

Unsinkable

Murray 2013

By Dr. David P. Murray

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Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids
950 Ball Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.frcgr.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/frcgr

We're going to look at this whole chapter but it's really summarized in verse 23,

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 evening to the children and younger ones among us, perhaps maybe at Communion times try your patience a little bit, make you a bit weary and tired. Last week, we had Preparatory Sunday where the focus is on getting Christians ready for the Lord's Table. We read a fairly long form of words to help with that preparation and then this morning, of course, more of the form, more long words and long sentences, fairly long service, and it can be really easy for you to switch off and think, "Well, this is not for me." Well, I'd like to try and switch you back on again tonight because we're going to look at a very popular children's Bible story and try and speak at a level that you'll understand simply, maybe a bit more briefly, shortly, and hopefully you'll take away something for yourself and maybe the adults will have to be a bit more patient tonight.

I'd 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 publicity and the adverts for these two ships and the commercials, if you like, it said this, "These two wonderful vessels are designed to be unsinkable," and that's really how all the newspaper reports went along 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 or when the ship hit the iceberg in the North Atlantic, 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 evening we'd like to look at God's Titanic, God's unsinkable ship, often called Noah's ark but really it's God's ark, as we shall see. I'm 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 he was going to destroy the earth because of sin, and that he was to build this huge boat, this huge ship into which he and his family was to go along with many animals, and that God would protect him 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 soon Noah and this 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's 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 to keep children interested and engaged in Sunday school and sometimes in church? 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 this book 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's 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. 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's 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'll 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's going to crush the devil and how he's 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.

The first lesson Noah, 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's not where the Bible begins, the Bible begins first with God is angry and he's angry, notice, not just with sin but with sinners. Again, some people say, "Well, God's angry with what people do, the sins that people produce." No, he is with that but more, he's 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's going to do? "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." It's very solemn. It's very serious, isn't it?

That's 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 sole, 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 come 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, Israel reading this would have said, "Well, this is what God is like, he's holy. He hates sin and he punishes sin." And not just sin as a weird separate thing but sinners, a sin that 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 from Genesis 6 and 7. No, as he looks at your life and he sees your heart and he sees what you're 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, remember it's full of 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'll come back again. No, it abides. It stays. It hovers. It's just if only you could see it and that's what you must pray for, children, young people, and not so young who are yet unbelievers, pray that God would open your eyes to see your sinfulness and the wrath, the tornado that's building and growing above your head and that never ever leaves you, that's there as you go to sleep; that's there as you go to school; that's 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 their tornadoes. Give me their whirlwinds. Give me their tsunamis. Give me these dark clouds. Give me every storm 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 Son. Does that not convince us? He didn't spare his Son when his Son took the sins of his people. Will he spare you? Never.

God is angry with sinners 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 these awful verses, awful in the sense of the condemnation, the guilt, the fear that they produce, verses 6 and 7, God is saying, "I'm so sorry I made man. I wish I had never done it," as it were. "I'm going to destroy them." "But," verse 8, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." And even more amazingly, you look at what God then says to Noah, this is sort of God having his own conversation in verses 7 to 8. He's talking to himself of what's happening there and what he's going to do with Noah but Noah doesn't know yet. Then in chapter 6, verse 12, God looks on the earth, sees it's corrupt, and then God speaks to Noah and he says to Noah – now just put yourself in Noah's position, children, okay, as if you're hearing this for the first time. You don't have the benefit of knowing the end of the story, okay? You have no idea about a future ark, about how you're 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 and God continues the conversation and says, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood." He still doesn't know the end

of the story, he still doesn't know how this is going to work out, can you imagine how happy he must have felt when he heard these words? "I'm going to destroy this earth. I'm 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's not God says, "I'm going to do this and now, Noah, you'd better come up with a plan. What is your way of escape?" It's hopeless, isn't it, until God speaks, until God takes the initiative, until God comes up with this wonderful idea and designs the refuge, provides it and designs it. This ark, about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, about 45 feet high; maybe they got so used to meters, I don't know, 140 meters long, 23 meters wide, 13 ½ 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: God, yes, hates and God's going to punish sin but God's 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 so many instructions. God knows exactly what's coming and so he knows exactly what's needed. He knows how to provide it. He knows 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 really told them more how he was going to save them, through the provision of a refuge, a safe place in the storm of 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. He's saying, "I'm going to destroy," again he says, "but I'll 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 this and then they saw again and again throughout the Old Testament, again and again God would reveal his wrath but provide a way of refuge, provide a Deliverer, provide an incident that would protect and shield his people until this ultimately is fulfilled in the most glorious of ways in Jesus Christ, the Man, the seed of the woman who would come and here he is God's refuge, God's divinely appointed ark. This is God's idea. He is God's initiative. He is God's design. God knows exactly what's coming and he knows exactly what's needed. He knows his wrath and he knows how to save from it and he doesn't ask, as it were, for us to make a contribution to this. Noah had to build this himself, he 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's doing is he's 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, it's so intricate, it's so perfect. Everything has been thought of. Nothing's 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 40 days of God's wrath. This saves from an eternity of God's wrath.

God provides a refuge. Never forget that, children. When you do sense your sin and you do feel that you're guilty, you do know God's angry with you and rightly so, when you worry about God is going to punish me, if not here in this world then when I 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. But thirdly, God calls sinners. God's angry with sinners. God provides a refuge for sinners. But God calls sinners. He patiently calls sinners to trust in his refuge and take the refuge he's provided.

Why do we say that? Well, it's all very well, as it were, for Noah to build this ark but you've got to get inside it. You could stand outside and admire it, though it would appear nobody did. It was more mockery than admiration but maybe somebody now and again might look at it and admire the structure, the work, 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 massive. 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's saying to people that are 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. But it doesn't in any way minimize the fact of God's patiently calling 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 in the ark. They had to put their trust in Noah's word and Noah's ark, or God's work and God's ark through Noah.

It's 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's looking back and he's seeing what God did to all the wicked outside the ark, the unrepentant. What did God do to them? He blotted them out. He blasted them to smithereens. He exterminated them. He removed them. There was no trace of them left. Gone forever. The earth cleansed, renewed, fresh. The Psalmist is saying, "Do the same with my sins. Blot out my sins like you blotted out these sinners. Remove them. Exterminate them. Cleans me from them. Create me anew." This is what the Psalmist learned, as it were, from the story of Noah. God provides a refuge, God provides a way of salvation. For us, too, who know way, way, way more than Noah and more than David about what God's refuge is, how we get our sins blotted out, through Jesus Christ. Again, it's 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, it's like what do you do when you sense danger? When you're afraid? Well, your mom or dad's around, you run to them, don't you? You run inside the house maybe 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 mom or dad, it's Jesus Christ, and it's not physical, it's spiritual. You don't do it so that it can be seen, it's in your heart. Your heart has arms and your heart's arms can embrace the Lord Jesus as your Savior. You go to him and you say, "Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner. I know God's angry with me and I know his wrath is on me and it's going to burst upon me one day, but you're God's refuge, you're God's ark, and ministers and my mom and dad have called me to put my trust in this Jesus, to embrace this Jesus, put my arms of faith around him. Help me to do so. Give me that faith. Give me that trust. I want to embrace you. I want to believe in you. You're my only hope. You're 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 him to the ark. Get into the ark. Don't spare another day. Don't wait another week. Don't delay." And not only young people can be running in, old people can too. Old people still have hands and arms in their hearts to embrace Christ. The door is open, as it were, to the ark. The door is wide.

You think here of this scene of all these animals and just hundreds, probably thousands of animals coming into the ark, coming from every direction. I love to think of that on a Sunday as I think of Christ being preached and you think of sinners streaming from the north and the south and the east and the west, all different kinds and colors 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, I don't want to get to Monday without getting into the ark." God is calling you to the refuge he's mercifully provided.

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.

You think of what this must have been like. It's an utter miracle. The construction was a miracle but also the very safety of the ark was a miracle. It wasn't enough either just that

the ark was built, you imagine as these, we're told the heavens which had a canopy, it hadn't rained until this time; it was sort of a strange watery curtain over the earth; a canopy that let down vapor to water. We're told that, as it were, burst open suddenly and we're told that the foundations of the earth also broke open. I think maybe in terms of a tsunami. There's an earthquake and you see these waves coming in, flooding, something like that, and then there's the rain too. This ark starts floating. Can you imagine the currents and the swirling, the thunder, the lightning, the flooding rain, the racket on the wood, the panic amongst the animals, the sounds outside, the terror, the awful screams. Then as this boat starts floating, there are mountains, there are cliffs, there are jagged rocks. There's all sorts of things floating around that could easily puncture and sink this ship and should have, really. No, because God was the helmsman. God was the skipper. God was the captain. There was no tiller. There was no rudder. There was no steering wheel. God was in charge and he's floating 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 Everest and all these other Alps and Himalayas and the Rockies and wherever it went in these days. Inside, while outside it's just unimaginable anger and fury, inside total, perfect, complete safety. God saves like that. That's what he promises his people, those who put their trust in his refuge.

You notice 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. Just think about this this afternoon, I was wondering, I often wonder about the words of the thief on the cross, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Where did he get that language from? "Lord, remember me." He's, as it were, in the midst of a storm. The wrath of God is breaking upon the person beside him. He's seeing this very vividly. Was he thinking, you wonder, of maybe a Bible story he'd heard of Noah's ark at the time and said, "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 and Peter refers to this in 1 Peter 3 and he says, 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's saying baptism is a fulfillment, as it were, of this ark. He's saying what this ark, what this incident pictured is fulfilled in baptism. What happens here? What happens here is the earth is cleansed of all its corruption and Noah is brought into new life and Peter is saying that's what baptism signified. 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 in a similar way signifies, gives us a picture sermon 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's not the water, it's not the ritual, it's not the ceremony, it's what that's pointing to that does this. It's Christ's

salvation. It's his death and his resurrection, his faith in that death and resurrection that produces this ark moment.

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're in perfect, total, complete and eternal safety. The ark of Noah somewhere in the world was unsinkable for 40+150+40 days, a couple of hundred days. Its unsinkability was limited. The unsinkability of Christ is unlimited. He's unsinkable now as he was when he died on the cross. He's 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.