

**PP**How do you deal with evil? Leaders of nations that have a sense of justice, a sense of fairness, integrity have struggled with that question for a long time. How do you deal with evil? Is diplomacy the right direction to go? Is it war, sanctions, or other means of punishment of wayward and evil nations and groups? How do you deal with evil? Watch this:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Skvw5BqTEO0>

**PP**Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of England believed that the way you deal with or at least contain evil is by appeasement. You give in to evil just a bit so that evil will be satisfied and stop. At least that was Chamberlain's hope. But he was not as naïve as many make him out to be. Chamberlain knew that evil is phenomenally hard to deal with. So while he made his agreements with Hitler he also began rearming Britain's military. He strengthened the home guard. He sent the British expeditionary force to France in 1939. He prepared for war. He prepared because he knew that whatever way you try to deal with evil, evil is hard to deal with, hard to defeat.

**PP**How do you deal with evil, how do you defeat evil? God is dealing with a world that has gone from bad to worse. First Adam and Eve reject him in the Garden of Eden, they decide it is not longer good enough to be living in a perfect Garden, no longer enough to be hanging out with the king of the universe. No longer good enough to be his children, not enough to be called by this king, by God to participate in shaping the creation to bring glory to God. It was no longer enough. They wanted more. And so they eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and evil begins in the world. An evil that goes from bad to worse: Cain murders his brother, Abel; a man named Lamech boasts that he has killed a man for wounding him, a young man for striking him—and unlike a repentant Cain, Lamech is proud of his murderous ways. It is a downward spiral of evil until we get to Genesis 6 where we hear that *5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* Creation has gotten off course; God's vision of what this world was going to be, how people were going to be, this vision has been shattered by evil.

How do you deal with evil, with a people who whose hearts are constantly tilted toward evil? **PP**Here is God's story of how he deals with evil: Gen. *6.11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.... 7.4 ...I will send rain on the earth 40 days and 40 nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.... 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.... 19 And the waters prevailed so*

*mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits 1 deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. God's story of how he deals with evil.*

**PP**God's story, not Noah's story, not the story of the Ark or the Animals on the Ark. This story is not first of all about Noah and what a pain it must have been to build an Ark. Or the story of the animals and how tough it must have been to collect them and get them into the ark. For some reason we want to make the central character of this story someone or something other than God. Maybe it's our deep desire for ourselves to be at the center of the story, to be the one who is focused on. Think about it in terms of a bit of excitement that took place around the corner from my house this past week. Early in the week large trucks started pulling in and filling the Central Avenue. They unloaded cameras, props, and a bunch of other stuff. Of all things Zeeland was becoming a movie set, part of filming for the movie "What's wrong with Virginia?". **PP**The movie stars Ed Harison, Jennifer Connelly, and Emma Roberts. As we drove by the set one night I notice a group of about 50 people watching from across the street. Now my guess is they were all hoping for a glimpse of one of the main actors in the story, they weren't looking for one of the extras, they weren't looking for someone who had just a small part. They wanted to see one of the big name people. Big name people. We have this desire in our hearts to be a big name person, at least in what we consider the story of our life. We find it outrageous that we would live our lives not as a central character, but as a person who has a small part, that the focus would be on someone other than us. **PP**We want to be at the center of whatever story we are living and so we put Noah at the center of the story, it must be his story; he must be the central actor. Because if he's not, if Noah who does the whole flood thing is the central actor in the story, then house could I possibly be the central actor in my life which is so ordinary compared to his?

While we may want to be the central actor, while we may want Noah to be the guy, this isn't his story and he isn't cast in the leading role. By the way, this lack of a leading role in the flood story is one of the things that sets the story of God's flood off from the flood myths that we find in ANE writings. All the flood myths have a human being as the central character and not only at the central character, but as the hero of the story. But not the Biblical account. This is God's story. Contra what many of us remember from Bill Cosby's great and humorous skit on Noah, Noah never has a word to say in this story until the very end of the story. Noah gives no instructions, doesn't talk to God, doesn't speak to his neighbors, we don't even hear a conversation between Noah and his wife. God

speaks every word, gives every instruction, God has every speaking part. What Noah does is hear the voice of God and then he does what God commands so that what God wants done is done. It is that continual reminder as we go through life that we are always to see our life as part of God's story and to respond to what God calls us to do so that what God wants done is accomplished.

**PP**Push the pause button for a second. I don't know about you but this is one of the hardest things for me to keep alive in my soul. This idea that I need to see my life as part of God's story, that I am not a central actor in the story, I'm not the hero of the story, but rather God is at the center of it all and my part is to hear his voice and do what he calls me to do so that what he wants done is done. That my life needs to be the kind of life that Jesus spoke of when he says in the gospel of John, *6.35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.* Jesus comes not to do his own will, but the will of the one who sent him. If I'm going to be a passionate follower of Jesus I need to see my life in that light, that I am not here to do my will, but the will of the one who has called me to himself through Jesus Christ. So let me ask you this morning, "How is it with your soul?" I promised you a few months ago that I would stop and ask you that from time to time about how your spiritual life is going. So here's one of those spiritual life checks, a soul check. How is it with your soul when it comes to having your soul feeling at ease with the idea that you are not the central actor, not the hero, but rather it is God who is at the center of the story and your task is to do his will so that what he wants accomplished is done. Does that thought put your soul at ease or dis-ease? How is it with your soul?

