

The Church Part Two: Shipbuilders and Lifesavers

Genesis 6:5-8, 13, 17-19, 7:23-24; Matthew 24:36-39; 1 Peter 3:20b-21; 2 Peter 2:5

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Dear Congregation of Christ: Noah's ark is often taught in children's Sunday schools with pictures of teddy bears, puppies, kittycats and many other cuties peeking out of the ark. The ark was captained by a jolly old man on a sea with puffy clouds and a colorful rainbow hovering above. Just so much cuteness and happiness. And the moral lesson is usually, "Noah obeyed God and he was saved, so must we!"

But Noah's ark floats in much deeper waters than this cuteness. In last Sunday's Part One of our series on the biblical, theological, and historical aspects of the church, we learned that the Garden of Eden was God's temple, and that the church there consisted of Adam and Eve. After their fall into sin, they were driven out of Eden. Because of sin, their firstborn son Cain killed his brother Abel, whose descendants would have been God's chosen people. So God created another covenant son, Seth, in Abel's place (Luke 3:38). After many generations, Noah was born, and he fathered three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and God chose Shem's descendants, the Israelites, to be his chosen people (Luke 3:34-35).

Noah's family consisted of his wife, their three sons, and three daughters-in-law, eight in all. Soon after Cain's murder of Abel, the world became filled with all kinds of evil and violence. Therefore, God commanded Noah to build an ark because he would send a great flood on the whole earth to destroy all mankind. Of the whole human race, only Noah and his family survived the flood because of the ark. Noah's ark, therefore, is the ark of salvation, a foreshadow of our Savior Jesus Christ. Noah's family of shipbuilders who were saved inside the ark was the whole church, God's covenant people. But in all 120 years that Noah was building the ark, he preached righteousness and repentance to the unbelieving world.

Therefore, our theme this Lord's Day is, **The Church Part Two: Shipbuilders and Lifesavers**, under two headings: first, **The Ark, a Foreshadow of Christ**; second, **The Church, Shipbuilders and Lifesavers**.

The Ark, a Foreshadow of Christ

Because of the many images and features of the ark that point to Jesus Christ, many pastors and theologians have interpreted the ark in light of our Savior.

However, a few features of the ark that are types of Christ tend to be interpreted allegorically, a type of interpretation popular during the early and medieval churches. Here are a few examples. The ark has one door, a type of Christ who is the only door of his sheepfold (John 10:9). The only light into the ark comes through one window on the roof, as Jesus is the only light of the world (John 8:12). Noah covered the ark inside and outside with pitch or tar, so the atoning

blood of Jesus covers our sins. These features might have some merit, but there are other more concrete features that deserve more attention as to the ark's foreshadowing of Christ.

First, the ark was the means by which Noah and his family were saved. He obeyed God's command with faith and fear of God, without questioning or grumbling against him, "*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household... and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*" (Heb 11:7). Would you build a boat for 120 years because of a promised great flood when it hardly rained? Noah's found favor with God because of his faith, and this faith led to trust and obedience. In the same way, faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to salvation from God's wrath and judgment. He fulfilled his mission in this world to be the "ark" of salvation to those who believe in him as Savior.

Second, Noah's ark brought a new creation. Like Adam and Eve, Noah and his family of eight repopulated the world after all people perished in the flood. This is why God's commandment to Noah after the flood mirrored his commandment to Adam, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (Gen 9:1; see 1:22, 28). Christ, like Noah, brought a new creation into the world. In Christ, we are a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). Christ's resurrection brought believers into "newness of life" (Rom 6:14). True believers have a "new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23-24; see also Col 3:10).

Third, like Noah's ark which saved Noah's family and left the rest of the world to perish in the flood, Jesus did likewise. Those who believe in Christ are saved from God's wrath, while those who do not perish under God's judgment.

In the most faithful reading of 1 Peter 3:18-21, it is the Spirit of Christ who preached through Noah to disobedient, rebellious people, who were suffering God's judgment "in prison," that is, hell. In his second epistle, Peter calls Noah a "*herald (or preacher) of righteousness*" (2 Pet. 2:5). Earlier in his first epistle, Peter says the "Spirit of Christ" was speaking through the Old Testament prophets, who "*inquir[ed] what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*" (1 Pet 1:11). Noah was one of those prophets. Peter is making the analogy between Noah's situation and his own. Just as Christ preached through Noah to an ungodly and disobedient world, so was Peter preaching to hostile, unbelievers. Those who listened to Noah—seven people in his family—were saved by the Ark, just as those who will believe Peter's preaching of Christ. And both groups of people—in Noah's time and in Peter's days—are very small, persecuted minorities in their own time.

