

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 236

The Greatest Disaster

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 27th February, 2005**

Text: *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11. 7).*

Without any doubt, the flood was the most terrible disaster this world has ever known. Recently there has been a lot of thought about disasters in the earth. First of all there was the terrible disaster at the end of the old year which swept through the Middle East [the tsunami], and then later the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz – thoughts of these terrible disasters. And they *were* disasters, appalling disasters, weren't they? But there never was a disaster like the flood. Why do I say that? Because terrible as these were, they only affected part of the earth, but the flood destroyed the whole of humanity apart from eight people. Now there never was a disaster like that. Let us be clear, the Word of God very, very clearly tells us that it was God's judgment for sin, God's judgment on this sinful world. And let us be clear, that though the Lord in mercy has promised that He will never drown the earth again with a flood, He has solemnly promised that one day He will destroy it with fire.

So beloved friends, whenever we think of Noah and the ark and the flood, never forget that we are thinking of terrible things, appalling things, and these things are a reminder that God hates sin and that God will punish sin, that God will judge sin. I believe that Satan hates the very mention of the flood, because it is a reminder to fallen, lost humanity of who God is, what He once did and what one day He will do again – though by fire, not by water. That is why almost every book you see concerning the ark – and you can see them by the multitude – really they are making a joke of it, making a laughing-stock of it, the animals going into the ark and funny little figures of Noah. It is made a joke, a laughing-stock. Never laugh, never smile about the ark, about Noah. It was the most solemn event this world ever knew, apart from the cross of Christ.

So when we think of the flood, we should remember and we should contemplate. Really there are three things in the account of the flood. The first is God's hatred of sin and God's wrath poured out against sin and

sinners in that worldwide flood. The second thing is the wonderful love and mercy of God that He did provide a refuge, only one refuge, a divinely-appointed refuge. And the third thing: there was safety in the ark and there was safety nowhere else. It is made very, very clear in Scripture that in these things we can see a beautiful figure of the everlasting salvation of the people of God; that God is holy, that God will punish sin, that God will punish sinners, that divine wrath will be poured out. But then there *is* a refuge. In love and mercy God has provided a refuge in His own beloved Son. “A refuge for sinners the gospel makes known; ’tis found in the merits of Jesus alone.” And then the third thing: the everlasting safety and security of those who are in Christ as Noah was safe in the ark.

There were two little words that struck me. I wonder if things ever strike you when we are reading the chapter. Two little things struck me this morning. The first: God said to Noah, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark.” He did not say, *Go*; He said, *Come*. God Himself was there in the ark already. And the second little word: “And the Lord shut him in” – a beautiful word! That was their safety, their security, that the Lord shut them in. O to have a view of the blood-bought people of God in all ages eternally shut into Christ in the bonds of everlasting love!

Well, I say these things right at the beginning before coming to the text, to emphasise the solemn, awful importance of the flood, what it means to you and me this morning and the lessons it teaches concerning divine wrath and divine mercy. You know what holy Scripture says: “The living will lay it to his heart,” and they will. “The living will lay it to his heart.”

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” There are quite a few mentions of Noah and the flood in the New Testament. Here the apostle introduces the subject concerning this important point of what faith is, true faith, living faith, saving faith, the faith that will take a sinner to heaven. What is it? And the apostle by the Holy Ghost gives quite a lot of examples of it. You will find as you read through Hebrews 11, this great chapter of faith, the worthies of faith, you will find that faith throughout this chapter always works like this. Two things: first of all faith believes God, and then because faith believes God,

faith acts. It is not a dead faith; it is not an inactive faith. Faith believes God. God has given this faith; it is a precious gift. And true faith believes God, everything He has said. But then faith acts. In one sense, the devil believes God. He believes every word that God has said is true. But it does not do him any good. It does not have any sanctifying effect. It has never caused him to act in a gracious way.

Right through this chapter we have people believing what God has said, and because they believed it, then there were the gracious acts of faith. So, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” He believed what God had said, and because he believed what God had said, that He was going to drown the earth, he obeyed God. He acted; he sought a refuge; he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world.” This terrible disaster that appalled all of us at the end of the year last December, the people were not warned of it. There was not any warning at all. If there had been any warning, I am sure all of them would have taken precautions. No doubt they just would not have gone there, or if they had gone there, they would soon have evacuated the place and gone away. They did not have any warning, but Noah did, and you and I have been warned.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet.” There was not any sign of any rain. There was not any sign of a flood. I am not going to enter into this – you can think about it, though it does not really matter – but many of the old divines believed it had never rained until the time of Noah’s flood, that the earth had been watered before that by a heavy dew. But leaving that, there was not any sign of rain; there was not any sign of a flood. Noah was “warned of God of things not seen as yet.” And he believed what God had said. It was solemn; it was awful; it was a disaster; it was God’s anger. He believed what God had said, and so he must have a refuge. And that is what faith is, and why unbelieving sinners perish is because of unbelief. There are a lot of unbelievers in this chapel this morning, and I say that in love and mercy and affection. Why do I say that? If you *really believed* that it will not be too long before you die and your bodies laid in the earth, if you *really believed* you have to stand personally in the presence of your Maker and given an account, if you *really believed* that there is a judgment day, if you *really believed* that there is an eternal sentence, if you *really believed* there is a heaven and if you *really believed* there is a hell, you would not have one moment’s peace

