

October 1

“What Changed?”

Genesis 6:5-7

5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

7 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”

Special Music:

Unchanging God

Praise TV Africa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPPmdzh9ydl>



A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

**I saw the stalwart rock
Speckled grey and tarnished
By years of lapping slapping waves
Glistening in the sunlight like varnished
Stones on graves.**

**Steadfast and unchanging,
Solid and true
Through both calm and stormy sea,
An edifice to be construed,
Always there, eternally.**

**From one direction
It seemed to prance and dance
As sunbeams advance across its face
Creating shadows and perchance
Giving form to time and place.**

**When viewed another way
Long shadows capture scars
Showing depth of grace and age
Forming pinnacles of lacy stars
Against a blackened darkened stage**

**The viewpoint can make all the difference
In the way that we approach our lives
The rock before us never moves
But our perspective changes as we glide
Around the rock in countermoves.**

**We can never truly understand
If we never change our view
If we never walk around the rock
And check to see tis true
And grasp the rock is not a faceless block.**

**There is always more than meets the eye
When standing in one single place
There's depth, and height, and shadow walls
With more than we can trace
With our single minded protocols.**

**God is forever our sacred rock
And so worthy of our time
As we explore his every face
And thus the ageless paradigm
That leads us on a path of grace.**

**Our God is ever changeless
Never fades with endless age
He never loses self-control
Nor is he given to senseless rage**

Instead he loves each and every soul.

It is we who change our understanding

It is we who change our views

We choose to view from every side

We never want to lose

The love that comes when we abide

Within the arms of our gracious Lord

Who gave his life for humankind

So that we may draw ever close to him

And in the darkness find

The light that burns within hearts and limbs.

When did God change? When did God's attitude toward His Creation shift? What changed His mind? What are you talking about, preacher? God doesn't change! God is the same. He was the same before Creation. He was the same after He created the universe. He was the same when Jesus healed people, told parables, washed feet, died on the cross and rose on the third day! He was the same during the Crusades and the reformation. He is the same today. He will be the same tomorrow. God is eternally the same. God never changes, preacher.

He is the one entity in this universe of ours that we can count on to never change. Mountains will wear down. Oceans will rise and fall. Civilizations will come into being and collapse when their time is done. But God never changes.

Wars come and go. Plagues and disease come and go. Floods, fires, earthquakes, tornados, freezing ice, and burning deserts will come and go. But God never changes.

There will be times of great harvest and times of great famine. There will be times of prosperity and times of poverty. There will be changes in governments. Maps will be redrawn. Science will advance. Morals will be restructured. Prejudices will shift with the generations of humankind. Time will continue to march on. The world will grow, and the world will decay. Life and death will continue to cycle. But God does not change, preacher. Steadfast and true, God cannot and will not change.

So, if God cannot and will not change, then what DID change? An angry, wrathful, impatient God whose sole desire was to destroy humankind because of

its sinful, ugly nature suddenly does an about face and decides that he loves humankind so very much that he sends a vital part of himself, his son Jesus Christ, to live among humans for thirty-three years and then die by the hands of the very creatures that he came to save. If God cannot change. Then what DID change?

We can't have it both ways. If God can be so provoked that he intentionally destroys the human race, all but a few tried and true believers, then how can he turn around and die for those same sinful, unthankful, disrespectful humans?

Maybe, just maybe, it wasn't God that changed, but our perspective changed. Maybe just maybe we don't understand the story of Noah. Or maybe we don't understand the true nature of salvation. Maybe we need to re-examine what we believe and why we believe it. If God is love and God never changes, maybe we just don't understand the story of Noah. Are we taking it at face value without ever looking at it with fresh eyes, looking for the God of love and grace that we put our faith in every hour of every day? Maybe, just maybe, the story of Noah is not a story of anger and destruction, but one of salvation and mercy.

Whoa!

Those are heavy, heavy thoughts. We grew up in church listening and reading the story of Noah from a perspective of God's wrath. But, perhaps, it is OUR perspective that is off, and we need to view the story from a different angle. Is God the God of wrath and anger, or is he the God of mercy, love, and grace? If Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek and love our enemies, the why is he able to

not follow those same precepts in the sixth chapter of Genesis? Can God lose his temper? And if he does, why is it okay to destroy an entire civilization? Is it allowed just because he is God, and he has the capacity to do so? Does God actually believe that we should be more gracious than he was in Genesis?

