

# Noah Pt 3: Confidence in God

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thanks, Ewan. Well, good morning. My name's Ali. If I've not had a chance to meet you, it's really good to see you. Thank you for being with us this morning. We're in part three, the final part of our Noah trilogy this morning. We've been making our way, as Ewan said, through the opening and incredibly significant first 12 chapters of the book of Genesis, the very start of the Bible that helps us make sense of the world that we live in, that explains why things are as we experience them around us, and which most importantly points us to the God who is behind it all, what he is like, what he has done, what he will continue to do. And this flood event that we've been looking at makes up a pretty significant proportion of these opening 12 chapters. It's three or four chapters of that. It's a key part of this opening section of Genesis. We said a couple of weeks ago, it's not just here as a kind of a kid's story with the animals going in two by two. We've been trying to kind of get that out of our minds.

We've seen it. It's serious stuff, that it's a story about God's judgment on wickedness. We saw that a couple of weeks ago and how actually that is something that we need in order to get back to the perfection of the very beginning of the Bible, but back to the perfection that we all long for.

It's an event which is all about a world remade. We saw that with James last week and how through God there is salvation, there is the opportunity for us to have a place in that. And really now as we draw this to a close, it's all about, well, what next? What happens next? That's what we're up to. God has brought the flood to an end. Noah has his feet on dry land again. It's this recreation. It's a fresh start.

And so what next? What's changed? What can we expect? What kind of hope can we have as we stand after this flood? How can we live well in this world that God has been active in and continues to be active in? And that's what we're going to see this morning. And really the big idea, I hope that we're going to go away with the end of our service is that we can have confidence as we live in the world. We can have a confidence that so many people in our world are lacking as we seem to be kind of engulfed by fear and anxiety. But we'll see that actually the Bible gives a reason for confidence and an appropriate confidence. A confidence which is in the right place. It's good to be confident, but misplaced confidence can be deadly. This passage is going to help us get our confidence, our security from the only place, the only person, which is God himself, who we can truly rely on. And so this, I think, is a great passage if we're worried, if we're unsure about our world, our existence, the way things are going. If we're asking that question, what next?

If that resonates with you, I think these are verses to point us to God with those questions and to find confidence, security in him that we can't find anywhere else. So let's get stuck in.

[ 3 : 2 4 ] Two halves of this passage that we're going to look at this morning. The first is this, God's commitment to a new start. And what we see here is that we can have real confidence in God's attitude, his posture toward humanity, toward his creation following on after the flood.

God's commitment to a new start. Two particular areas to humanity first and then to the world itself after that. Let's begin with humanity. We see that God remains committed to humanity.

One of the noticeable things about this passage is how God restates to Noah and his family, almost word for word, so much of what he had said to Adam and Eve back in the garden, back in Genesis 1 and 2. We read there, Genesis chapter 1, 28, as soon as God had created the first male and female. It says, and God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. There's Genesis chapter 1. Now have a look at the opening verse of Genesis chapter 9, chapter 9 verse 1, and it will sound very familiar. And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It's that same message, isn't it? God restates that purpose.

God has not given up on humanity. They still have this incredibly valuable role to play, this purpose, this dignity. Still, God wants humanity to fill his creation. And God also re-emphasizes that rule, that authority that humanity is to have. He tells them that they're put above the other animals.

Into your hands they are delivered, God says, verse 2. It's that creation order of God and then humanity and then the animal kingdom that continues. And all of that is ultimately because what was true at the beginning, what is emphasized in Genesis 1, again, at the creation of humanity, remains true and is re-emphasized, reinforced here in chapter 9, that last bit of verse 6 there, for God made man in his own image. And that key truth about humanity, made in the image of God, that has not changed. Actually, you might have noticed as you had read that or as you look at it in your Bibles. It's actually given there that in the context of the punishment for murder, it says, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. That's a big topic there that we don't have time to fully get into, I don't think. And most commentators would agree that it's not a kind of an eternal prescription of capital punishment. What it is, is a statement on just how precious human life is. It's saying there is no substitute for that, it says, that humanity alone is made in the image of God. And so the point is, God is committed to this new start that he has brought about and to humanity's incredibly privileged position within it. In some ways, for this part of our service, we could have printed out that second section we had in this Genesis series, that would have saved me a lot of time this week, where we said about introducing humanity, we saw the dignity, the design, the dominion of humanity as God created male and female in his image.

