

Prayers

To God

Forgive us, Lord Jesus, the limitations of our humanity. We are so easily tempted to follow the example of those who speak the loudest, amongst those we know, when viewing television or film, or listening to music or literature. We do this knowing that we should be looking at those who live by the power of the Spirit instead of the world's rewards. Give us the grace to confess our failure to listen to You, and turn us around so we accept Your guidance. Bless us as we seek to do what is right, we pray; **AMEN**

For myself

Weekly theme: Pray for joy

Where there are difficulties within your life, pray that God will return the joy precisely to where it is needed. He alone can do this; it is not in our power to turn things around and we need His strength if we are to resolve these things.

For others

Pray for those who work in new technologies, and who have the responsibility to make sure that the gifts of God are used for good and not for ill.

Meditation

Face the hardest challenges of life
whatever they are or may be

Christ has gone this way before
so we can have nothing to fear

Repent before the Lord of all
and leave all behind the past

Total respect for each other in Christ
only the best for God's church

Love the unlovely, whoever they are
embrace who the world rejects

Take hold of the power of the Holy Spirit
to march ahead of the enemy

Speak such words as honour God
and love the truth of the Word

Exercise faith like breathing, always,
and enjoy who you are in Christ

Bible Passage

Genesis 8:13-22

¹³ On the first day of the first month of Noah's 601st year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ark, and observed that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ On the 27th day of the 2nd month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah,

¹⁶ 'Go out of the ark, you and your wife, together with your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ Bring out with you all the living creatures that are with you, birds and animals and all the creatures from the ground, so that they may multiply on the earth, be fruitful and increase in number.'

¹⁸ So Noah went out together with his wife, his sons and their wives. ¹⁹ Every animal, every creature, every bird, and everything that moves on the earth, they all went out of the ark by families.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD inhaled the pleasant smell, the LORD said in his heart,

'I will never again curse the ground because of people, for their heart is inclined to evil from youth; nor will I ever destroy every living creature again, as I have done. ²² As long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.'

Review

The Flood was over, the land had dried out, and the family of Noah were at last able to think about leaving the ark! Everyone could go out and get on with life again! This is the underlying theme of today's reading, after everything that had happened during more than a year's worth of drama (6:11–8:12). The whole tale has been fascinating, with all kinds of interesting details including the timing of events (which carry over into the first few verses of today's text). However, in contrast to the rest of the story of Noah, this passage is full of deeper significance for later generations of God's people. It is a passage that was revered by the ancient Israelites and is still preached upon in Christian pulpits, because it is the first occasion in scripture where we read of someone offering a sacrifice by way of worship to God (apart, that is, from Abel's 'offering', as recorded in Gen 4:4).

After patiently waiting for the right time and moment (8:13,14) and then the word of God by way of instruction (8:15), Noah first led his family and then all the living creatures that had been in the Ark with him, out of their seclusion into the freedom of the earth again. It is an impressive picture, and moreover, the Lord God instructs them all to fulfil again the great commission of the first chapter of Genesis; to '*multiply ... be fruitful ... and increase in*

number (8:17). Much had been destroyed, but God had not done away with all His creation; after all the destruction, there had to be a new start.

To celebrate all that had happened, Noah then worshipped God, as the One who had protected him throughout his extraordinary adventure, and he worshipped God by offering a sacrifice. Those who believe that this story comes from people who 'wrote' Israel's history in later times, believe that Noah's sacrifice simply fulfils the sacrificial requirements of Leviticus (see Lev 1:4ff) on completion of a hazardous journey. However, Jewish tradition has always considered the sacrifice of Noah to be a unique act of worship, which copies that of Adam's murdered yet righteous son Abel (see Gen 4:4), and it is a sacrifice that sets a precedent for future generations. Although sacrificial worship is something we might find difficult, we should be ready to understand its principle, which is that there is a deep connection between life being given up to God and life that can flourish. This had happened at the time of the Flood; though many had died, life could now flourish again under God's direction. So the sacrifice of Noah, even though we know only a little of what he sacrificed and how (8:20), was a form of worship for this simple fact of life.

As God received the offering made to Him by Noah, He considered all that had happened (8:21,22) and accepted that a plan of annihilation because of the sin would not eventually bring the complete salvation and restoration with His creation He desired. He did not want to spend the whole of Creation killing men and women, and much more; this would not happen again! Calvin, a great Christian of the 16th century once commented that if God had chosen to continue to do His work of salvation by destroying those who sinned, then we would need daily 'Floods' if our daily sins were to be atoned!

But however righteous Noah was, God perceived that sin still lurked within him and his family, as ultimately proved to be the case (9:20ff); *'their heart is inclined to evil from youth'* (8:21). As a consequence, God graciously gave a gift of time (8:22), repeating itself in cycles of seasons; the *'seedtime'* and *'harvest'*. This sounds rather odd to us, but this is like an illustration; the seasons are like on-going opportunities for the grace of God to work within the lifetime of humanity. Indeed, much time would elapse before God would be able to find the right spiritual 'season' to deal with the problem of sin in the world through Jesus Christ.

One other thing worth mentioning is this. Through the whole experience of the Flood, God stood firm, meting out justice and mercy with discernment, and as a result, Noah was changed from a righteous man into a man who worshipped God. Although God observed that Noah and his family were still sinful people, He accepted his worship because Noah had a commission from God. He was the man now entrusted with the future of humanity. We often remember that we are all descended from Adam, and for good reason; but there are times when we need to be reminded that we are all descended from Noah, the first man who worshipped God!

Discipleship

Application

The importance of worship ...

This is a truly important and even beautiful moment in the history of God's dealing with men and women. Ultimately, God has not changed as a consequence of the great Flood, though we are told of His thoughts and the manner in which His great plan is extended as a consequence of all that has happened. However, what is it that has made God reveal more of Himself? It was not the Flood itself, but the worship that Noah gave to God for his

deliverance from the Flood. This worship is what God longs to receive from people, and although what happens in this story is culturally far removed from worship in our present day, we can easily see the principles of what is going on. According to this story, true worship which pleases God takes place when we give sacrificially to Him so that we might live and remain in His will, and there are many ways in which we can do this today without killing animals!

What does this mean for worship today?

Noah's sacrifice of worship to God was unprovoked, unplanned and unasked for. That is part of why it was acceptable to God. Perhaps one of the difficulties we face today is that we think of 'worship' as something which is done for us by worship leaders and preachers, with which we 'join in' in a rather timed and planned manner. Perhaps the worship that the Lord longs to receive from us is the instantaneous praise and honour of a prayer of thanks after we have come through some difficult experience, or completed a difficult journey, for example. When the natural things of life are turned towards God with praise and prayer, then worship is perhaps most genuinely given.

Ideas for what to do

- *How can you offer the Lord worship in a natural way during your everyday life? Think about whether it is practical to be so focussed, and what the difference is between Sunday worship and private worship.*
- *Pray for those who look after animals today, and especially those who look after endangered species. God has created all the world and he gives us responsibility for all these things, and we should not let Him down.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *Do you think of the story of the Flood as historically 'real', or do you think of it as a story which teaches us truth? Discuss the difference.*
2. *What does sacrificial worship teach us about worship today, and why do we find the idea of the sacrifice of life so difficult?*
3. *Look at the final speech of God again (8:21,22), and make a list of the things He says and does. Discuss what you have discovered.*

Final Prayer

Great Lord and Master of all Creation, we ask You to receive from us the prayers and the praise we offer each and every day of our lives. Fill us with a heart of worship so that nothing is too large or too small for us to bring to You in thanks, and be a reason for our praise. Great and Mighty Lord; we worship You: AMEN