**PP**Push the pause button again, back to Genesis. The story is God's story. The story of how he deals with evil, evil that is so hard to deal with. It is God's story of how he deals with evil by bringing justice. To a world and to those in it who have shattered what was supposed to be. To people who are continually turned toward evil God destroys them. It is a way of dealing with evil that we understand and often fully support. It's the reason we have prisons and courts. We are seeking justice and those who have done wrong we want punished. It's one of the reasons we have a military to force those who are doing evil to stop the evil, even if it means the loss of life to end the evil, even if it means the killing of the evil person or evil people. In fact, sometimes we are troubled by the lack of justice, by the lack of those who have done evil being brought to trial. We want those people brought in, we want them punished.

**PP**God deals with evil by bringing justice. It is scary justice; it is justice that is terrifying justice that our typical ways of seeing white bearded Noah and his cutesy ark don't even give a hint at. It is a justice that is full, complete, and if we stop and really think about it, maybe more than we really want. But it is God's story of how he deals with evil. In a world where people hold out that their God

would never condemn anyone, where there God is only love, where their God...well in that kind of world is necessary for us to see the truth: that the God of the universe, the one who is at the center of the story, that one of the way he deals with evil is justice. It is the story of how he deals with evil.

**PP**Well a part of the story. As God carries out his justice we get a hint of where God wants the rest of the story to go. We get that hint from one of the props in the story, the Ark. The Ark, a taste of what is to come. One commentator says it this way; **...shut up in the ark is a foretaste of what could be. A haven of security when this broken world order ceases. Here are the doves and ravens, expressive of a harmony between man and the animal world. Here the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the kid, the calf and the lion together. Here all animals are preserved to sing the praises of the creator. ...a new creation is pictured here.** The ark on the waters is a picture of where the story is headed. It is a story not just of justice, but one of hope.

A hope that it turns out is rooted in another way that God is going to deal with evil. He will deal with evil not only with justice by punishing those who have done wrong, he will also deal with it in another way. Back to the text **PP** Genesis 8.20 *Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."* **PP**If you listen closely these words strike one as extremely odd. God says that he will not destroy the earth again because every intention of man's heart is evil. This is exactly the reason that he destroyed the earth, sent the flood, because of evil and bent hearts, now he's promising that he won't destroy for the same reason. What's going on?

What's going on is that there is more than one way to deal with evil. God can deal with evil either with justice or with mercy. Justice means flood. Mercy means a covenant promise that he will not destroy the world again so that God's ultimate plan to deal with evil, the coming of his Son, the one who will crush the serpent's head, who will crush evil can happen. A son who crushes evil and a people who believing in and following after this son take up again that task Adam and Eve to mold and shape this world so that it brings glory to God. If God didn't do this, if he didn't make this covenant, if he instead choose justice there would be a need, as John Calvin said, for a flood every day.

**PP**But God chooses to have mercy triumph over judgment. He chooses to establish a covenant, a place of security from which he will bring about redemption and a place of security where his people can participate in his story. And as a sign of this covenant he gives a rainbow. Actually, in Hebrew the word is simply bow. We read in Genesis 9.11 *I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.* 12 *And God said, "This is the sign of the*

*covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.* God's sign of the covenant is a bow hung in the sky. The idea is that God who had shot arrows from heaven (lightening bolts) in the flood is now hanging up his bow in the heavens. Not only is he hanging it up but also it points upward, away from the earth. The hung up bow is a sign of peace.

**PP**God chooses to have mercy triumph over judgment, he hangs up his bow. That sounds excellent, but it is also troubling because it means that he will no longer use his power to destroy all evil, at least not right when we want him to. God is on the path to destroying evil, but choosing mercy over judgment means that evil is allowed to exist, that the destruction of evil is a long-term project rather than one that happens in 40 days and 40 nights. This choice of God to allow evil to exist has at times caused people to question the true power of God. Usually the argument goes like this: **PP**

1. A good God would destroy evil.
2. An all powerful God could destroy evil.
3. Evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, there cannot possibly be a good and powerful God.

**PP**But that the flood and the bow tell a different story:

1. God is good and is able destroy all evil.
2. But in doing so, he would destroy humanity, which is precious to Him.
3. Evil is not destroyed.
4. God is infinitely good and powerful, but out of mercy, chooses to wait to judge. In response to sin, he sent his Son as an atonement for all who would receive him.

**PP**God chooses to deal with evil by wiping out evil and then by beginning a new way, a way where mercy triumphs over judgment. He makes a covenant, a sure promise that speaks that truth with the rainbow as the sign. But the question remains, can God's promise, can his covenant be trusted? The answer comes immediately after the promise. We read in the text that Noah gets drunk; his son Ham whose name means hot or inflamed uncovers his father's nakedness, which means that incest, happens. It's Genesis 6 all over again. But instead of a flood to bring judgment, God is silent and for the first time Noah actually speaks curses on Ham and blessings on his faithful sons in this story. It is a new day, a day where one can trust that God will keep his covenant and all is secure so that the long path to destroying evil can go forward.

**PP**God story of how to defeat evil: it is a story of justice and of mercy. A story of hanging up his bow so one day his son could hang on the cross. God is in the house, *13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses.... God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us.... This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* The very words of God.