[ 7 : 14 ] That is restated here as the world is restarted. Why is it restated? Well, I think it's done here, as we said, to give us confidence as we live in God's creation. God is not naive about humanity.

By this point in the Bible, we've already seen some of the worst of humanity. And yet still, God gives this honour and privilege to his people. And that is true for humanity as a whole.

But perhaps actually, we kind of feel that or we grasp that or we understand it a little bit more when we grasp it on a personal level as well. Because our story for each one of us, everyone here really maps onto this story of humanity that we see in Genesis. It's not just humanity as a whole, in a kind of vague or general way that is flawed, that has gone away from God. It's each one of us.

In very definite and specific ways. And yet, as we've seen in the gospel through Jesus, we are given this new start. And it is vital that we know and that we remember that God is committed to us in that. God still has a purpose for us. God still values us, each one as individuals, whatever our background, wherever we've come from, whatever we've done.

As humans, all of us in various ways, I'm sure, we're fickle, aren't we? We are people who change our minds, change our opinions. I kind of keep listening to music that I used to like. And it turns out it's rubbish. You know, it hurts my ears. And I'm perhaps just getting old. You know, we move on. You'll have clothes in your wardrobe that were great when you got them and you wouldn't be seen dead in them now. You look back at old photos and you just think, what on earth was I thinking?

[ 9 : 08 ] What was I doing? Why did I make that decision? This passage is showing us that God is not like that. And one of the points of this passage is that God doesn't say, oh yeah, you know, I used to be quite into humanity. Oh, I thought they were great. I thought that was a really good idea when I first made it. But actually, kind of things went a bit pear-shaped. It's been a bit of a hassle and I've kind of moved on. I'm not really interested in people anymore. I'm not going to make that mistake again. No, this passage is here to show us that God remains committed to humanity. And that God remains committed to you, even though we've all had times when we have failed in our commitment to him.

And really, that makes all the difference. That is what transforms life, that we are not a people who are all here trying to make it up to God, that are trying to get back into his good books.

We're a people that God is for. We're a people that God is committed to. And if we've put our trust in Jesus, we're a people still that God sends forward to do the work he set out for us, to be his representatives in his world, in our communities, in our families, with the people that we know.

And make sure we hear this this morning, because this is an incredible truth, which is that God is not ashamed of us. God is not embarrassed of us. Rather, God is for us and committed to us. He's shown us that in Christ. And so we can go forward with confidence in light of that. Again, as we'll see a number of times this morning, confident not in ourselves. That would be a misplaced confidence.

But confidence in God and his commitment to us. And so God remains committed to humanity. The other thing then that is emphasized in this first half here is that God remains committed to his world as well. God remains committed to creation as a whole. We can pick this up in verse 8 and onwards. Feel free to follow along as I read this section. It says this, Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and 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, I 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.

[ 11 : 54 ] And God said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you. For all future generations, I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Incredible passage there, where God makes this covenant.

That's the first time in the Bible that that key word covenant is used. God makes promises that he will not flood the earth again. That's the content of this covenant. It's been called a covenant of preservation. And God gives the rainbow in the clouds. That's the sign of this covenant.

And notice, who is this covenant with? Perhaps have a look specifically at the end of verse 13. He says, It shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And so yes, God is committed to humanity as the pinnacle of his creation. And yet that's not the full extent of his commitment. God is committed in a covenantal, in a preserving way to the earth, to the whole of his creation.

Now we can often slide if we're not careful. Or perhaps this is your impression of Christianity as a purely spiritual thing. That God is about our relationship with him. And really that everything else is kind of irrelevant. But I think looking through these early chapters of Genesis, as we've been doing, and perhaps more here than anywhere else, shows us that God's horizons are so much wider than that. That God cares for his creation as a whole. That is what God is preserving in the ark. As C.S. Lewis puts it, God likes matter. He invented it. God is not disinterested in the world as a whole. And actually we see that as we go on through the Bible. That's the end point of the Bible. That's the destination of history. Not humanity kind of escaping in some spiritual way from the earth that God created. But actually God perfectly renewing his physical creation for us.

That's an incredible thing. An incredible thing that we need to remember about God. I think in a lot of ways for myself and I'm sure for many of us here as well, that's a challenge for us as God's people.