until you had a sweet hope of a refuge in Jesus. As Joseph Hart says, it is “unbelief that sin accursed,” “of all opposers worst,” because it fights against our God. Unbelief is the root sin. We come to chapel and listen to preaching and sing hymns and go home, but if we *really believed*, we would not have a moment’s peace until we found that refuge in Jesus. “By faith Noah, being warned of God,” and how that warning sunk into his heart, and how the Lord gave him faith.

I look at my own case. As a boy I went to chapel, heard the old preachers, their solemn warnings, but it did not have any effect. I was glad when Monday came and I went back to my friends and could go back to my pastimes and pleasures. But then the time came when I really did believe there was an eternity. My life was turned upside down in a moment. It is unbelief that is the root sin. If you really believed this solemn warning that there is an eternal reckoning, that there is a judgment day, that you must stand personally before God, almighty God, your Maker, and give an account, then you would think and you would tremble and you would not have a moment’s peace until you had a sweet hope of a refuge in Jesus.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God.” All these poor souls who perished in Asia in December did not have any warning, but in love and in mercy the Lord has given the warning in His Word and in the preaching of the gospel. It is in love, in mercy that the Lord has given the warning so that sinners, believing what God has said, might flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel. That is what Noah did. Here was one man alone. “He condemned the world.” What does that mean: “He condemned the world”? Well, he must have been an object of scorn and ridicule and laughter. Let us be clear, they were a wicked people, an evil people, a dreadful generation, and here is this man. He is building this great boat, building it on dry land. They must have asked him why and he told them: there is going to be a flood and it is going to drown all the world. He preached for a hundred years. We are told that Noah was a faithful preacher of righteousness. He did not have one single convert. Now you girls and boys, you young people, the majority are not always right. Often it is just a few who are right and the majority are wrong. Noah was scorned and mocked and laughed at, but when that terrible flood came and swept over the whole earth, it was proved that Noah was right and the others were solemnly wrong. “By the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith,” which takes us into

this wonderful, blessed theme of justification through faith in the righteousness of Jesus.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear.” Now you know that I have so often spoken to you about the holy fear of God; we have so much about it in the Psalms and the Proverbs and it is “the beginning of wisdom.” I have said it is not being frightened of God; it is a loving, tender awe, reverence, respect for the majesty of God. But I believe here fear *does* mean being frightened. I believe that when God told Noah, he was frightened. “Being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear” – he was frightened.

There was a well-known American preacher and he was told that it was dreadful that in his preaching he frightened the people, that he tried to frighten the people, and they told him that no loving preacher of Jesus Christ ever frightened the people. His answer was this. He said, “Where we live” – it was one of the southern states – “right the other side of the road from our home” there was a big expanse – I do not know whether it was grass, wood, forest, but it was infested with snakes, and some of them were poisonous, deadly poisonous. The preacher said, “We brought up our little children to be frightened that there were snakes there and that one bite would kill them. We brought them up to be frightened of going over where those snakes were, so they would keep away.” He said, “Was that not being loving? Was that not being kind?”

I believe with all my heart when the Lord says, “I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me,” it is that loving, holy, tender, filial fear of God, but I believe for the most part God’s people, when He begins to work in their hearts, are frightened because of their sin, frightened because of divine wrath, frightened of sinking into hell.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.” Now that was the one point with Noah: the love, the mercy of God in warning him; the love, the mercy of God making him afraid; the love, the mercy of God telling him there is going to be this terrible flood. So there was that one thing: he wanted to be prepared. Really, that is the great thing for you and me when we think of the great unknown, when we think of that day when the Lord will descend from heaven. Our hymnwriter calls it “the great burning day,” when the elements shall melt with fervent heat and the heavens shall be rolled up as

a scroll and millions will call on the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of God and the Lamb. The great thing is to be prepared.

When I was a teenager, once or twice I stayed in my mother's native village in Shropshire with a dear old Shropshire couple. He had been a shepherd all his life and now he just had a small holding, a horse and a few cows and hens and pigs. It was a real, beautiful, old-fashioned thatched cottage. But there was one thing that struck me. There was one of those old Victorian samplers there and it said this:

“Oft as the bell, with solemn toll,
Speaks the departure of a soul,
Let each one ask himself, ‘Am I
Prepared, should I be called to die?’”

It had an effect with me. I later found out – you will not be surprised – that it was John Newton who wrote it, the first verse of one of his hymns which does not seem to be in any hymnbook today. But in those days, when someone died the bell used to toll.

“Oft as the bell, with solemn toll,
Speaks the departure of a soul,
Let each one ask himself, ‘Am I
Prepared, should I be called to die?’”

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” Now that preparing, that making of the ark. There is one thing that has been on my spirit so much through the last week or two: reading through the Book of Proverbs, verse after verse you have warnings against slothfulness and you have a commendation of diligence. You have slothfulness, diligence; you have diligence, slothfulness. Well, if you and I are born of the Spirit of God, if God gives us living faith, if we are warned, if we believe the warnings, if we want to be prepared, then we will not be slothful. There is a chapter before this (chapter 6) and it puts these things together. “Be not *slothful*, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” like Noah, like Abraham, like Jacob, like Moses. They were not slothful. Be ye “not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And then the opposite: “We desire that every one of you do shew the same *diligence* to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.” Now living faith is not slothful. Living faith has a diligence about it. So I have thought quite a bit about the second Epistle of Peter chapter 3. We could have read it this morning, but I thought perhaps we should read just the simple account of Noah and the flood. Now what is 2 Peter 3 all about? Well, first of all it deals with Noah and the flood, and then it goes on and says though God will not drown the world again, one day He will destroy it with fire. And this is the Holy Spirit’s application: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent*.” Noah was. He looked for these things. God had warned him, so he looked for these things. “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Now surely, beloved friends, you believe these things. Surely you are looking for these things. And seeing you look for these things, the end of the world, the great burning day; seeing you look for these things, the last judgment; seeing ye look for these things, the day of your death, “Be diligent.” Now Noah was. “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” Well, Noah was found in peace as he entered into the ark. “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” In the great day, the only way in which we can be found *of Him* in peace is if we are found *in Him*. Our hymnwriter says, “O may my soul be found in Him, and of His righteousness partake!” To be found in Christ our only refuge; to be found sheltering in His merits, just as Noah was found sheltering in the ark. That is the only way you and I can ever be at last found of Christ, found of Him in peace, if we are found *in Him*, as Noah was found *in* the ark, sheltering in the ark, finding a refuge in the ark. If only you and I might be found sheltering in Jesus the Ark of grace. Then, says Peter – blessed words – we shall “be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

“He that better knows than we,
Bids us now to Jesus flee;
Humbly take Him at His word,
And your souls shall bless the Lord.”

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.” That was it, the ark. There was safety in the ark. It was the only place of safety. It was the place appointed by God. It was the place provided by God. And the wonderful mercy is that as we think of these solemn things, of divine wrath and the day drawing nearer, and our unworthiness, our guilt as lost, ruined sinners in the sight of

a holy God, deserving His wrath, to hear that the gospel speaks of a precious refuge provided in the Person and merits and finished work of God's dear Son, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“The weary, the tempted, and burdened by sin,
Were never exempted from entering therein.

“And if God the Spirit reveal this to you,
Take refuge in Jesus, though hell should pursue.”

There is the diligence, there is the urgency in real religion. “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” O the safety of Noah and his family in the ark! It was the only place of safety. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” We do not know any other name. We do not know any other Saviour. We do not know any other hope.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” But there did come that moment when Noah entered into the ark. Whether he came in happily, or whether he came tremblingly, or whether he came peacefully, or whether he came fearfully, we do not know, but it was *in the ark*, and salvation is in Christ and in Christ alone. Beloved friends, that is the great, the vital point. Do not be satisfied with anything else. Seek that the Holy Spirit might lead you to Jesus as the Saviour, a Refuge just like the ark, and that the Holy Spirit might enable you by faith to enter, because that is what faith does. It is not just the warning, it is not just being afraid, it is not only that it flees, but it enters. O may there be that entering in by faith! It is entering into rest. The ark was a resting place. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

He “prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” So the last thought is this: salvation, the saving of his house, salvation in the ark and in the ark alone. O what a glorious theme salvation is, provided by God for all His people, unworthy as they are, through the merits of Jesus; made known, blessedly revealed by the Spirit of God, and that salvation in Christ, the glorious Antitype of the ark! “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

Well, beloved friends, these are vital, important things. May the Holy Spirit warn you and may you be moved with fear, and may the Holy Spirit teach you that need of gracious preparation, and may He reveal Christ, and may you be able to enter in, and may you prove there that you are safe and safe eternally. It is all in Christ.

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