

Unsinkable

Text: Genesis 7:23

We are going to look at this whole chapter but it is really summarized in verse 23. "And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark."

I'd like to especially speak this morning to the children and younger ones among us, because we're going to look at a very popular children's Bible story, and I will try to speak at a level that you will understand, and hopefully you will take away something for yourself. I would like to speak with you first of all though, about a big ship that, no doubt, many of you will have heard of, called the Titanic. As you know, it was a great ship that was built many many years ago and it was built to be unsinkable. Many ships were lost in the past, engineering was not so great, but this ship was going to be different. It was built by the White Star Line and it was built with another ship called the Olympic. And in the advertisements for these two ships it said this, "These two wonderful vessels are designed to be unsinkable," and that's really how all the newspaper reports talked as well. There was one, "Shipbuilder Magazine," that said this, "These ships are practically unsinkable." A deckhand, one of the helpers on the Titanic was asked by a reporter if it was unsinkable and his reply was, "God himself could not sink this ship." Indeed, when the ship did sink when it hit the iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean, radio transmissions brought news to New York that the Titanic was in trouble and the White Star Line Vice-President, a man called Franklin, said when he heard these first reports of the Titanic sinking, "We place absolute confidence in the Titanic. We believe the boat is unsinkable." By the time he had spoken these words, the Titanic was actually at the bottom of the ocean. So much for man's Titanic. This is the best that man's unsinkable can do, but this morning we would like to look at God's Titanic, God's unsinkable ship, often called Noah's ark, but really it was God's ark, as we shall see.

I am going to assume that you know the story fairly well, you know that Noah was the only godly man around at the time, and he was told by God that God was going to destroy the earth because of sin, and that he was to build this huge boat, into which he and his family were to go, along with many animals, and that God would protect them in it. It rained for 40 days, and they floated for 150 days, and then the water started going down again for 40 days, and then Noah and his small remaining family was on a renewed, a cleansed and a purged earth to begin again, as it were, to begin in a new creation and a new way. But it does raise a question, I mean, it's a really exciting story when you read it, it has always thrilled and interested people, not just children, but it raises this question: why is it in the Bible? What is the purpose of God's Titanic, God's ark, God's unsinkable ship? Is it just a really exciting children's story? There's got to be more than that. God doesn't just give us stories for entertainment. Really we can ask an even bigger question: what's the whole purpose of the Old Testament? Why did God give us this book that's so full of lots of interesting and exciting stories? Well, what we have to keep in mind is, it is a revelation of God. That's what the ark story is, that's what the whole Old Testament is.

Nobody knew what God was like, who God was, what He required and what He did and what He said. God was way out there, man was down here, and there was no communication unless He spoke, unless He revealed himself, and that's what He is doing in the Bible. He gave this book, these books to Israel, He gave these stories in order to say to us, "This is what I'm like. This is who I am. This is what I do. This is the kind of God that I am." Even more than that, it doesn't just tell us what God is like and what God does, but it tells us especially how God saves, and that's what we need to keep in mind. When you read any story in the Old Testament, whether it's the Tower of Babel, whether it's Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, whoever we read about, just keep asking

yourself this big question: what does this teach me about God, and especially, what does it teach me about God's salvation? What does it teach me about how God saves sinners like me?

Earlier on in this book of Genesis, there's an amazing promise in Genesis 3. Remember Adam and Eve had sinned, God had come in judgment upon them and upon the earth for their sin, but in the midst of all this is a wonderful promise that is saying something wonderful is going to happen in the future, that by God's punishing sin, he's going to save from sin, and He promises that He will send a Man called the Seed of the woman. He's going to send a Man who will crush the devil and save those who trust in him, and that great promise gave Israel and all who read the Old Testament a sort of forward look. It made them always ask, "What is this Man going to be like? How is this promise going to be fulfilled?" So when we come to read the story of Noah and the ark, that's the big question we should be asking, "What does this tell us about this Man, this Seed of the woman? What does this tell us about how He is going to crush the devil and how He is going to save sinners?"