[ 14 : 28 ] That actually we too should have this same concern for the world around us. Christians of all people have a better motivation for creation care, for looking after our world, because it's God who created it. And he's given us that responsibility in that. That is obviously a kind of a huge conversation, a huge discussion at the moment, environmental issues. And Christian voices should be involved in that. They should have wisdom to speak into that. We should engage in that and not turn a blind eye there. There's a challenge I think to us. But actually I think more in line with the thrust of this chapter as well as that challenge to us. There is also an incredible comfort in these verses as well.

Remember this is a passage to give us, I think, a rightly placed confidence because we see here that actually God has made a promise about his creation and his concern for it. And there's that reminder of that each time we see that the rainbow in the sky, that God is in control of his universe and is committed to his creation. And that challenge, but also that overwhelming comfort.

And those things aren't opposites. Throughout the Bible, God's promises kind of stir us into action rather than being passive. But they do mean that we're able to approach things and be active from a place of certainty and encouragement rather than hopelessness and despair. There's the comfort and the confidence that God alone provides. And again, this is something that makes a real difference in life. I came across some statistics this week and as always these things can be, have a bit of an agenda or an angle behind them possibly, but these were shared by the Natural History Museum. It said this, that over 70% of young people feel hopeless in the face of climate crisis.

And as many as 56% believe humanity is doomed. That's a terrifying statistic to hear, isn't it? If most young people are being brought up feeling hopeless and doomed, that is not a good situation.

And it was fascinating to kind of read on and really see the advice given in response to those numbers was to encourage people to do more about the environment. It basically said, you know, you're right to feel like that, so get busy. Again, that's pretty grim, isn't it?

[ 17 : 15 ] If young people especially are being told it's really bad and you need to sort it out. And as we said, Christians should be concerned, informed, involved in the care of God's creation.

But actually without kind of sounding defeatist, you know, when it comes to the global energy policy or all these things, I have very little influence on that. I would guess most people in this room are in the same boat. If my hope is, if my confidence is based on kind of, you know, get up and get active, then actually I've got very little hope, very little grounds for confidence at all.

But again, here's where the Bible is offering a better story that we live every one of our days on a planet created by God that he is committed to, which he has made promises about.

And that alone is where our hope and confidence is found. That alone is what is able to bear the weight of our hope and our confidence. The Bible's description of a God committed to his people and to his world is perhaps needed now more than ever before.

And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian or still kind of asking questions or wondering what it's all about, if the state of the world worries you, and of course that can be bigger than simply environmental things. We've remembered and we've prayed about war and violence already this morning. But if you worry about the world that you live in, then the Bible invites us to come to God and to find the hope he offers through his commitment and promises and covenant that he's made with his creation, that he will sustain, that he will protect, that he will put things right.

[ 19 : 09 ] And that's the same for those of us who are Christians too, that we should be realistic, informed about our world. We've seen how Genesis time and time and time again makes sense of the brokenness of the world we live in. But we need to keep on remembering above and beyond that, that God is in control and that God is committed to his world. I think particularly if we've got children or for the younger guys in the service with us this morning, young guys, you'll hear this kind of message of doom and gloom far more than us older folk will do. And those statistics show that, don't they? 70% feeling hopeless about the world. And yet we want our young people to know what's going on and to engage with that. But it is so important that over and above that, really, that the lenses through which they're able to process that information is hearing again and again and again the certain hope that God offers because of promises he's made and his commitment to his world.

Now remember, this is a passage to encourage us when we ask that question, well, what next? We're called to look to God and find our hope in him as the one who is committed to this new start that he's brought about, committed to his people, committed to his world. So that's the first kind of section, really the first two thirds of what we're looking at this morning, God's commitment to a new start. But the last third of our passage and the last third of our time we see from verse 18 onwards really is humanity's failure through an old problem. God's commitment to a new start, humanity's failure through an old problem. That although in so many ways things in Genesis chapter 9 are new, in so many ways we see actually they've not really changed at all. So righteous Noah who found favour with God, who built the ark, who saves humanity, what does he do? What is the first thing in this new world that he does? Well, he blows it, doesn't he? He makes wine, he drinks too much, he passes out naked in his tent. One of his sons, Ham, sees what's happening, he kind of exacerbates the problem by spreading the news and acting in a kind of deeply disrespectful way about it all.