Man, that is hard stuff to even think about.

Often, when calamity hits, we are so very likely to blame God. Why would God do that? Why did all those people have to drown in Libya? Why are we surrounded by wars? Why are there shooters that set out to kill our children? Why? Why? Why? It must be God's fault. There is no other explanation. God is an angry God!

But when things are good, and life is somewhat calm, we are a little short in giving God the credit, aren't we? Suddenly, God is a God of love, mercy, and grace and he would never get angry at us, even if we don't give him any credit. Until, of course, there is another calamity, and then suddenly God is angry again. And still, the greatest theologians tell us that God does not change; that is okay for God to lose his temper and destroy the world, but we should be better than that.

I read a post last week from someone who was upset. They had been in an exchange of words with someone and neither had not been kind to each other. But the writer of the post had come down with the flu and it was their belief that the flu was God punishing them for the verbal altercation that occurred.

Is that how we see God? Peaceful, calm, merciful, and forgiving until we mess up and then ZAP, his anger sends trouble our way. Cause and effect. If we upset God, he is going to ZAP us. We find ourselves living our lives in fear of the one entity in the universe that was willing to come to earth as a human and lay down his life for us when he could just as easily ZAPPED us. It is almost as if we want to be ZAPPED as a means of keeping us in line.

But folks, it just doesn't work that way. That is our perspective talking. That is us deciding how God does things without really taking the time to get his opinion on what is happening in our lives. We may want to believe it, but just because we are caught up in a catastrophe does not mean that God is responsible for that catastrophe. Could he? Of course, he could. He Created the universe, and he can destroy it any time he chooses. But instead of wiping us all out because of our unfaithfulness, he came to give us a better understanding than ZAP theology and then laid down his life for us.

Computer programmers deal with two basic types of data transference. Each subroutine will either push data to the user or pull data from the user. The computer doesn't know if these processes are good or bad. It's just data transfer between machines.

In human relationships, this is actually referred to as giving and taking. We often see people that spend most of their time, energy, and resources taking those same things away from others. We find this somewhat unsavory. We call these people Takers. And people who are constantly giving of their time, energy, and resources to others, we see as kindhearted. We call these people Givers.

Takers often see Givers as weak and feeble minded. Givers often see Takers as greedy and selfish. But I think there is a little bit of both in all of us.

But what about God? Is he a Giver or a Taker? Or maybe he is both? Is God greedy and selfish in his demands of his Creation or is he loving, nurturing, and merciful towards his Creation? Do we really believe that God will offer us his love and affection only to snap it out of our grasp at the last minute because we fail to live up to his expectations? Even when he knows that we can't live up to those expectations. We are born to sin. It is a core part of our nature.

Yes, I know that is a lot to take in. But it is vital to talk about this if we are going to examine the story of Noah with open eyes and open hearts. What changed?

7 So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."

If God knows everything that is going to happen, then he knew all along that this was going to happen. Why would he even make humankind if he knew he was going to regret it? Why not return to the blackboard and fix the problem before going through all the effort of Creation?

I want you to take a minute and think about our approach to campfire tales. Picture Hebrew families gathered around a nightly campfire in community. Children running around. Men stoking and nurturing the fire. Women sharing food and drink with their neighbors. Then the old storyteller comes from his tent

and stands at his appointed place where everyone can hear him. Everyone stops what they are doing, makes their way to where they can sit and listen. With his deep rattly voice, he begins to tell one of the greatest stories found in the Old Testament, a story passed down from generation to generation. The powerful story of Noah. The Bible tells us in Genesis 6:9 that **“Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.”** He was a man who walked with God, listened to his words, and did as he was instructed to in spite of the ridicule of the community around him.

Now, I want all of us to step out of our comfort zone for a minute and remember our own approach to catastrophe, how we are quick to point a finger at God when tragedy surrounds us that we cannot explain.

There is a very dark passage of scripture spoken by Jesus in Matthew 24:6-13. I want to read it to you.

6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

I want us all to note that nowhere in this passage does Jesus tell us that God causes any of this nastiness. There will always be natural occurrences and human-made occurrences, but we are not in a position to hang the blame on God.

