

After the Door Closes: Genesis 8:6-22

Main Idea: God restores order to His world and preserves it by grace so that His redemptive promise continues.

I. Ordered Again | Genesis 8:6-19

By Genesis 8:6, Noah has spent months inside the ark watching the waters slowly recede. He begins sending out birds to learn what is happening outside. The raven goes “to and fro,” the dove initially finds nowhere to land, and a week later the same dove returns carrying a freshly plucked olive leaf. Eventually Noah removes the covering of the ark and sees that “the face of the ground was dry” (v.13). But Noah doesn’t immediately step off the ark. Nearly two months pass between verses 13 and 14 before the earth is described as fully dried, and only then does God command Noah to “Go out from the ark” (v.16). There is an important balance here between wisdom and trust. Noah observes the world around him, gathers information, but his circumstances don’t dictate his obedience. Not every opportunity is something God is calling us to pursue. Proverbs tells us that “the simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps” (Prov. 14:15), while James commands believers who lack wisdom to ask God for it (James 1:5). Christians should pray, search Scripture, seek wise counsel, honestly examine motives and responsibilities, and then make decisions in faith. **The will of God is not discovered by chasing signs until we end up with an opportunity we already wanted to hear.** God has given His Word to govern us and wisdom to help us live faithfully where His Word gives freedom.

When Noah finally comes out of the ark, the language of verses 17–19 again brings us back to Genesis 1. God commands the animals to “swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply.” At creation God had commanded living creatures to “be fruitful and multiply” and fill the earth (Gen. 1:20–22). During the flood those boundaries were removed. Dry land disappeared, living creatures died, and the world God had ordered became covered again by waters. Now dry land has returned, vegetation is growing, animals spread across the earth, and God once again commands fruitfulness. The point goes beyond Noah being able to get off the boat. **God is restoring His creation to ordered life under His rule and Scripture consistently presents that order as good.** Psalm 104 describes the boundaries, seasons, creatures, food, and rhythms of creation as works of God’s wisdom, all dependent upon His continued provision (Ps. 104:19–30). Paul says that all things were created through Christ and for Christ, and that “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17). This confronts a common assumption in our culture that freedom means growing past the limitations placed upon us. Biblically, created limits are not enemies of human flourishing. We are creatures rather than the Creator living under God’s moral authority. Sin promises that life will become fuller when we reject God’s order. **But Genesis has shown us from the beginning that life flourishes under the ordering Word of God, while rebellion against the Creator eventually produces disorder and death.**

There is also something important about God bringing Noah out of the ark in the first place. The ark had been the place of safety while judgment covered the earth, but God never intended Noah to remain there forever. Noah is brought safely through judgment and then sent back into God’s world to live under God’s command. Christians can sometimes function primarily in terms of withdrawal. The world is sinful and culture is increasingly at odds with God, so retreat can appear safer. Scripture certainly calls Christians to put sin to death, but that should not cause them to neglect the responsibilities God has given them. Jesus prayed concerning His disciples, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Believers are called to raise families, work honestly, love neighbors, serve churches, make disciples, practice hospitality, and pursue holiness in the midst of a fallen world. Noah could not spend the rest of his life staring out the window of the refuge God had provided. God preserved Noah and then called him out of the ark. **God’s grace isn’t only a refuge from the broken world. His grace empowers His people to live faithfully in it.**

To Ponder:

1. Why can an “open door” be a poor way to determine God’s will?
2. How should knowing that God preserves us in a fallen world shape the way we live in that world?

3. How should believers practically work through making wise choices when scripture doesn't explicitly give a command about some of the decisions in our lives? What means has God given us to depend on him?

II. Promise Preserved | Genesis 8:20-22

The first thing Scripture records Noah building outside the ark is an altar. He takes from the clean animals God had preserved and offers burnt offerings to the LORD. Verse 21 says that the LORD smelled the "pleasing aroma," language that Scripture later uses repeatedly for sacrifices accepted by God (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17). Noah had already received God's favor, already been preserved through judgment, and already been brought safely onto dry ground. **Noah's worship is therefore a response to the grace shown to him rather than an attempt to earn it.** Fallen sinners can't freely decide on their own terms how they will approach a holy God. Cain has already shown us that sincerity by itself doesn't make worship acceptable (Gen. 4:3–7). The sacrificial system will later make clear that access to God requires atonement, and those sacrifices eventually point beyond themselves to Christ. Paul deliberately uses this same language when he says that Christ "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). Noah offers something God accepts, but Noah's sacrifice can't cleanse the human heart or permanently remove guilt. Christ offers Himself. Hebrews says that His single sacrifice actually perfects those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:11–14). **Christian worship begins with the recognition that we do not make ourselves acceptable to God. We come to Him because He has provided the sacrifice by which sinners are received.**

That truth becomes even more important when we read God's assessment of mankind in verse 21: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." The wording deliberately recalls Genesis 6:5, where God saw that "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." An entire generation has been swept away in judgment, but the fundamental problem of humanity has not been taken away with them. Scripture repeatedly places sin's deepest problem within us. Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9). Jesus teaches that evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, pride, and foolishness come "from within, out of the heart of man" (Mark 7:20–23). **For a culture that continually searches for an external solution to an internal problem it will constantly find itself only solving surface issues.** Christians should value the law, education, and other cultural boundaries, and pursue the good they can accomplish. But none of them can replace a heart of stone. Christianity is not a program for producing better behaved fallen people. Jesus says, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). God promised through Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek. 36:26). **Our deepest need is not a better environment, but completely new hearts.**

What is remarkable is that God's promise in verses 21–22 is made with humanity's continuing corruption fully in mind. God promises that while the earth remains, "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." God preserves the fallen world according to His own merciful purpose. Theologians have often described this kindness as God's common grace. Jesus says that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. 5:45), and Paul tells unbelievers that God has not left Himself without witness because He gives "rains from heaven and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:17). Romans 2:4 says that this kind of kindness is intended to lead sinners to repentance. **The continuation of ordinary life is therefore both mercy and patience.** Another sunrise, another harvest, another generation, and another year exist because God continues to sustain the world in which His redemptive purposes are being accomplished. The promised offspring of Genesis 3:15 still must come. Today, God's patience continues while the Gospel goes to the nations (2 Pet. 3:9). But Genesis 8 carefully says these rhythms continue only "while the earth remains." The present order is preserved, not permanent. Scripture points toward a day when judgment comes again and God brings forth "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). **God preserves this fallen world to faithfully bring about his promises.**

To Ponder:

4. What are common ways our culture attempts to solve the evil in the world? How has the Church sometimes adopted the same solutions rather than focusing on a transformed heart?
5. When you think about your own spiritual growth, are you more focused on changing your behavior or having your heart changed by God?