

Turning the Page (Genesis 6:18; 33:4, 12; Luke 8:7-48)

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/turning-the-page

Thank you for being a part of worship today. My name is Todd Pridemore. My wife, Carolyn and I and our three sons have been a part of First Baptist Church for several years now. Which seems kind of strange to say since we haven't been able to shake hands or hugs or even be in the same room as many of you during the last few months.

Today – depending on when you're watching this – is the 1st Sunday of a new year. And I know many of us are certainly ready to turn the page on 2020 and we look forward to 2021 with hope and a desire for better circumstances and better news. I actually brought a 2020 wall calendar with me because I feel the need to let you know that I'm really a month ahead of the rest of you. This is a Mizzou alumni association calendar, and I know if this was done with prophetic forethought or not, but about a month ago, when I took this calendar off the call to turn it from November to December, I realized that this calendar had no month of December in it at all! I had to laugh, and selfishly I am a bit happy that I was able to move on to 2021 a month ahead of schedule.

Of course, there are all kinds of things that happened last year that we are excited and more than ready to put behind us. I thought about giving you a recap of some of bad news stories from around the world, around the country, within our community, and even within this church that we want to turn the page and move on from – but I'm not going to do that.

Instead, I want you to join me in thinking about three different stories from the Bible that involve people that were ready to turn the page in their own lives... people that dealt with some of the things that we can identify with from the past year. And as we think about these stories, I invite you think about the common themes that tie all three stories together, and – most importantly – what does God want us to keep in mind as we begin this new year? Near the end of the message, I'm going to ask you to share your thoughts with all of us by using the comment box on your screen. I'm excited to see how God speaks to each one of us through the Holy Spirit this morning.

So, "turning the page." As I thought about what it means to be in a situation that we are more than ready to get out of... to move on from... to put firmly behind us – three Bible stories that entered my mind dealt with three different situations. The first story involves an "act of God" circumstance that no one had any control over. The second is a family conflict where tough decisions had to be made. And the third involves an isolated person who had lost everything and just wanted to return to some sense of normal. I think there are things in all of those stories that we can relate to.

We're going to begin in the book of Genesis, with the story of Noah and the great flood. It's in Genesis chapters 6 through 9. I'm not going to read the entire story this morning, but you might want to take time and do that on your own at some point. The story begins with news that something big and uncontrollable was coming – a huge flood. Noah couldn't stop it, and he was forced to deal with it. He might have had many of the same thoughts and emotions that we did about 9 or 10 months ago when we began hearing about this strange thing called COVID-19.

When you think about Noah and the Ark, what's the first thing that pops into your mind? For me, it's the images of all of the animals, two-by-two, that God brings to the ark and that seem to march in in single-file fashion. Everything seems so orderly and organized - But as I reflect more on the day-to-day living arrangements that Noah and his family endured in this story, I realize that it had to have been a mess. Once everyone and everything was on the ark, and the door was shut. And they were locked in there for month after month. I can't imagine how hard that was to deal with. The smells. The sounds. The extremely close quarters. The disagreements with family members. I can't imagine anyone who was more ready to "turn the page" than Noah and his family once the rain stopped and the water finally began to recede.

What do you think God wants us to remember from this epic story as we begin a new year? I'm going to read one verse that sticks out to me from this story:

But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. (Gen. 6:18)

Noah and his family had to cope with a situation they had no control over in many ways – but they did it TOGETHER. The second story we're going to think about is a bit different. It's in Genesis 31 – 33 and involves a lot of family drama. The main character in this story is Jacob, and it involves some very rough family dynamics with his father-in-law, Laban, and his distant, estranged brother, Esau. Again, this is a long story that you may want to read in its entirety at another time, but I'll give a quick recap.