What would Israel, who were the first readers of this book, have learned as they read the story of Noah's ark? As they taught their own children, as they read this at family worship, what would they have said to their kids? I want to give you four answers to that this evening, four things we learn about God and His salvation, about the Man who is coming to save and how He saves.

1) The first lesson Noah, and later, the children of Israel reading this story, would have learned is this, very simple: God is angry with sinners. God is angry with sinners. That's not a very popular message today. A lot of people begin their message about God with this, God is love. That is not where the Bible begins. The Bible begins first with, God is angry. And notice, He is not just angry with sin, but with sinners. Again, some people say, "Well, God is angry with what people do, the sins that people produce." No, He is more than that, He is angry with sinners themselves, with you, if you are an unbeliever. What the story of Noah's ark tells us is that God is holy, that He hates sin, and that He will punish it justly. Isn't that what we learn when we read the previous chapter? We read about why God did this. We read, for example, in Genesis 6:5, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." So here's the cause of it all: sinners sinning.

And what does God say He is going to do? "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." It is very solemn. It is very serious, isn't it? That is repeated again if you look further into chapter 6, verse 11, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." What is the only reason for the flood? It's not just that God decided one day, "Well, I think I'll just flood the earth and start again." No, it was caused by sin. This was what provoked God, and really when we read from Genesis 3 on, we see sin increasing in seriousness and severity until it climaxes here in this chapter. It's interesting that the two sins that are named in this chapter coming out of the wicked heart of man are the perversion of marriage, the early part of the chapter, and extreme violence, fearfully similar to our own day and generation.

So this is what we see in the story of Noah, and the Old Testament believers in Israel who read it would have said, "Well, this is what God is like, He is holy! He hates sin and He punishes sin." And not just sin as a separate thing, but sinners, because sin does not exist apart from sinners, apart from people like you and me. This is what we should learn from this passage, children, young people and older people too. God is establishing a pattern here. He's saying, "Look at this very vivid story and learn the consequences of sin, of disobeying me."

Don't think for a minute that God has changed since Genesis 6 and 7 happened. No, as He looks at your life and He sees your heart and He sees what you are doing, be persuaded, be convinced by this passage, that this unchangeably holy God is angry with you. There is fury in His heart towards sinners who sin against Him without repentance. It's interesting, people think, "Well, that's very Old Testamenty." Not at all. If you look, for example, in John 3 at the end of that chapter, and remember, it's full of the message of salvation, "God so loved the world," and so on, but the last verse of that chapter says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Do you see what it's saying? It's saying there's a dark, fearful, thick tornado above his head, above the head of everyone that has not repented of sin and believed in the Son of God. It's abiding, it says. It's not like, well, it's there one day and then it goes away for a few days and then it will come back again. No, it abides. It stays. It hovers. If only you could see it, and that's what you must pray for, children, young people, and older ones who are still unbelievers, pray that God would open your eyes to see your sinfulness and the wrath, that is building and growing above your head and that never ever leaves you, that is there as you go to sleep, that is there as you go to school, that is there as you play. It's there. The wrath of God is abiding. God is angry with sinners and will punish sin.

Of course we see that lesson fulfilled in the New Testament. When Jesus came, Jesus took the sin of his people. He said, "Give their sins to me. I'll carry their guilt. I'll take what is due to them. Give me the wrath that's waiting to break upon their heads and pour it out on me." That's what happened at the cross. There we see God in His holiness, hating sin, punishing sin, even when He finds it on His own Son. Does that not convince us? He didn't spare His own Son when His Son took the sins of His people. Will He spare you? Never. God is angry with sinners.

2) And, secondly, wonderfully, God provides a refuge for sinners. That's what he did here in Noah's experience. If we go back to chapter 6, we read some awful verses, awful in the sense of the condemnation, the guilt, the fear that they produce. Verses 6 and 7, God is saying, "I am sorry I made man. I wish I had never done it," as it were. "I am going to destroy them." "But," verse 8, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." And even more amazingly, look at what God then says to Noah. Verse 7 & 8 is sort of God talking to Himself of what happening, and what He is going to do with Noah, but Noah doesn't know it yet. Then in chapter 6 verse 12, God looks on the earth, sees that it is corrupt, and then God speaks to Noah in verse 13. Now, just put yourself in Noah's position, children, just as if you were hearing this story for the first time, as if you don't know the end of the story, okay? You have no idea about a future ark, about how you are going to get through this, but God comes to you, you know nothing and he says, "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." It's over. There's no way out until verse 14 when God continues and says, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood." Noah still doesn't know the end of the story, he still doesn't know how this is going to work out, but can you imagine how happy he must have felt when he heard these words? "I am going to destroy this earth. I am going to flood this earth and purge it of every evil thing, everything that lives. Make an ark."

There's hope here, isn't there? There is a refuge being provided. This is God's initiative. It is not that God says, "I am going to do this and now, Noah, you'd better come up with a plan. What is your way of escape?" It is hopeless, isn't it, until God speaks, until God takes the initiative, until God comes up with this wonderful idea and provides and designs the refuge. This ark, about 144 meters long, 24 meters wide, 14 and half high. This is God's design. This is God's way of salvation. The Old Testament believers looking at this, reading this, what would they have drawn from it? They would have drawn this: yes, God hates sin, and God is going to punish sin, but God has provided a refuge. This is the kind of God our God is, He doesn't leave us without hope, He doesn't leave us to give up, He doesn't say, "Find your own way. Make the best of it. Get to work with your best brains

and your best skills and see what you can do." He says, "No, I've got a plan. I've got a way. I've got a refuge. I've got a place for you that's going to be safe."

So he goes on to give many instructions. God knew exactly what was coming and so he knew exactly what was needed. He knew how to provide it. He knew how to secure it. Old Testament believers must have had great hope that if Genesis 3:15 told them Who was going to save them, the Man, the seed of the woman, this story really told them more *how* He was going to save them, through the provision of a refuge, a safe place in the storm, a shelter from God's wrath. God has thought this all through. You notice the details in chapter 6, lots of details about the length and the breadth and the windows and the stories and the kind of materials, and the outside of it, the waterproofing of it. God is saying, "I'm going to destroy," but then He says, "but I will establish my covenant with you, with your wife, your sons, your sons' wives."

And Noah does everything that God commands him. And don't we see this fulfilled in Jesus Christ? The Old Testament believers saw again and again throughout the Old Testament, that God would reveal His wrath, but also provide a way of refuge, provide a Deliverer, provide an incident that would protect and shield His people, until ultimately this is fulfilled in the most glorious of ways in Jesus Christ, the Man, the Seed of the woman who would come. He is God's refuge, God's divinely appointed Ark. This is God's idea. Jesus is God's initiative. He is God's design. God knows exactly what is coming, and he knows exactly what is needed. He knows His wrath and He knows how to save from it.

He doesn't ask for us to make a contribution to this. Noah had to build this boat himself, but God doesn't ask us that. In the New Testament era, He does *everything*. He prepares Christ. He prepares Him a body. He brings Him into this world through the womb of the virgin Mary. He brings Him through birth, through childhood, through teenage years into adulthood, brings Him through much danger and suffering and pain, brings Him to the cross itself. And all the time what He is doing is He is building a refuge. Every single part of the person and the work of Christ is God building His Ark of Refuge for sinners. Every single aspect of Christ's life is essential. It's like every nail, every hinge, every piece of wood, is so intricate, so perfect. Everything has been thought of. Nothing has been missed. There's no hole to plug, as it were. There's no crack in the hull. This is God's appointed, and provided, and perfect, refuge for sinners, far exceeding the ark which saved from Noah and his family from God's wrath during the flood.

This Ark saves from an eternity of God's wrath. God provides a refuge. Never forget that, children. When you sense your sin, and you feel that you are guilty, you know that God is angry with you, and rightly so. When you worry about that God is going to punish you, if not here in this world, then when you die, that's good that you know that, but it's even better to know this: God has provided a refuge! God has provided Jesus Christ!

