

B Lent 1	But what about Noah's Neighbors!? Genesis 6-9 by Tim Isbell	Preached 3/9/2003, for a 2/18/2018 version,click The Gospel of Noah.
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Thesis: Despite how it at first appears in some Old Testament stories, God is fair and God is gracious, offering his Grace Plan to everyone.

This was a special Sunday when the children from our weekday Christian preschool had a part in the worship program. The preschool is full of unchurched children, so these sorts of Sundays are an opportunity to extend hospitality to them and to give them a snapshot of Christian faith. Most of our preschool families were first-generation Chinese immigrants, schooled in the sciences, but with family histories including some combination of Asian folk-religions (ancestor worship) and pure secularism.

My strategy on this occasion was to have the preschool children in early in the service, and as part of their time in worship to tell them the Noah story. Then after the children were excused I'd have time for a short adult message designed especially for this audience.

Children's Time: Remembering the Rainbow

- Interact w/ kids as they put up crepe paper in correct color order for a rainbow.
- Gather the children around and use a big storybook full of pictures to tell the Noah story. While I did this, we projected the same pictures up with [Google Slides](#) so that the parents could follow along.
- Show them how God makes a rainbow with white light through a glass prism.
- Give out rainbow disks as they leave as a way to remind them that God loves them and will take care of them forever.

After the kids left we did some other worshipful things, then I circled back to deliver the adult sermon (which I had set up earlier by telling them the Noah story).

Adult sermon

I trust you got the point I was making to the kids ...

God made a promise and gave the rainbow as a perpetual reminder that he will honor his promise.

In the Bible, God uses this technique quite a bit. For example:

- Cross
- Communion
- Baptism
- Little piles of stones ... *(this is a slide in the [Google Presentation file](#))*

It's a good technique for us parents and grandparents to learn to set up little reminders of significant things.

Friday I gave the kids a rainbow sticker, a string of balloons, some rainbow colored chalk – all physical items to help them remember that this morning I would show them how God makes rainbows.

We're taking our family to a Pacific Grove getaway pretty soon. Preparing for today's message reminded me to come up with some sort of symbol to remind my family about our Pacific Grove getaway.

It's an idea you can use, and I know it's a good one because it came from God himself.

There's more to learn from the Noah story

Perhaps you know the whole story. But in case not, the Bible explains the reason for the flood. Noah, his wife, 3 sons and their wives were not the only people alive when the water came; there was a whole civilization! Listen to what the Bible has to say about this civilization and what happened to it.

Read from Genesis... 3 slides (Gen 6.5-8, 6.11-12, 7.17-24)

This story bothers people. They want to know why a loving God destroyed his whole creation, even the people he made in his own image!

Let me tell you how it goes when a person comes into my life and decides to investigate Christian faith

I've seen the process many times, now.

At some point I tell them about Jesus and encourage them to read gospels. As they read the gospels, they like Jesus.

Then I explain how he died and why he died. Sometimes I describe it like this...

(In this sermon, I used “The Moral Self Improvement Plan.” It’s something I picked up from Bill Hybels at a Willow Creek Leadership Summit. Later, Bill included it in his book, Just Walk Across the Room - Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith. Be sure to see the Presentation file that accompanies this sermon. Below is the excerpt from Hybels’ book, pgs 137-138.)

Envision morality as escalating rungs on a ladder. God sits at the top of the ladder because he is holy—he’s perfectly moral. And of course, really evil people are at the bottom—mass murderers and the like. The rest of humanity is somewhere in between. When I draw this for people, I ask them to put a mark somewhere on the ladder that represents where they believe they are, based on what kind of morals they keep.

Before I go any further, though, I toss in a few assumptions. ‘Mother Teresa,’ I say, ‘would probably qualify for a rung about three-fourths of the way up. And just as a guess, Billy Graham probably falls right below her. As far as I’m concerned, I guarantee I land lower than those two.’ I place the initial of the three of us on the ladder, leaving an honorable amount of space between BG (Billy Graham) and BH (me). I know my place.

Then I hand over the pen. Inevitably, the person I’m in conversation with writes his or her initials just south of me.

‘Okay,’ I say. ‘Here’s my only question: What is your plan to make up your gap?’

‘Mother Teresa had a plan for her morality gap,’ I continue. ‘It was the cross of Jesus Christ. Billy Graham has a plan for closing the gap between his level of morality and God’s standard of perfection. It’s the cross of Jesus Christ. So what is your plan? If you believe that you can rise to the standard of God’s holiness on a self-improvement program, you will waste the rest of your life in spin cycle.

Real freedom is found when you ditch your man-made plans and choose instead to accept the work that Jesus did on the cross. You can be forgiven. You can live an abundant life. Your morality gap can be closed once and for all by choosing faith in Christ.’”

Within a few months my friend is reading the Old Testament.

Pretty quickly, right in the 6th chapter of the first book they read this Noah story and it stops them cold.

They wonder: “Where’s the Grace Plan for these people that died in flood!?”

They usually keep reading anyway and guess what they run into – more stories like Noah’s.

Soon my friend is back wanting to know what’s up? Where’s the Grace Plan in the Old Testament?

So I explain Hades to them

In Old Testament when people died, God didn't put them through some eternal judgment, they went to Hades. It's sort of a holding bin, like cache memory.

Then when Jesus comes, in the New Testament, he lives a completely holy life, the first one ever lived, and the only one since.

Instead of proudly clinging to his perfect life, Jesus does something astounding. He voluntarily dies on a cross, accepting the natural consequences of the world's sin so that people like you and me can be saved from the natural consequences of our sins.

There's this 3-day period after the crucifixion, when Jesus is buried in a grave and not yet resurrected. The Bible has some astonishing things to say about what Jesus did during these 3 days.

Listen ... read 1 Peter 3.18-20.

If you have time and want to develop this thinking further, take a close look at Romans 3.6, where the NLT says that God is "entirely fair." Connect this passage with Romans 3.25-26, where Paul acknowledges that God wasn't entirely just in every case within the Old Testament, and knew that to be a holy God he'd need a strategy that included righting these "wrongs."

It's time to wrap-up the Adult message for this morning.

1. Are you rejecting Christian faith because God seems unfair in the Old Testament? ... Give it up!
2. Are you still on the Moral Self Improvement plan? ... Give it up!
3. Are you expecting a 2nd chance at the Grace Plan in some sort of afterlife... give that up, too.
4. God is offering his Grace Plan to you only in this life. Why not consider receiving it?

Would you like to know more? ... Call me, email me, come back any Sunday.

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Slides . (Similar to PowerPoint)
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