

SINNERS & SAINTS
Noah
Genesis chapters 6-9
Layne Lebo
June 4, 2023

I've been looking forward to preaching this series, because I find the stories of the Old Testament Bible characters fascinating. I appreciate that the Bible presents its heroes as three-dimensional characters rather than flat stereotypes. The men and women we read about in the Old Testament are presented as real humans with flaws and weaknesses, but in spite of their shortcomings, God used them to accomplish his purposes. My hope as we walk through this series is that we're able to connect the flawed nature of the men and women from the Old Testament we explore to our own imperfect lives and recognize that what was true then remains true today: God is glorified and his purposes are accomplished precisely because He chooses to unleash his grace in flawed people like us.

The Apostle Paul says it well in 2 Corinthians 4:7: "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." As I was talking through this series with our staff, Pastor Cindy Agoncillo shared a comment Jackie Peel made as she was speaking to our young adults about Abraham during their series focused on Bible characters. Jackie pointed out that if God desires to work through people, using imperfect people is his only option, because we're all flawed. That's so true. God's choice to partner with flawed people in Scripture reinforces his desire to work in and through our lives today.

The title "Sinners & Saints" isn't meant to imply that some of the people we'll be looking at in this series were sinners and others were saints. "Sinners & Saints" highlights that the heroes of the Bible—like us—were simultaneously sinners and saints.

In his book, "Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools," author Tyler Staton writes:

The New Testament doesn't call the earliest Christ followers "Christians"; they had another title: "saints." Today we tend to reserve that title for the most pious spiritual elite. But in the early church, it was commonplace--the everyday name for the everyday Jesus follower. That's because the biblical use of the word saint has nothing to do with

human competence and everything to do with divine grace. To call someone a saint is not to necessarily call them good; it is only to name them as someone who has experienced the goodness of God. – Tyler Staton

Calling someone a saint isn't calling them good; it's identifying them as someone who has experienced the goodness of God. As an example, consider the 1st Century church at Corinth to whom the Apostle Paul wrote the New Testament letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. The Corinthian church was notorious for its problems, including division over which spiritual leader people viewed as worthy of following, participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, and tolerating blatant sexual immorality in their midst. But despite all that dysfunction, in Paul's introduction to his first letter, he writes, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the face of their sin and flaws, Paul calls them holy people—saints. We're all sinful, but as followers of Jesus, we're saints. Like the Old Testament heroes we'll be studying this summer, you and I are sinners and saints.

The first character we're exploring in this series is a man who is widely regarded as one of the most righteous and upstanding individuals in all of Scripture. After his story is told in the first chapters of the Bible, he is mentioned multiple times in the Old and New Testaments. The prophet Ezekiel lists him along with Daniel and Job as one of three men who, despite their own righteousness, couldn't save the unfaithful people of Jerusalem even if they were to return from the dead and preach to them. And in the New Testament, the Apostle Peter calls this man a "preacher of righteousness" whom God protected from an ungodly world. The person I'm referring to is Noah, the man who believed God and in faith constructed an ark to save himself and his family from God's judgment against the sinful world.

Noah is listed in Hebrews chapter 11, the Bible's "Hall of Faith," as part of the great cloud of witnesses who cheer us on as we run our journey of faith. Noah's righteousness and faith is legendary and yet the last account we read of Noah in Genesis sounds like something from a tabloid TV show:

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. ²¹ When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.”

– Genesis 9:20-25

Following God's deliverance of Noah and his family from the great flood, Noah got drunk. In his drunken state, he passed out and lay naked where his son, Ham, found him. Ham apparently gossiped about his dad being drunk and indisposed and brought a curse on himself and his descendants. My goal in sharing this detail at the end of Noah's life, as well as other negative aspects of the Bible heroes' lives we're looking at in this series, isn't to tarnish their reputations. It's to emphasize that they were human like us, and in spite of their shortcomings, God used them and called them "righteous." To paraphrase Tyler Staton, calling someone a saint isn't calling them good; it's identifying them as someone who has experienced the goodness of God. Let's take a deeper dive into Noah's life now to see why he's held up as a model of faith and righteousness and how God used him to save the world.

Genesis 6:5–8 paints a picture for us of the situation in the world during Noah's life:

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." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. – Genesis 6:5-8

The words, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord,” tell us a lot about Noah, but they tell us even more about God. A question I always try to keep in mind as I preach from the Old Testament is, “How does this story or these verses point to Jesus?” All the Scriptures portray God’s amazing heart of love and compassion for his people, but this is especially obvious in the first 12 chapters of Genesis, where God repeatedly gives a fresh start to the human race. In Genesis chapters 1–3, we read about God creating the world and Adam and Eve, and the Fall occurs. In Genesis 6, we read that God regretted creating humans because the earth was corrupt and full of violence, so God started fresh with Noah. Chapter 11 tells us about people seeking to become God and collaborating to build the Tower of Babel to reach to the heavens, so God scattered them across the earth. In Genesis 12, we’re introduced to Abraham and Sarah, through whom God determined to bless not only their descendants, but the entire world.