3) But thirdly, God calls sinners. God is angry with sinners. God provides a refuge for sinners. But God also calls sinners. He patiently calls sinners to trust in His refuge and take the refuge He has provided. Why do we say that? Well, it would be all very well for Noah to build this ark, but it wouldn't be any good unless he got inside it. People could stand outside and admire it, though it would appear nobody did. There was more mockery than admiration, but maybe somebody now and again might look at it and admire the structure, the work, but that didn't save them. They had to get into the ark. This is what God says at the beginning of chapter 7, "the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark." We're not sure how long it took Noah to build the ark, the estimates vary between 80 and 120 years. It was a massive project! He was doing it on his own as far as we know. But does that not communicate the amazing patience of God? Because what was happening during these 120 years? Noah wasn't just building an ark, he was preaching. In 2 Peter 2:5 it speaks of how God "spared not the old world," that sinned, "but saved Noah the eighth

person, a preacher of righteousness." Noah was a preacher. He was a builder and he was a preacher. He had a trowel in one hand, a hammer in one hand and a Bible in the other. He was building this ark and he was saying to people that were passing by, "You need this. There is wrath coming. God, the righteous God, is going to pour out His righteous anger. This is your only place of safety." He was a preacher. He called people to safety. He pointed people to the refuge and he said, "This is where you've got to come and this is where you have to enter." Sadly, only seven others did: his wife, his three sons and their wives.

God patiently called these wicked sinners to refuge, but they had to believe Noah's word and they had to act on it. It wasn't enough just to say, "Well, okay Noah, that seems fair enough. I agree with that," and then go on your way. No, they had to get *into* the ark. They had to put their trust in Noah's word and Noah's ark, or rather, God's word, and God's ark through Noah. It is interesting here in chapter 6 verse 7, God says, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing." And the word is actually to blot out, "I will blot out." The same word is used in Psalm 51:19. The Psalmist takes this same word and says, "Blot out my sin, O Lord." The Psalmist knows the language of the Bible, he is looking back and he is seeing what God did to all the wicked outside the ark, the unrepentant. What did God do to them? He blotted them out. He exterminated them. He removed them. There was no trace of them left. Gone forever. The earth was cleansed, renewed, fresh. The Psalmist is saying, "Do the same with my sins. Blot out my sins like you blotted out those sinners. Remove them. Exterminate them. Cleans me from them. Create me anew." This is what the Psalmist learned from the story of Noah.

God provides a refuge, God provides a way of salvation. Today we know way, way, way more than Noah and David about what God's refuge is, how we may get our sins blotted out, through Jesus Christ. But again, it is just not enough to *know*, there has to be faith. There has to be trust. We need to get into Christ by faith, by uniting with Him, by believing in Him. Children, what do you do when you sense danger? When you're afraid? Well, if your mum or dad is around, you run to them, don't you? You run inside the house and you throw your arms around them and you say, "Don't let me go!" until you feel safe again.

And this is what faith is, except you're not grabbing and hugging mum or dad, it is Jesus Christ, and it is not physical, it is spiritual. You don't do it with your arms, you do it with your heart. With your heart you can embrace embrace the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. You go to him and you say, "Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner. I know God is angry with me and I know His wrath is on me and it will burst upon me one day, but Thou are God's refuge, Thou are God's ark. Ministers and my mum and dad have called me to put my trust in Jesus, to embrace Jesus, to put my arms of faith around him. Help me to do so. Give me that faith. Give me that trust. I want to embrace Thee. I want to believe in Thee. Thou are my only hope. Thou are my only refuge. There is only one ark. There is only one Jesus."

God calls you. God preaches to you. God points to his Son and says, "Get into the ark. Don't wait another week. Don't wait another day. Don't delay." And not only young people can be running in, old people can too. The door is open, as it were, to the ark. The door is wide. Think of the scene of all those animals, just hundreds, probably thousands of animals coming into the ark, coming from every direction. I love to think of that on a Sunday as Christ is being preached, I think of sinners streaming from the north and the south and the east and the west, all different kinds and colours and backgrounds and ages and stages and classes, all the different varieties of sinners, yet all coming to this one place and all pressing in, all saying, "I must get into Christ! I must be saved! I can't spend another day without getting into the ark." God is calling you to the refuge he has mercifully provided.

