

“What Will God Do With a Wicked World?”

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37). Both Matthew and Luke in their Gospels record these words of Jesus. They share these words with us so we know that the account in front of us for consideration during our sermon is an important one. Jesus connects what happened at the time of Noah to what will happen when time comes to an end.

Jesus tells us that we are not dealing with a fable or a fairy tale in the account of Noah. No matter how many people disagree with that or deny it, this is what God says. This is the truth about what once happened to our world, a shocking event that has indeed left its marks and signs of it behind for us to see if we pay attention to them.

And because it is true, it serves a valuable purpose for us today as we begin the Advent season. As we look back on the events of the life of Noah, we will find answers to this weighty and meaningful question: what will God do with a wicked world?

There is no doubt that the world at Noah’s time was a wicked one. Genesis chapter 6 begins with an example of the sin that marked this period and led to more wickedness. Even the believers, referred to as sons of God, wavered in their concern and their consideration for their own spiritual well-being. They took unbelieving spouses, based first and foremost on physical beauty rather than on any concern for spiritual matters.

But this was only a part of the picture. As the Lord looked at the world of that day, he saw only wickedness. He had his servant Moses later record his assessment that **“every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”** No wonder wickedness was so pronounced. No wonder that nobody was concerned with their standing with God, their relationship with him. What would God do with that wicked world?

You know the answer. But before we speak more about it, let’s compare that world to ours. The human heart has not changed. The inclinations of the thoughts of people naturally are only evil and always evil. People chase after all sorts of things without a thought about their relationship with God, without any spiritual concern whatsoever. We find examples of wickedness beamed into our homes on the television news. Someone takes a gun and shoots someone else, or many others. Someone sells the filthiest, trashiest pictures you could possibly imagine. And someone buys it. And we look at all this and say, “yes, indeed, what a wicked world it is out there!” But God’s Word tells us that we need to look closer. We need to consider not only the “out there” but also the “in here,” in my own heart and in the heart of my family members.

Don’t believe that by nature and from birth we have wicked hearts? Watch a group of children playing. Watch how easily and how often their play devolves into fighting and arguing and cruelty. Don’t believe that you have a wicked heart? Pay attention to your thoughts about others. I know that you don’t intend to hurt or harm or kill in the same way you’ve heard about on the news, but don’t you catch yourself with feelings of anger and rage and jealousy? Don’t you find yourself so frequently concerned with so many other matters that you simply are not paying any attention to spiritual matters? Yes, this is a wicked world. We are a part of the wickedness that defines it in so many ways. So what will God do with our wicked world?

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” The pattern has been established. God has shown us how he treats people, how he treats wickedness. What will he do? The first thing he will do is warn. God saw the wickedness. He selected one righteous man, Noah, and with that man he shared his plan. **“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.”** The warning was sounded. We know from Scripture that Noah didn’t keep this news to himself. He was a preacher. He told people what God had said. And he went to work building the massive boat, the ark, that God directed him to build. So even if people had not heard the warning, there stood a monument of warning, a giant structure. It was a boat being built

in the middle of the dry land, announcing that someone was planning to use it, to need it, that a deadly end was impending for this wicked world.

And then God waited. It took time for this project to be completed. It took time for the animals to gather. And in the meantime, the warning continued to sound out, loud and strong. Change! Repent! Take God seriously and take seriously your relationship with him. What does God do with a wicked world? He warns and he waits.

We sit today inside a monument of God's warning. This towering structure shouts to people outside of it, and inside, too. "Take seriously your relationship with God! This is important!" And we sound the alarm as often as we find it in Scripture. Here is what God forbids, and you have done it. Here is what God commands, and you have left it undone! And we speak about a time when God will make an absolute and final judgment concerning all people. It's a time when this structure will be worthless, when the world will shake as Jesus returns to judge, to lay out for all to see the record of wickedness that stands against us. He is warning, and he is waiting. God is patient, oh so patient! He has put up with so much from creatures that he fashioned and formed. But his patience will reach its limit. On a day that Jesus reminds us is unknown, the waiting will end. God warns, and he waits, and then he wipes out.

One day the rain started falling. The springs of the great deep burst forth. The floodgates of heaven opened up. And the world and the animals and the people and all their wickedness were buried under water that covered the tops of the highest mountains. God did as he said. Don't mistake his patience for weakness or impotence. How many people with their last gasp of air saw the ark start floating away? God had warned, and he had waited, and now he was wiping out. He was putting an end to a wicked world.

That warning ought to be a familiar one to us. On that day for which we are directed to watch, all this will be destroyed. Wickedness will be once and for all wiped out in the very fires of hell. This is not a fable. This is not a fairy tale. It will happen. **"Just as in the days of Noah..."**

But there in the midst of a wicked world was Noah. **"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God."** Make no mistake, Noah's natural heart was as wicked and unclean as any. But God had chosen him and called him. God had changed him. God had given Noah a new heart, one that cherished and loved what God cherishes and loves, one that hated wickedness just as God does. God had given Noah a promise. It was a promise that would still take time to reach fulfillment. Noah would have to wait. But God was going to act to rescue Noah from all of his sins. God was going to rescue a world of sinners from their sins. God was going to let Christ suffer once for those sins, the righteous for the unrighteous and in him to bring people to God.

And so in a wicked world, there he was: a man who believed what God said, a man who believed what God promised. There he was, a man who would do what God said. He spent years building a giant vessel of rescue, an ark that would carry him and his family and so many animals safely above the destruction and return him again to a renewed world, a fresh world.

"As in the days of Noah..." God has still chosen and called people in the midst of a wicked world to be different, to be transformed by his love. He has washed sins away in baptism. He has set you and me safely in his ark, in his church of believers, people who have been brought into a relationship with him and with his Son who died for them, who was wiped out so that they wouldn't have to be, who was wiped out so that their sins—your sins—would be wiped out.

Just as it was with Noah, God will preserve and he will save. He will come in judgment and he will come to save. Jesus will return when the time is right, when the time that has been determined arrives. And he will take everyone who is prepared to meet him to live with him forever in heavenly glory. **"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). Amen**

The Text: Genesis 6:1–3, 5–14, 17–22 (NIV)

When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

⁵The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

⁹This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

¹⁰Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³So 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. ¹⁴So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.

¹⁷I 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. ¹⁸But 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. ¹⁹You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰Two 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. ²¹You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

²²Noah did everything just as God commanded him.