

Text: Gen. 6:9-22

Title: "Covenant Promise in Days of Pending Catastrophe"

Time: February 3, 2008

Place: NBBC

Introduction: It turns out that catastrophe is not only a major theme of the early pages of Genesis, it is also a relatively new topic in the circles of evolutionary theory. You may remember that when we studied the doctrine of creation, we took some time to define some terms, and in our definition of evolution we noticed that there is currently a tension between *uniformitarianism* and *catastrophism* in evolutionary attempts to define this position.

Uniformitarianism is the idea that today's natural processes are the keys to understanding the natural processes of the past, because these processes have been uniform over time. Under this assumption, we can observe the gradual processes we see today and thereby explain how things happened in the past.

Catastrophism, however, interferes with this approach. It says that catastrophes interrupted the natural processes of the past, infrequent events that yielded results that differ from what we can observe today.

So, on the one hand, Richard Dawkins claims:

"Gradualness is of the essence. In the context of the fight against creationism, gradualism is more or less synonymous with evolution itself. If you throw out gradualism, you throw out the very thing that makes evolution more plausible than creation." Richard Dawkins (Oxford University evolutionism professor), "What Was All the Fuss About?", *Nature*, vol. 316 (August 22, 1985): 683.

But on the other hand Peter Ward, an evolutionary geologist at the University of Washington, must admit: "There is no mystery about what kills organisms: too much heat or cold; not enough food (or other necessary nutrients); too little (or too much) water, oxygen, or carbon dioxide; excess radiation; incorrect acidity in the environment; environmental toxins; and other organisms. Mass extinctions occur when one or some combination of these factors kills a significant percentage of the planet's biota. There has been no shortage of them in the past" (*Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Rare in the Universe* (2000), p. 160).

Well, Bible students need not worry about the difficulty of reconciling mass extinctions with evolutionary dogma, because we believe in the Creator of Genesis 1. He has told us that a mass extinction happened in a global flood, and the passage we read this morning tells us exactly why this happened and how we should apply this historic catastrophe of God's judgment to our lives.

The message this morning is about "Covenant Promise in Days of Pending Catastrophe." Noah lived in days that awaited God's cataclysmic judgment, and so do we. I want us to see three themes regarding living under these conditions this morning from our passage.

I. The cause of pending catastrophe is man's corruption (vv. 11-13).

Illustration: One of the things we had to do to our house while living in Greer, SC is order annual termite inspections. One day Maureen asked me to look at something in Kara's room, and she showed me some weird squiggly markings on the base boards. I had never seen the results of termites before, so I had no idea what was causing the base-

boards to look like that. We knew enough to call in a pest control guy, and sure enough we had termites that needed to be dealt with.

Application: Moses describes for us the conditions that caused catastrophe in the days of Noah, and he uses the word *corrupt* three times and the word *violence* twice to do so. We saw this characteristic of violence last week in v. 4, where the Nephilim are described – a name that comes from the word meaning *to fall* and indicates that these men would characteristically fall upon or attack others. Gang warfare is something that we are not strangers to here in America. As sin runs rampant in a society law enforcement becomes less and less possible. This was true in Noah's day of pending catastrophe, and it is true in ours as well.

The word *corrupt* is used in Exod. 8:24 in a way that reminds me of my termite problem. There the land of Egypt is laid waist (corrupted) because of the damage of the plague of insects. So the picture this gives us of the damaging effects of sin is that sin is that which brings rottenness to the very core of our land. All can seem well and good on the surface of things, but underneath there lies an infestation that is slowly eating away at the structure and threatening to bring catastrophic collapse. Notice Jesus' description of the days of Noah (Matt. 24:36-39). All seems well on the outside, but this is not the case.

There is an emphasis on the responsibility of man for these conditions in this passage. Did you notice that little phrase *because of them* in verse 13? The form of the verb *corrupt* in this passage can be taken in a reflexive sense, and so we can read *corrupted itself*. The Bible is clear that catastrophe comes because of corruption, and corruption comes because of man's sin.

Man likes to blame God for catastrophe, but this is merely more evidence of his own corruption. We need to recognize that our sin brings the corruption that God must judge. But there is hope in this passage. As is true for any pest-related infestation, our holy God must deal with the corrupting problem of our sin. The cause of pending catastrophe is man's sin.

II. Hope in the face of pending catastrophe depends on God's covenant (v. 17-18).

Illustration: We are most familiar with the idea of *covenant* in the realm of marriage. The ring that I am wearing is a symbol of a covenant that has been established between my wife and I. Some marriage ceremonies point out that the ring is a circle and that circles have no end. The covenant of matrimony is designed to be a permanent thing.