4) Then fourthly and lastly, God saves sinners. He doesn't just say, "I'm angry with you." He doesn't just provide a refuge. He doesn't just call you. He then actually saves. He fully protects and completely saves all those who put their faith in him. Think of what this must have been like. The safety of the ark was an utter miracle. It wasn't enough just that the ark was built well. It hadn't rained until this time, and we are told the heavens had a sort of watery curtain, or canopy over the earth; a canopy that let down mist to water the ground. We are told that this burst open suddenly, and the foundations of the earth also broke open. I imagine it was like a tsunami, with earthquakes and big waves coming in, flooding, and then there was so much rain too. The ark started floating. Can you imagine the currents and the swirling, the thunder, the lightning, the flooding rain, the noise on the wood of the boat, the panic among the animals, the sounds outside, the terror, the awful screams. Then as the boat started floating, there were mountains, there were cliffs, there were jagged rocks. There was all sorts of things floating around that could easily puncture and sink this ship and should have, really. But no, because God was the helmsman. God was the captain. There was no tiller on the ark. There was no rudder. There was no steering wheel. God was in charge and He floated that ark in the midst of the storm, guaranteeing its safety and for all those within.

Nothing, nothing, nothing could get inside to destroy or damage. I doubt one drop of rain got in that ark. God secured it. God waterproofed it. God protected it. God steered it around Mount Everest and all these other Alps and Himalayas and the Rockies and wherever it went in those days. While outside it was just unimaginable anger and fury, inside was total, perfect, complete safety. God saves like that. That's what he promises to His people, those who put their trust in His Refuge.

You notice in the beginning of chapter 8, God remembered Noah, and every living thing that was with him in the ark. It doesn't mean God forgot him for a time. "God remembered" means God thought upon him for good. Sometimes I wonder about the words of the thief on the cross, "Lord, remember me when Thou comes into Thy kingdom." Where did he get that language from? "Lord, remember me." He was, as it were, in the midst of a storm. The wrath of God was breaking upon the person beside him. He could see this very vividly. Was he maybe thinking of the story he'd heard of Noah's ark? "I need to be remembered as Noah was in the midst of the storm. I need to be protected as Noah was. I need to be saved like Noah was. Lord, remember me for good."

God saves by purging the earth of sin and of sinners, renewing it and putting His people afresh on the land. Peter refers to this in 1 Peter 3. He speaks of the days of Noah in verse 20 and he says, "in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." What is Peter saying? He is saying baptism is a fulfillment, as it were, of this ark. He is saying what the ark, what the flood pictured is fulfilled in baptism. What happened in the flood? The earth was cleansed of all its corruption and Noah was brought into new life, and Peter is saying that is what baptism signifies. It doesn't secure it, but it signifies it, it points to it, it promises it to those who put faith in this Christ. He's saying baptism gives us a picture of exactly what happened in the ark, of the possibility of sin being cleansed, and washed, and purged away, and the believer coming out to new life and a new start. Peter's saying that it is not the water, or the ritual, it's not the ceremony, rather, it points to Christ's salvation.

It is Christ's death and His resurrection, it is faith in that death and resurrection that produces this salvation. God saves sinners. God cleanses sinners. God creates anew. God gives a fresh start. This Christ is unsinkable. You get in Him, you will never sink, you will never be destroyed, you will never know anything of the wrath of God, the anger of God. You are in perfect, total, complete and eternal safety. The ark of Noah was unsinkable for 40+150+40 days, a couple of hundred days. Its unsinkability was limited. The unsinkability of Christ is unlimited. He is as unsinkable now as He was when he died on the cross. He is as unsinkable in the future as well. Get into Him or else you

will sink. You have nothing to protect you, nothing to shield you, nothing to be a refuge in the coming anger of God. Get into the Ark. Amen.