Too often we see God as the avenger. But I challenge us all to see God as the salvation amidst all this turmoil. I'm going to stick my neck out here theologically, but when I read the Bible as a whole, I see don't see this angry and avenging God that so many want him to be. I don't see that dichotomy of "Good God" versus "Mean God". I only see a God that truly loves his Creation. I don't see God pushing humankind into the hell that we so richly deserve, but rather pulling us to heaven at great cost to himself. God doesn't send anyone to hell. Yes, I believe that hell exists, but I believe that it is the default place of existence for those who choose to not believe in God's freely offered salvation. He sees us falling into the abyss and sticks out his hand to pull us into his own home rather than see us perish. And yes, there are so many people that refuse to take his hand and complain when they hear the words that God sends people to hell.

Imagine we are in a barrel about to go over Niagara Falls. Above us is a helicopter with a rescue worker hanging from a ladder with his arm stretched out

begging us to take his hand. The raging water falling over the falls is so very close and the sound is deafening, but all we have to do is take the rescuer's hand. But instead of doing that, we chose to blame the rescue worker for not coming up with another way of rescue or for not just turning off the falls. It's all the rescuer's fault as we fall to our death. Where's the logic in that? The rescue worker was only trying to show their love by helping us, and yet they got blamed by us for our own choices.

The nature of God is one of salvation. Since the very beginning of Creation, God has continuously reached out his hand to pull the souls of humankind into his kingdom to feast at his table. And humankind has continuously chosen to ignore God's hand, reaching instead for false promises and alternative routes.

And for that reason, I see the story of Noah as a story of salvation, not a story of an avenging God. God knew the flood was coming. He didn't need to cause it. God knew that he had only one faithful believer on the earth in the person of Noah. God chooses to save his Creation from total destruction through the family of Noah. He gives Noah, who has never built a boat in his life, the instructions, and materials for building the arc that will save Noah's family. But the tellers of the tale, like so many of us, want to blame God for the calamity.

I have no doubt in my mind that if there had been other faithful followers of Yahweh, that they too would have been saved. There just weren't any. Instead, we have an early civilization that (other than Noah) had turned their backs on

their Creator. God must have seen some spark of worship, thankfulness, and praise in Noah, a man who communed with his Creator.

All this is to say that I don't think the nature of God changed. I truly believe that God loved his Creation and found a path to salvation for Noah and his family. I am also willing to acknowledge that I find it more palatable knowing that God doesn't run around zapping people for their sins. People bring about their own condemnation. They choose to ignore their chance at restoration and redemption. The danger of hell is not real to them because if they believed in hell, then they will have to acknowledge that the hand of God is reaching out to them to save them. And yes, so many of them choose to close their eyes and go over the edge of the falls rather than acknowledge the existence of a loving God. That is the perspective of humans, not a change in the nature of God.

I want us all to ponder this theological dichotomy that has puzzled so many amazing minds among humans. How do we truly know the character of God? Do we believe that he finds satisfaction in hurling souls in the abyss of hell? Or do we believe that he willingly gave up his life on the cross, reaching out his hand to pull us into heaven so that we can avoid the abyss?

A person's true character cannot be found within the pages of a book, even the Bible. We understand a person's character through a personal relationship. We cannot understand the love of God if we are unwilling to let him bring us home to him. We need to open our hearts to the very presence of God and allow him to dwell within us, change us, encourage us to be his hands and feet, meet him eye to eye, mind to mind, spirit to spirit. There simply is no other way.

6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

7 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”

I can see why Noah would think that. I can see why Moses would think that. But it simply is not the God I have come to know, who cherishes me for who I am in spite of my sinful nature. Who died so that I might come and live in his presence. He could have chosen to zap me at any time. But instead, he continues to choose to love me even when I fail him. Let me ever draw closer to him. But I also have to say that the cross allows us to embrace a different perspective than Noah or Moses. How does the words to “The Old Rugged Cross Made the Difference” go?

And the old rugged cross made the difference

In a life bound for heartache and defeat;

I will praise Him forever and ever

For the cross made the difference for me.

We have the advantage of being on this side of the Cross where we can begin to understand how very much God loves us. The Cross did not change the nature of God, but instead, gives humankind a new perspective to help

understand him. I, for one, choose to stand in awe of my Creator, but I will not fear him, because I trust him with every fiber of my being.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God bless you all. AMEN

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