We're now kind of firmly beyond where the kid's story finishes, aren't we? I've seen plenty of picture Bibles with arcs and animals and rainbows, and non-thankfully with naked Noah kind of passed out in a tent. I think we can agree that's a good editorial decision. But actually, this end of chapter 9 is a vital conclusion to the flood story, because again, it shows us the reality of the world that we live in. It shows us that actually, even in this new world, that is still the old problem, the same old problem of sin, even Noah and his offspring. Again, just like with Adam, humanity is off track right from the very beginning of this reset. That yes, it is a new world, but yes, it still has the same old problem. That problem underlined then in the final verse of chapter 9, all the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died. And that ultimate problem of death still looms over God's world. And of course, that is the world that we live in, isn't it? If we'd got to the end of the story, and it said, and they got out the ark, and everyone lived happily ever after, well, we would rightly kind of look around and say, well, that must be nonsense then, isn't it? Because it's not true. That's not what the world is like now. You know, we've said that this passage is here to encourage us, to give us confidence, but actually, how can it do that if the root cause of the problem hasn't been dealt with in these chapters? Well, we're reminded here that the answer can't be that it's in us. It can't be that, you know, we're all sorted now. But again, it pushes us back here to looking to God, to his commitment to his people, flawed as they are, and his world as imperfect as it is. That's the only place we can look for this confidence. And really, that leaves us with this question, and this is the last thing we're going to look at this morning, but really the foundation for the hope, the encouragement, the confidence this passage gives us. And here's this question, as we kind of tie up this Noah and the flood story. How is God able to be so deeply committed to his world now, as we've just been saying he is, when actually the very thing that caused him to judge the world, the sin of humanity, is still alive and kicking? How can the God who we've been saying through this story rightly judges the world now also be the same God who is committed to its ultimate eternal good? Now, the answer isn't that humanity is somehow fixed. It's not. We see that in those end verses of chapter 9. The answer isn't that God is naively thinking that everything's changed. He doesn't. Actually, the answer here in these verses, and it takes us right back to the start of our passage, the answer is that sacrifice has happened. Let me read the last three verses again of chapter 8.

It says, Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man. For the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Never again will I strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. James touched on this last week.

Noah's response to God's salvation, his sacrifice and worship. This is something that's looking back to what's God's already done. But it's also something that looks forward as well, isn't it? Look at verse 21 there.

[ 25 : 41 ] It says, And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man. For the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. God smells the sacrifice, fully aware of the ongoing state of mankind's heart. And he commits not to curse the ground again because of man. And again, we think, well, how can that offering change God's approach? How does that even make sense? How can whatever animals it was that Noah sacrificed on that altar make up for the evil intentions of the hearts of humanity? How can that work? And the only way that works, as is the case with all of the sacrifices and the offerings in the Old Testament, the only way that works and makes any sense at all is that it's here to point us toward Jesus. It's here to show that God knows that he himself will provide the ultimate, the only possibly appropriate sacrifice as Jesus suffers on the cross for the sins of the world, as Jesus takes the penalty for the sinful state of humanity and its sinful heart. It's been long kind of noted throughout the history of the church, and I don't think this is kind of pushing things too far, that the rainbow is kind of the perfect sign for this covenant that God makes. It's the coming together of the storm of God's judgment with the shining light of his mercy and the rainbow that results when those two things meet. And that is what happens at the cross.

The storm of God's judgment on wickedness comes, and yet in his mercy he takes that judgment upon himself as Jesus dies in our place.

And that is how God is able to make great promises to great sinners, because he has taken the penalty required for those who trust in Jesus. There is forgiveness. This passage is here to encourage us as we move forward. It shows God's commitment to his people and to his world, despite our waywardness.

That in a world marked by fear and anxiety and uncertainty, the Bible offers a deeper hope and confidence. And it leaves us remembering. It points us forward to know that that confidence can only be found in Jesus.

He is the perfect sacrifice that enables justice to be done and for us to live in real confidence of God's mercy to us now and forever.

[ 28 : 38 ] The story of Noah and the flood reminds us, and it finishes up reminding us, of humanity's and of our own weakness and failure, that in some ways nothing has changed.

But it points us to a God of both judgment and salvation, of justice and mercy, who through Jesus, through the cross, through the gospel, enables us to live with confidence in the world that he is committed to.

Let's pray together. Let's pray.