- As young men, Jacob cheated his way into stealing Esau's birthright from their father. In today's world, it was kind of like one child stealing the entire family inheritance from their sibling.
- Esau was so mad that he wanted to kill Jacob, so Jacob fled for his life.
- Jacob ran for his life and ended up in a distant region where he married two sisters (times were definitely different back then!). From the beginning, Jacob's relationship with his father-in-law, Laban, was always touch-and-go and built on distrust.
- After many years, Jacob finally wore out his welcome with Laban and decided he needed to pack up and move again. The only place he knew to go was back to his homeland... where the brother who hated him still lived.

So, Jacob had some very difficult decisions to make and was really stuck between a rock and a hard place... stay where he was and deal with a father-in-law who was done with him, or return back to his boyhood home and be faced with a brother who wanted to kill him the last time he'd seen him.

Tough situations require tough decisions, and Jacob made the tough decision to roll the dice and move back to where Esau lived. Jacob made the best decision he knew to make, and set off to an unknown homecoming with Esau. As Jacob was approaching his old homeland, he began getting reports that Esau was on his way to meet him – and that Esau wasn't alone. Esau was marching toward Jacob with 400 men at his side, which amounted to a small army. Understandably, the writer of Genesis describes Jacob as being "in great fear and distress" (Genesis 32:7).

On the way, Jacob did two very important things. He humbled himself and sent gifts ahead of him to show Esau that he was truly sorry for what he did in the past, and he also turned to God and asked for God's grace and help. Jacob had an amazing middle-of-the-night encounter with God that was transformational and impacted the rest of Jacob's life. The next morning, Jacob continued his journey

and after so many years, once again looked at his brother eye-to-eye. With a spirit of forgiveness and unconditional love the only God could have supply, Esau ran to his brother and hugged him.

These are the powerful words that stand out to me from this amazing story of family conflicts, regret, and grace:

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.... 12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you." (Gen. 33: 4, 12)

The final story we will look at today is probably my favorite, because it's a Jesus story. It's found in Luke 8. A lot of things happen in this chapter, but I want to point out that in the opening verses we are reminded that several women traveling with Jesus who had been cured and helped by Jesus. But the person I want to draw your attention to wasn't one of those women, and we don't even know her name. Near the end of the chapter, Jesus is walking through a large crowd and he stops and literally causes a scene when he realizes that someone had touched him intentionally – they had reached out and grabbed onto him on purpose – because that person had faith that Jesus could help. That unnamed woman was suffering from a physical illness for 12 years... a condition that had literally cost her everything as she paid money to doctor after doctor trying to be cured. But she wasn't only terrible sick and completely broke financially. She was also alone and isolated.

She wasn't unknown for long, though, after Jesus stopped for her. Jesus wanted to know her and her literally stopped in his tracks – just for her. These are my favorite words from this story:

When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8:47-48)

I used to think that being physically healed was the most profound thing that Jesus did for this woman. But now I wonder if it was even more about the personal connection that Jesus made with her. Did you notice what Jesus called her? He lovely called her his "daughter." This woman who up until this point had been isolated and unknown was now connected with her Savior in a very personal way... in a way that changed her life moving forward... in a way that gave her peace that she desperately sought.

In these three stories, is there a common thread or theme that God wants you to remember as you start this new year? There are no right or wrong answers to this question. And I invite you to use the comment box on your screen now and share what it is that God has said to you this morning.

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Today we were reminded that Noah was placed in a situation that he had very little control over, but he wasn't in it alone. God gave him his family to support and help him. In the story of Jacob we saw that family dynamics are often difficult, and sometimes we have to make really hard choices. But the good news is that when grace and forgiveness are present, our relationships with family members can endure almost anything. Finally, we saw that a woman who was isolated and unknown was able to find connection and identify when she turned to Jesus.

For me, the thing that ties all of these stories together is that we need each other. We need relationships with people who help us, encourage us, and are in the struggle with us. In many ways, 2020 was a year

of separation and isolation from each other. In 2021, may it be a year when our connections with each other and with others are strengthened.

In closing, I share these final words of blessing that come directly from a letter that our Pastor, Doyle Sager, wrote to the congregation a few weeks ago:

“As we move together into this time of transition, let’s hold on to one another. And let’s hold on to our Savior who never fails us.”

Amen.