

Feb 23rd 2014: Baptismal service for Lucas Walton: 1 Peter 3:18-22

There is a film that is about to be released which will no doubt attract a lot of interest throughout Australia. Starring Russell Crowe it has a one word title. Noah. And even the non-church will know by that one word, basically what the story will be about. They will no doubt not be surprised as we who know the story will be, by the weird stuff in it. And there is some weird stuff. Just one comment I read was: ***"I like Russell Crowe, but when you get Russell Crowe, you get Russell Crowe – You get the tough guy, not Noah."***

Peter's readers knew the real story of Noah and the ark and when Peter referred to it in his first letter they knew that his focus was not on the drama of the story. Not on the part Noah played, or the animals played, or the people to whom he preached played. They knew that his focus was on the judgment that the justice of God brought upon an extremely wicked world, and the salvation that His mercy and grace delivered to Noah and his family.

And the interesting thing is that it was the water that was both the instrument of judgment and the instrument of salvation. It caused the destruction of all outside the ark and it caused the ark and those in it to be kept from the judgment that the flood brought.

This double use of water....able to bring both good and bad....was mentioned in the news recently in connection with the cyclone that hit Queensland. It brought with it copious amounts of rain that caused destructive flooding in many areas. Yet there was also the hope that as the cyclone continued inland it would bring sufficient amounts of water to truly break the drought that the land had suffered for years. That it would bring life!

The water in Noah's day meant death for those who refused to take God and His ways seriously. But for Noah and his family. For those who listened to God and put their faith in Him. The water lifted them to safety as they took refuge in the Ark that was built upon all the words that God spoke to Noah.

It's the same mystery that we see in the Gospel story. We have the cross on which death reigned. On which Jesus endured the judgment for the sins of the world. He died upon that cross and the powers of evil and darkness rejoiced at what they perceived to be His defeat.

Peter mentions this in this passage in v18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body

Jesus, God the Son. Had to die upon the cross in order to bear the punishment of our sins. He being perfectly pure and righteous endured the most shocking and terrible physical and spiritual suffering on the cross: for Him it was the instrument of judgment.

Yet we have an image of that cross upon our church wall. Some of you are wearing it around your neck. We feature it on our church letter head. This terrible thing that brought about the death of our Saviour we honour, because it is also the instrument of our deliverance. For what brought judgment upon Christ also brought salvation for those who trust in Him. Because His death upon that cross was followed by His resurrection.

The rest of v18 says

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

Even as the water carried out God's judgment against wickedness, so the cross carried out God's judgment against our sin, causing the righteous one to die in our place.

And even as that same water also caused the ark to float for 150 days with Noah and his family safe within it, so the cross caused the death that was necessary for the resurrection that gives us eternal life to occur.

So Peter goes on to say in v20-v22

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

The waters of the flood stand, says Peter, as a symbol of baptism for a Christian.

As the believer, in this case Lucas, goes beneath the water it is as though he is descending into that judgment of God that the flood waters bought back in

Noah's time. But his trust is not in his own goodness to save him but the perfect goodness of God the Son. When he comes above the water it is the sign of the resurrection that will be his one day because of his commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Being in the ark is a picture of a believer's life being safe in Jesus Christ. Receiving from Him forgiveness, protection, security, and the assurance that whatever storms in life we may sail through, He will finally bring us safely home.

I love the illustration from the book "100 Meditations on Hope" that tells the story of a little bird clinging to a tree in the midst of a great storm and yet seeming to be calm and unafraid. As the wind tore at the tree the bird continued to look into the face of the storm as if to say, "Shake me off; I still have wings"

And I know that as a Christian I can look the experience of death in the face and confidently say because of Christ's resurrection—"Shake me off; I still have wings. I'll live anyway."

Can you say that with confidence this morning because you have believed in Jesus as God the Son. You have acknowledge your personal need for His forgiveness to make you safe on the day of judgment Or do you need to fully put your trust in the One who desires to rescue you, and then, like Lucas today, and millions more since the day of Pentecost, proclaim that commitment before others in this Biblical act of baptism?