Application: God brings hope to these days of catastrophe, and He does so in the form of a covenant. I want us to see two things briefly about the covenant that God made with Noah in this chapter.

1. The hope of God's covenant is personal.

The word *you* is singular in this passage, and for this reason I do not believe that the covenant referred to in this chapter is the same as the covenant involving the rainbow in chapter 9. These are two different Noahic covenants.

Here the covenant is with Noah personally, and with Noah's family, and this is a great emphasis of verse 18. The verse tells us that God would come through on a specific promise He had made with this individual. Let's take a moment to see how the rainbow covenant of chapter 9 is different from this: contrast *you* plural [9:9, 11, 12], *your*

descendants [9:9], every living creature [9:10, 12], all successive generations [9:12], the earth [9:13], all flesh [9:15-17].

Application: The kind of covenant that saved Noah and his family from God's judgment was a personal covenant. Noah had done business with God one-on-one. This was not something done through a church or through Noah's parents or through some general sense that applies to everyone. No, Noah had himself received God's covenant for him. Each of us needs to do business with God one-on-one. This would be insurmountably intimidating were it not for the second characteristic of God's covenant.

2. The hope of God's covenant is gracious (note also v. 8).

This is something that God does because He is gracious. Just as God is the one who brings judgment, God is the one who must bring the covenant of mercy into the life of a believer (vv. 17-18).

We cannot earn this gift; it is freely given by the grace of God. *Grace* is the gift of blessings that we do not deserve and cannot earn. If our hope of salvation is in the religion we have chosen, or in the pedigree we possess, or in the works that we have done, or in the comparisons we have made, then it knows nothing of the hopeful grace that truly saves. The hope of God's covenant is gracious. It is not earned or deserved. It must be simply received in faith.

Heb. 11:7 makes exactly this point about Noah's saving faith: "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which [faith] he condemned the world, and became an heir of righteousness which is according to faith." Hope in the face of catastrophe always depends on faith in God's gracious covenant.

III. Days of pending catastrophe call for faithful obedience (vv. 9-10, 14-16, 19-22).

Illustration: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem called, "Success," which I think captures well what it must have been like for Noah to obey God's command to build the ark:

"We have not wings, we cannot soar;
But we have feet to scale and climb
By slow degrees, by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

"The mighty pyramids of stone
That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen and better known,
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

"The distant mountains, that uprear
Their solid bastions of the skies,
Are crossed by pathways that appear
As we to higher levels rise.

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

Note with me five things about this great man's obedience:

1. Noah's obedience began with a sanctifying relationship with God (v. 9). Note that Noah considered his walk with God more important than his walk with other people. He stuck out like a sore thumb in that society of corruption, because he was the only one who loved the Lord. We need to

get comfortable with the fact that men and women who walk with God are never going to win any popularity contests.

We cannot truly obey unless we walk with God first. We must find the strength to do right in the constraining love of Christ. Traditions, habits, force of will, and trying to impress others are poor substitute motivations for obedience.

2. Noah's obedience influenced his family (vv. 10, 18). Notice that the disobedience of everyone else also influenced their families in these days of pending catastrophe. "Do as I say, not as I do" has never worked, and it never will. We need to care for our family's faith with our own faithful example.

3. Noah's obedience was careful about how, not merely what (vv. 14-16). The ends never justify the means in the work of God. Had Noah decided that the real important thing here was to survive the flood and taken the easier approach of building a smaller boat for just himself and his family, he would not have known the blessing of God on his life. We need to not only have wonderful goals in the work of the Lord; we also need to have obedient means for carrying out those goals.

4. Noah's obedience relied on the miraculous power of God (vv. 19-21). We can be faithful and obey, but ultimately we cannot do what really needs to be done in the work of God. All our human effort profits nothing if not anointed by the power of the Spirit of God. Noah prepared the ark, and God brought the animals. This is how the work of God here must go.

5. Noah's obedience was comprehensive (*all*, v. 22). God deserves exactly this. Don't hold back on God – give Him your all. Obey in all things, even that area of persistent disobedience, which he has been dealing with your heart about over and over again. You know what is right, but you can think of 1000 reasons why not to do it. God will bless us if we live like Noah: “*all* that God commanded, so he did.”

Conclusion: Our world is a world of sin, and so our days are always going to be days of pending catastrophe. But in spite of the darkness of this world, God's promise of salvation gives us hope, and as those who have found this undeserved grace in the eyes of the Lord, our lives must be lives of faithful obedience. Our day needs its Noahs just as his day did. Let's be faithful as he was, by faith.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching