

“HAS GOD FORGOTTEN ME?” **(Genesis 8:1-22)**

When I was about 5 or 6, one Sunday after church playing with some other kids behind the church, and one by one, they began to leave with their parents until I was the only left. I didn't see my mom or dad anywhere, and come to find out – they forgot me. They drove nearly three miles towards home before they discovered they were missing a kid. It happens. Make sure you count your kids before you head home today.

We all know what it's like to feel forgotten and abandoned, and it's especially hard when it involves those we trust and depend on. Throughout life, we depend on several kinds of people to be there when we need them – parents, policemen, firemen, and doctors – to name a few. It's beyond challenging when you're depending on them for help or answers, and you get no attention. Some years ago, I was waiting to hear back from a doctor's office over in the Rogue Valley regarding some test results. It was the kind of call you were anxious to get because everything was on hold until you heard from the doctor. I waited every day for a call, I waited a week, and then two weeks, then three. Have you been there before? I figured they would call me as soon as they knew something.

Finally, I decided to give them a call and they told me they'd check to see what the delay was and call me back. They called back that same day and apologized profusely. Apparently, my file fell behind some desk or filing cabinet and got lost. If I had not called, I'd probably still be waiting for the results.

There are going to be many times in life when we feel forgotten and abandoned, but the most painful is when we feel forgotten by God. King David, after running for his life, hiding in cave after cave, cried out, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1). Jeremiah the prophet lamented, “Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days?” (Lamentations 5:20). When we most need God to act on our behalf, He seems silent.

I imagine similar thoughts went through Noah's mind after he boarded the ark and the floodwaters engulfed the earth. God promised that He would keep Noah and his family safe from the flood, but He didn't tell him when the flood would end or when he would walk on dry land. When you add up the timeline recorded in Genesis, you find that Noah is on the ark a little over a year, and during that time there is no record that God speaks.

Imagine floating day after day after day on the open sea with no land in sight. One time my dad and brother and I were fishing on the ocean out of Brookings – a few miles out – and the fog began to roll in. We decided to head for shore, but found that our compass was not working. For several minutes we had no idea where we were or where to go, and we began to get a little nervous. Thankfully, another boat passed by and we were able to follow it back to the harbor.

At first, Noah and his family were thankful just to be safely tucked away on the ark, but as the weeks and months go by, they no doubt began to get a little anxious. This is going on and on. When will this be over? Has God forgotten about us? The first words of chapter 8 begin with the words, “And God remembered Noah.” This doesn't mean that God had a memory lapse and said, “Oh yeah, Noah, I forgot about him.” In the Bible the word “remember” means that God takes action to act on behalf of His people.

When God was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He remembered Abraham and spared Lot on his behalf (Genesis 19:29). When Rachel wanted to bear children, but could not, God remembered Rachel and she conceived (Genesis 30:22). When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Exodus 2:24). The word “remember” means that God takes action, and it speaks of His faithfulness to those He loves.

As we come to Genesis 8 this morning, we see that God remembers Noah in three ways. First, **He sends a wind to remove the waters.** Verses 1-5, “But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.”

It’s hard not to miss the parallels between these verses and the creation story in Genesis 1, and the fact that God is recreating the earth here in Genesis 8. Genesis 1:2 says, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” As with the original creation, the flood of Noah’s day caused the waters to cover the earth, and made the earth – once again – formless and empty and dark. There was no life. But God sends a wind – which is the same Hebrew word translated “Spirit” in Genesis 1 – to blow across the surface of the waters and separate the waters from the dry land – the same as He did in creation.

In the flood, God “de-created” the earth, and now He begins to “re-create” it. Like in the original creation, light will replace darkness, the waters will be separated from the dry land, and grass and plants and trees will once again grow on the earth. In the storyline of the Bible, God is showing that despite His judgment in the flood, He has not given up on His creation, but gives it a new beginning through Noah.

Notice that Noah is completely dependent on the Lord. He has no control over the water, and He has no control over the wind. Without God’s intervention, he is doomed. But in His perfect time, God acted and closed the springs of the deep and the floodgates of heaven, and sent a wind to dry up the water. He remembered Noah.

After 150 days on the ark – five long months – the waters begin to recede and the ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Mount Ararat is located in the eastern part of modern-day Turkey, and stands at a little under 17,000 feet tall. So we know that the waters were at least that high, and many think that the catastrophe of the flood – with all that water bursting up from below – drastically changed the topography of the earth, causing the oceans to become deeper and the pushing the mountains up higher.

People have been searching for Noah’s ark on Mt. Ararat for centuries, and if it was found it would certainly be a big deal, and further confirm that the Bible is true. But to the spiritually hardened – to those set in their unbelief – it would make no difference. As Jesus said, “If someone doesn’t believe when they see someone raised from the dead, nothing will convince them.” And for those of us who already believe, we don’t need to find the ark to believe – the Bible has been proven, time after time, to be historically accurate and trustworthy – and every new archeological discovery only validates what the Bible has said all along.