The story line in the Old Testament can be discouraging as we read misstep after misstep made by God’s people, but through it all, God had a plan. Amidst the repeated failures of the Jewish patriarchs, prophets, priests, kings and ordinary people, God highlighted our inability to walk free from sin. Eventually God sent his Son, Jesus, as the only remedy for human sin and the cure for the physical and spiritual death that accompanied sin. As we unpack Noah’s story, I encourage you to keep in mind God’s reaching heart of love that is evident in God saving Noah and his family in the face of a world-wide flood that destroyed the rest of humanity. God’s preservation of Noah and his family foreshadowed the salvation He ultimately made available to everyone of us through his Son, Jesus. Follow along as I read Noah’s story from Genesis 6:9–22:

This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty

cubits wide and thirty cubits high. ¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him. – Genesis 6:9-22

These verses give us the basic facts that God shared with Noah about the destruction of the earth and about the ark God asked Noah to construct so that he and his family could be saved. In chapters 7, 8 and 9, we read more of the details of Noah's story: animals boarding the ark in pairs, the onset of the flood, the flood lasting for 40 days and covering the earth for 150 days, Noah sending out a raven and then a dove to determine when it was safe for him and his family to leave the ark, God's charge to Noah's family to repopulate the earth, and the rainbow God placed in the sky as a sign of his covenant promise to Noah and all humans that He would never again destroy the earth.

The Biblical account of Noah provides us with an overview of what took place: the world was filled with evil, God determined to destroy humanity, Noah and his family were preserved by God as a remnant through the flood, and the earth began to be repopulated following the flood, but we're not given many human interest details. Specifically, we're not given much information about the faith Noah placed in God that enabled him to follow through on building the ark, and the persecution he likely encountered from his peers over the course of the 75 years or so that it took him to build the ark.

I wish we had more of these details, because they're our connection point with the humanity of Noah. There are many movies and books that attempt to fill in these gaps for us, but while there is probably truth in what they portray, they are conjecture. As I was preparing

this sermon on Noah, I watched the Sight & Sound musical version of Noah. Have any of you seen it? I always enjoy what Sight & Sound does in trying to add texture to the Biblical stories by filling in details that we're not given in the Scriptures.

As I watched the Sight & Sound musical, "Noah," I was struck by the amazing faith it took for Noah to follow through on God's command to build the ark and by the resilience Noah showed in withstanding the ridicule and persecution of his neighbors who resisted Noah's pleas to repent and turn to God and who stood in the way of him constructing the ark.

Think for a moment about Noah's faith. Following God's interaction with Adam and Eve and their sons in the Garden of Eden, Noah is the first the Bible records that God spoke to. What kind of faith did it take for Noah to hear God's call to build the ark and to respond in obedience? What did it require for Noah to withstand ridicule and questioning from his neighbors to pursue what God had told him?

I'm also intrigued by Noah's steadfastness in obeying God in spite of everything that could have led him to embrace doubt and unbelief. Think about some of the questions that would have made it challenging for Noah to follow through when God told him to build an ark: Who was this God who spoke to Noah? Noah would have had no conception of a flood: water pouring down out of the sky and welling up from the ground to cover the earth. The massive size of the ark would have been unheard of, not to mention difficult to build. Noah persevered for as long as 75 years in constructing the ark. The people around Noah no doubt believed he was mentally imbalanced, and in building the ark, Noah was in essence declaring judgment on his neighbors.

With each character in this series, my goal is to have us reflect on our own lives and consider what truths we can learn and apply to our lives as we seek to faithfully follow Jesus. There are numerous unanswered questions we'll always have about Noah, but those don't have to keep us from making connections to our own lives.

First, I want us to think broadly about our focus in this sermon series on sinners and saints. It's a widely accepted principle that each of us live into the picture we have of ourselves. Our identity—how we view ourselves—shapes us profoundly. My first question for each of us is, **"Do we view ourselves as sinners or saints?"** The Bible is clear that all of us have sinned and

fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Being human equals being sinners. But the Bible is equally clear that because of Jesus' death for us, we can walk in freedom from sin and have new life. Sin and death no longer need to enslave us and define us. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" The issue of whether we view ourselves as a sinner or a saint is critical for each of us. We're human. We sin. We mess up. We fall short. But when we place our faith in Jesus and receive his forgiveness, we're saints set apart for God as holy people. Whether we view ourselves as a sinner or a saint makes all the difference in the world.

Secondly, I want us to focus this morning on God's reaching heart of love for us. When God was heartbroken by the sin and evil He saw in the world, He took note of Noah. Genesis 6:8 tells us, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." It's easy for us to go through life believing that we're unnoticed by God, that nothing we do really matters much. But the truth is that **God loves us, He sees us, and He's very concerned about what we do with our lives.** From the first pages of the Bible, God's plan in filling the earth with his glory and in drawing people into a relationship with Him has been that his people—people like you and me—would live our lives for Him, and in so doing, point others to his love. 2 Chronicles 16:9 explains it like this: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." Noah lived a righteous life and God took notice. He set Noah and his family apart as the ones through whom He would save the world in the face of a destructive flood. God also sees you and me. What we do matters, because God's primary plan for drawing people into relationship with Him is that people see Him through our lives. "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."

Finally, I'd like each of us to reflect on these related questions:

- **What does it look like for me to be a person who places my faith unwaveringly in God and follows his direction?**
- **Is there an area of my life where God is calling me to trust Him and live by faith?**

Noah was a man of faith. He lived in obedience to God's direction even when it was extremely costly. How's your faith in God? And specifically, is there an area of your life where God is calling you to trust Him and follow Him by embracing faith?