works through our darkest experiences to make our lives and our world better—even when, in extreme circumstances, this involves having to start over.

After the storm, if you recall, there's a rainbow. It's a reminder of God's presence with us and His promises to us. As terrible and tragic as it was, the message of God's grace is still here: again, God is giving to His creation "A FRESH START."

Of course, this takes nothing away from the fact that this was a tragic event. It turned out horribly for the vast majority of the people on the planet.

From time to time, hurricanes and other deadly storms strike. In many cases, however, these storms would have been so much worse—much deadlier--had people not been warned in advance to evacuate.

But think about this: the Bible says that Noah warned people for 120 years that a flood was coming. He told them to "evacuate" their evil ways, to repent of their sin and return to God; but they mocked him. They refused to heed his warnings!

When the flood finally came, there was no place to go. The time for evacuation had passed. And the result was total death and destruction for everyone except those few people who believed, and prepared, and got on board the ark with Noah.

Granted, there's nothing in our lives and hopefully there'll never be anything in our world that begins to compare with this catastrophe. But we all face tough times, we all go through troubled situations—so what can you and I learn from this sad story about Noah and the flood that might be helpful to us today?

1. The first thing I would suggest is this: A FRESH START REQUIRES A CONNECTION WITH GOD. That's clearly the message in Romans, and it's also here in Genesis. The world was broken because people had turned their backs on God.

Verse 5 says: **“The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”**

Now, contrast that with what we're told about Noah in verse 9: **“Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”** “Walking with God” is how the Bible describes the life of faith.

To walk with God is to pray and worship and practice God's presence in our lives. It's dependent on our decision to “stay connected” with God. Our presence here this morning says we desire to keep this connection—to nourish it; make it stronger.

Before the flood, Noah saw his relationship with God as a privilege. After the flood, though, he understood the absolute necessity of it. The question for us is “how much do we value our walk with God? What importance do we assign it?”

So often, when life is good and there're no clouds in sight, we don't feel the need to stay in touch with God. We may get lazy in our devotional life, our church life, our giving and serving. God just isn't one of our “felt needs,” as they say, when there're no storm clouds on the horizon.

But then something happens to rock our boat. It may be as common as an important test at school that we know we haven't studied for—so we start praying! (As they say: “as long as teachers give tests, there will always be prayer in schools!”)

Or we hear rumors that the company we work for is about to be sold—so we start praying. Or a family member gets a life-threatening diagnosis or gets deployed to a war zone, a friend is in a serious accident, or for some other reason, the concerns we have, the pressures on our lives become overwhelming—so we (what?) start praying.

Do you remember how it was after 9/11? The media reported that more people were showing up in church. It didn't last, but it did make an impact for a while.

If God had first sent a flood with water up to just, say, people's necks, I wonder if a lot of those who perished would have

changed their ways—but maybe God knew that wouldn't have lasted long either.

The point is Noah, unlike others, stayed connected with God. He was ready for God to use him when the crisis came. That's not the time to START praying, though, or to start worshipping and serving God—it's a bit late when you're already in the midst of a full-blown crisis!

The time to love and serve and connect with God is NOW, before the crisis. If we wait till the floods come, we may be in over our heads! Now is the time to get ready. Now is the time to connect with God!

2. Here's a second observation from Noah's story: A FRESH START IS SUPPORTED BY A CONNECTION WITH PEOPLE.

Troubled times have a way of revealing who cares about you—whose love is real. Noah discovered who his friends were—or mainly who they weren't--as he was building the ark. Most folks were nowhere to be found.

Proverbs says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." My little sister would agree with that—I was so hard on her growing up, she was sure I existed just to bring adversity into her life.

But that's not what the verse means. A friend and brother will support you no matter what you go through. They'll be there in adversity. They'll still be around when the storms arrive.

The distinguishing mark of being connected with another human being is love. Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (I Cor. 13:7-8)

It can be hard to tell who really cares about you—until you go through adversity. It's then that real friends prove themselves.

When the water's rising, watch to see who gets in the boat with you—or invites you to get in with them. That's when you discover where the deep, strong bonds are—with friends, or family, or whomever—it's those "hard times" that provide the truest test of genuine love.

3. Let's end with this: A FRESH START INVOLVES A CONNECTION WITH GOD'S PLAN. If the account of the great flood tells us anything, it's that God is in control, and we are answerable to Him for how we live.

There's a simple, but revealing, story about twin sisters who had an alcoholic mother. Sadly, one of the twins had also become an alcoholic. The other sister, though, had chosen to abstain completely from all alcoholic beverages.

When the first sister was asked to explain why she had become an alcoholic, she said, "Well, my mother was an alcoholic, so what can you expect?"

The other sister was asked a similar question--why she had chosen to abstain from alcohol. She replied, "Well, my mother was an alcoholic, so what can you expect?"

Friends, we're not simply victims of heredity and environment. We make choices—decisions that affect our lives and our happiness. Sometimes we're tempted, or misguided, or we just get careless, and we make bad choices.

Never forget that most people in Germany thought Hitler was right when World War II began—including the majority of those who called themselves Christians.

I recently heard a man say that he no longer calls himself a Christian. "Too many people associate that with a political party today," he said. Instead, I say I'm a "follower of Jesus." Sadly, I completely understood what he meant.

Almost everybody in Noah's day thought they were right and he was wrong—till the flood came. What we must understand is that God has a plan. It includes standards of right and wrong, even higher standards of justice, mercy, and love, to which you and I are accountable no matter what we think. Thumbing our noses at God will always bring a flood of problems.

The Great Flood destroyed any doubts about God's judgment on sin; and Noah's life and witness answered all questions about the merits of faithfulness. God is true to His word, and His word teaches that how we choose to live our lives matters.

So does this answer every question we have about good and evil and why things happen to people the way they do? No, it doesn't.

Many people in Jesus' day believed that every difficulty in life was the direct result of God's judgment—but Jesus refuted that notion. Bad things happen to people who don't deserve them, and we're left wondering why.

There are other times, however, when tragedy strikes as a direct result of sin. Think how it must have been for Noah and the handful of others on the ark when they heard the screams of those who were sinking beneath the water.

How sad it is for us to see people we care about making bad choices, running with the wrong crowd, getting caught up in some sin that will eventually drag them down and perhaps end their lives. God is patient; but sin does have consequences.

Sometimes we may be tempted to think the price of faithfulness is too high, that it requires too much. Maybe we're missing out on something better by staying faithful to God.

But Noah's experience, along with that of so many others, tells us otherwise. It tells us that sin is serious—deadly serious. God made this point all through the book of Genesis—not just here with Noah and the flood.

Finally, when the time was right, God sent this same message through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the last chance we have to get the message that sin will be judged--that it must be atoned for—that death is its price, and it will be paid by someone!

The Gospel is that sin's price HAS been paid—for all those who connect with Christ Jesus by faith and receive Him as Savior and Lord.

Sin is forgiven, death is defeated, life is transformed, and eternity is gained. More important than anything else in your life is whether you've made this connection with Christ! If you haven't, will you make the connection now?