After 150 days on the sea, tossing and turning with no dry land in sight, the ark finally rests on Mount Ararat. What a great word – rest. But their adventure is not over. They’re stuck on a mountain surrounded by water. You can’t live on a mountain. The second action of faithfulness on God’s part is to **give Noah a sign** – a sign of life and a hope for a new beginning.

Verses 6-7 say, “After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth.” According to verse 5, Noah waited another 2 ½ months on Mt. Ararat, and then he waited another 40 days – verse 6 says – before he opened the window of the ark – something like a hatch – and sent out a raven to see if the waters had receded enough to get off the ark.

Ravens are unclean animals that like to eat on dead and decaying flesh, and the raven would tell Noah if the waters had dried up enough for him to eat. He gets his answer when he sees the raven flying back and forth looking for food, and he knows he must wait for the water to recede.

Next, Noah sends out a dove. While the raven ate flesh, the dove ate vegetation – and while the raven would tell Noah if there was death out there, the dove would tell him if there was life. Verses 8-9, “Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark.”

Like the raven, the dove also comes back, and Noah must wait some more time for the waters to recede. Noah does a lot of waiting – he waited 120 years for the flood to come, and now he waits and waits and waits to find out when he gets to get off the ark.

Verses 10-12, “He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.”

Noah has now been on the ark for 267 days and he finally gets a sign from the Lord – an olive leaf – a sign of life – a sign of a new beginning on earth – a sign that he could once again walk on dry ground. When you feel forgotten and abandoned, you look for a sign – you look for reassurance that things are going to be okay. Just let me know you’re there Lord – give me some hope.

I think of Elijah who felt abandoned by God, and he goes to a cave to curl up and die. God says, “Go stand on a mountain, for the presence of the Lord is about to pass by.” And on the mountain, a great wind tore the mountains apart, there was an earthquake, and there was fire. But the Lord was not in any of these big things – He came to Elijah in a gentle whisper – as the King James puts it... a still, small voice. We love big, bold signs to boost our confidence and show that God remembers, but most often He speaks in a whisper. He uses the small things in everyday life that we might not even notice.

I have found that God often speaks through other people – that’s why it’s important to be around church and be in community with believers – so that we can use our gifts to encourage others and them to minister to us. When we’re going through stormy season of life, God often gives us an olive leaf in the form of a phone call from someone, a card or message online. Someone will bring you dinner or bring you a gift. They’ll come to mow your yard or stack your wood. Sometimes God gives us an olive leaf through a Bible verse that leaps out at you. Sometimes the Holy Spirit whispers calm reassurance to your heart. God probably sends us more olive leaves that we realize, if we’ll keep our eyes open for the little things.

First, God sends a wind to dry up the waters; then He gives Noah a sign of life in the olive leaf; and beginning in verse 13 we see a third way God remembers Noah is that **He gives Him a word** – He speaks to him and tells him to come out of the ark.

Verses 13-17, By the first day of the first month of Noah’s six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry. Then God said to Noah, “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”

From all we know, this was the first time God had spoken to Noah in over a year. In chapter 6 God spoke to Noah and gave him detailed instructions on how to build the ark and when to enter it, but for twelve long months, there was no word from God. Job experienced the same thing when he lamented, “I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me” (Job 30:20).

Throughout scripture we see that God often takes His people through periods of silence... as some say, “a dark night of the soul,” where He doesn’t seem to answer prayers and doesn’t intervene on behalf of His children. It’s as though God just looks at them and says nothing.

- We see it in the life of Abraham, where he waits over 25 years for God to fulfill His promise.
- We see in the life of Joseph, who no doubt felt completely abandoned by God after his brothers sold him into slavery and then is thrown into prison after being falsely accused.
- We see it in the life of David, who spent ten years running for his life, avoiding be killed by Saul.
- We even see it in the life of Jesus, who cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Part of what God is doing in these periods of silence is developing our faith. Couldn’t He do it some other way? Not really. As I look back on my life, and I’m sure you can say the same, my times of greatest growth have come in the midst of hard times, not good times. It’s during time of trial that our faith is tested and grows more real and resilient. Faith is like a muscle where you must use it or lose it. Muscles are not developed by sitting in your easy chair and eating Doritos – they’re developed by lifting weights and by resistance. So it is with our faith muscles.

James Dobson said that it’s easy to have “convenient faith” when life is peaceful and there is smooth sailing, but God is looking for “tough faith” that trusts Him even when the storm is most intense. Many believers say that they trust God, but when storms of life come, they wilt. But when you cling to faith during the dark times – during the times when God seems silent – it builds endurance and strength. And after each storm you go through, your faith grows even stronger because you’ve seen first-hand how God brought you safely through to the other side – and you know He will be faithful to bring you through the next storm.

God remembers – God is faithful to act on behalf of those He loves in His time and His way. But we also see in chapter 8 that Noah remembers God, and this is seen in two actions that Noah takes. First, **he gets off the ark**. Verses 18-19, “So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.”

We think, “Of course Noah got off the ark – He couldn’t wait to get off the ark. Having gone over a year aboard a crowded, cramped, smelly ark – and having been with your family 24/7 – he was more than ready to get off.” But getting off required another big step of faith. The ark had been his comfort zone, and even though its living conditions were not ideal, it was safe and familiar. God is asking him to leave the known for the unknown.

The world he had known was gone forever – the cities were gone, the roads were gone, their home was gone, their food supply was gone – there were no doctors or grocery stores – the geography of the earth had changed and all the landmarks were different – nothing looked the same. Yet when God said, “Come out of the ark,” Noah obeyed and took the next step of faith.

I couldn't help as I read this but think how much the world has changed the past couple of years. In many ways, like Noah, we are stepping into a different, unfamiliar world where the ground beneath our feet seems to be constantly shifting. We're much more comfortable with what we know, and what makes us feel safe. Change is unsettling, but every generation has gone through change – although maybe not as rapidly as things are changing now.

In addition to the changes in our world, things constantly change in our personal lives. Some of you have lost loved ones this past year, and as my brother-in-law said when they got a call at 5:30 in the morning that their 36-year-old son had died, he said at that moment their “life changed forever.” All the great men of faith in the Bible went through changes, and we called to step from the known to the unknown...

- Abraham was called to leave his familiar, comfortable life in Ur and go to a land God would show him.
- Moses was called to leave the luxury of the palace to lead His people to the Promised Land.
- Daniel and his three friends were taken away from their home as teenagers and grew up in the foreign land of Babylon.

Walking by faith often requires that we leave the known and step into the unknown. One thing I try to keep in mind is that our faith journey on earth is temporary. One day our sojourn here will be over and our faith will become sight. My dad used to say that this life was simply a preparation for the next life. Knowing that helps us step out of the ark with courage and face changes, face new circumstances, and trust God each step of the way.

The second way Noah remembers God is that **He makes a sacrifice**. Verses 20-22, “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

The very first thing Noah does when he gets off the ark is He remembers God, by offering Him a sacrifice. Noah could have gotten off the ark and immediately started building a home, planting a crop, and hustling to provide for his family – but his first act is to remember the Lord and thank Him.

It reminds us of the ten lepers in the book of Luke who were healed by Jesus, and nine of them went on their way rejoicing that their life of affliction was over. Only one came back and thanked Jesus, and Jesus took note of it. When God remembers us, it's important that we remember Him. Our natural, human impulse is that once our dilemma is solved, once the test result comes back negative, once the check arrives we've been counting on, once we get off the boat and walk on dry land – our tendency is to forget about God – to forget to thank Him – and forget to worship Him.

The first thing Noah does is build an altar to the Lord – and upon that altar he sacrificed some of the clean animals and clean birds that God had instructed him to take on the ark. God smelled the aroma and it was pleasing to Him. He liked the smell because it was offered by a grateful heart, a heart that remembered the Lord. Centuries earlier Cain offered God a sacrifice, but it was rejected – it was rejected because Cain's heart was not right. God delights and accepts whatever we sacrifice to Him from a pure and grateful heart.

Today we don't remember God by sacrificing animals on an altar – but we remember Him in several ways, like saying grace before a meal. Our first instinct is to dig in and feed our appetite, but we pause to say, “Thank you, Lord. This came from you, and I remember that you blessed me with it.”

Another way to remember the Lord is to give Him the firstfruits of our income. When you give a financial tithe or offering to the Lord, you're saying, “Lord, I could use this for a lot of things, but I want to honor you and obey you by giving it to you.” Another way we remember the Lord is by gathering each Sunday to worship Him. There are a lot of things you can be doing on Sunday morning, but you get up and come to church because you want to remember the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.” If you remember God when you are young, you will set a pattern of remembering God the rest of your life. No matter how old you are, it's never too late to remember the Lord.

Jeremiah 51:50 says, “Remember God in a distant land.” Jeremiah writes this at a time when the Jewish people had been taken from the homeland in Judah and carried off into captivity in Babylon. They were now far from home, placed into a pagan culture, unsure of their future, and tempted to forget God. Jeremiah says, “Remember God. Don't forget who you are and where you came from. Remember that the Lord is with you even in a distant land.”

It's a good reminder for us as we go through this period of great change and uncertainty, and the values of culture are shifting so dramatically, it's tempting to despair and give up. We must remember that God is still in control, God still has a plan, and just as He saw others like Noah through time of great upheaval, He will see us through ours.

Noah stands as a great example of a man who endured a traumatic event, who faced an uncertain future, and silence from God for over a year, but he clung to his faith in God, and in due time God rewarded His faith and sent a wind to dry up the waters, He gave Him a sign of life in the olive leaf, and He gave Noah a word that the storm was over and it was time for a new beginning.

Perhaps you are going through a dark night of the soul right now, and if so, cling to faith. Allow God to use this time to develop your faith muscles – to grow in you a stronger, more resilient faith so that when the storm is over, you will come out the other side remembering and thanking God for seeing you through.