The ark "*condemned the world,*" that is, the unbelieving world (Heb 11:7). While Noah was building the ark, people scoffed at him and mocked him. Where is the downpour that you have been predicting? You're just one of those weather forecasters who are always off the mark. Peter says that throughout this age, people will mock and scoff at the Scripture's promise of Jesus' Second Coming, "*They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation'*" (2 Pet 3:4). But as in the days of Noah, people today will carry on with their lives as usual as if there is no tomorrow, "*eating and drinking and*

marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27).

On a day and hour that no unbeliever expects, Judgment Day will come like a thief in the night, when God’s fiery wrath will be poured out on all the unrepentant: murderers of unborn and newborn infants, LGBTQ, haters of God and Christ, haters of their parents, thieves, the corrupt liars, and those who worship themselves and their money, fame and power (1 Cor 6:9-10). On that day, the ark will not be the ark of salvation—the gracious and merciful Jesus—but the ark of destruction. All those shut out of the ark will perish in a fiery end.

The Church, Shipbuilders and Lifesavers

But all true believers are those inside the ark, those who are united to Christ in faith and repentance of sin. They are safe, sound and secure in the arms of their Savior and Lord.

However, let us never be proud of our salvation. We were also sinners in the hands of a wrathful God before we were given faith and repentance by our gracious Savior. Let us not gloat at the coming destruction of all unrepentant unbelievers, saying in our heart, “They deserve it because they are evil.” Rather, like Noah, let us be shipbuilders and lifesavers.

Since the ark is Christ and Noah’s family is the church then, we who are inside the saving ark of Christ are commanded to also be *shipbuilders* building arks and ships. Let us bring those around us who are perishing into the ark of Christ. A multitude of ships must be built in all the nations by those who are already safe inside the ark. Let us have compassion on those who are doomed for destruction, for we know that outside the heavenly city are *“the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur”* (Rev 21:8).

Therefore, let us not only be shipbuilders, but also *lifesavers*. Let us pray for them, that God will bring many inside the ark of our Savior and Lord. And when all people whom God has chosen from eternity past have been brought into the ark of Christ, the end will come. They will be in the ark in heaven, the heavenly city itself, and all sin, pain, sorrow and death will cease. God’s judgments against the sinful world will also end, and eternal rest will begin. We will be in a new earth and new heaven where we will all be Noahs who find eternal rest, for the name Noah in Hebrew means “rest” (Gen 5:29). Jesus promises to all of you who come to him in faith, *“You will find rest for your souls”* (Matt 11:29).

Christ calls us to also be *lifesavers*. We are to be life preservers who are thrown into the ocean when someone is drowning. The world of unbelievers is in an emergency, a crisis, because the “flood,” that is, God’s fiery wrath, is coming on a day and hour that no one knows. Let us be “lifeboats,” small boats who rescue passengers on a sinking ship. Let us bring into the lifeboat of Christ everyone who can fit into it, because when the lifeboat is at capacity, no one is then allowed to board. All those who are left outside the lifeboat of Christ will perish.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself was the pre-eminent shipbuilder and lifesaver. What images do we think of related to Christ and boats? We are reminded that he preached from a boat when

thousands of curious “inquirers” crowded him on land. We are reminded that many of his first disciples were fishermen, whom he called to be “fishers of men.” We are reminded that when they were on a boat during a storm in the sea, his disciples were terrified of death, and he calmed the wind and the waves. Like Noah, Jesus was not the least bothered, sleeping during the storm, for he is sovereign over his own creation, and over “climate change.” We read that after his resurrection, he helped his frustrated disciples fishing all night without any catch, catch so many fish that the overloaded boat was in danger of sinking.

Beloved friends, let us all who believe be also “fishers of men,” “shipbuilders,” and “lifesavers,” because time is short. No one knows when the fiery “flood” will come and destroy all unrepentant unbelievers, some of them our family and friends. Noah was “a preacher of righteousness,” the perfect righteousness of Christ that God will give to all who believe in Christ as Savior. We also must be preachers of righteousness, preachers of the gospel of Christ, in order that when they have faith alone in Christ alone, the Christ of Scripture alone, they will enter into his ark of salvation.

And while we are still in this earthly ark of salvation waiting for our heavenly ark, let us nourish this salvation with our heavenly feast at the Lord’s Table.

