

# St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes 1<sup>st</sup> August 2010

## Creature Comforts: the Dove and hope

### Genesis 8

#### Word: Key points from Sunday's 9am sermon

The universal flood is a familiar story. There are other ancient texts outside the bible that refer to a great flood and a huge boat built to survive it, particularly in ancient Babylonian literature. Most geological experts agree that there was a flood in ancient times – maybe more than one - but probably not over the entire surface of the globe. But it would have seemed like that to the writers of the OT because they had no idea how vast the world was, and it was customary to use the phrases like *the whole earth* when things seemed to be everywhere. Scholars also tend to agree that we have probably 2 OT writers combined here, hence some details contradicting each other, e.g. whether Noah was to take 2 or 7 of each kind of animal in chapters 6 and 7. Whatever the actual extent of the flood, it is clear that this was a judgement on human-kind as a whole; that God was displeased with the behaviour of the people He had created, except for Noah and his family, and wanted a clean slate to start again. Read ch 6:5-8 (p.8). So Noah was given precise instructions in how to build a huge boat or ark and how to put a number of every creature in it before it started to rain! Mount Ararat exists and is 17,000 feet high but the name could actually mean anywhere on the mountain range in Ararat.

It's been suggested that ARK equals *Act of Random Kindness*, but I don't agree! This was no random act by God at all. I think He had it all planned from the beginning. This testing of humanity can be seen as a pre-echo of the Final Day of Judgement, when the whole universe will come under God's scrutiny, as we have recently explored in our studies on Revelation. As we read this account we need to remember that the story does not stop there, that God did not and does not give up on us, and that He provided the solution to humanity's ills through the saving grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Four points of hope:** 1. God remembers and protects us through the bad times. Notice the first 3 words of ch 8:1 *But God remembered*. This phrase *God remembered* comes several times in the bible and is more than a casual memory. It always implies that God is faithful and loving and that He makes a movement towards those he remembers – it implies action, not just mere whimsical thought. (See also Exodus 2:24).

2. We may need to cultivate patient self-discipline at times, in the certain hope and knowledge that God's purposes for us are good. It's an amazing example of patient self-discipline, as Noah waits. Look at verse 6: *after 40 days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven*. Then he sent the dove but it just flew about; then he waited a week before he sent it again and it brought back the olive leaf. He waited another week before the final sending out, when the dove didn't return.

3. We need to remain God-ward in our thinking and then we will hear from God and he will bless us. Noah steps out onto a new earth like a new man, a new Adam, and is blessed by God as Adam had been in the Garden of Eden. Noah's 1<sup>st</sup> action is to praise God and build an altar.

4. God is faithful and He has made an everlasting covenant with us. The fragrance of the offering pleased God and God responded with His promise never to flood the whole earth again. And this is a very important point of hope when others tell us that the earth will one day be destroyed e.g. as it is burnt up by the sun. We do not need to fear this because God says the world will not be destroyed before Jesus comes again. Any disasters in the world will now be "local" and we are able to mitigate them through planning and generosity, if we will. So God renews His covenant with Noah and the Earth. In ch 9:12-16 we get the wonderful symbol of the rainbow.

The writers of the New Testament would have been very familiar with the story and used its images in their thinking. The flood itself can be seen as a metaphor for baptism. The use of a dove and a raven is like a parable, and when the dove appeared as a symbol of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, this would have reminded the Israelites of the Noah story. The dove with its olive leaf is also the symbol of new creation, of God making all things new, which is an idea used many times, of course, in relation to God's New Covenant through Jesus. Whereas the raven, by contrast, lives off the dead, as it feeds on carrion, and this could be seen as a picture of the OT Law as opposed to Jesus and Grace. There's also the image of the fragrance of Noah's sacrifice being pleasing to God, which is an idea St Paul used in Eph 5:2. Jesus as the ultimate pleasing sacrifice to God was an image based on Noah's offering.

God keeps His promises: what are the promises that mean a lot to you? We can increase our hope and faith by reminding ourselves of them often or, even better, by learning them by heart.

#### Questions to discuss

**Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to you/your group. In home-group, make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.**

ICE-BREAKER: If you had to describe yourself as an animal, which one would you choose and why?

1. ARK equals *Act of Random Kindness*. Do you agree? Why/why not?

2. Explore the images from the Noah story that recur in the New Testament e.g. baptism; the Holy Spirit and grace as opposed to the raven and the law; the Holy Spirit and new life; we are to live as a fragrant offering to God (Eph 5:2). Choose one that resonates with you and discuss (or pray about) what God might be saying to you.

3. Read PSALMS 42-43 and notice the refrain that is 42:5, 11 and 43:5. How easy do you find this?

4. Look at God's promises in these scriptures: which means most to you? Resolve to learn it/them by heart. *Isaiah 43:1; Isaiah 61:1; Heb. 11:1; Joshua 1:9; Matt 28:20b*

