



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*At the Movies, Flops:
God's Greatest Flop*

Genesis 6 and 8 (Noah's Prequel and Sequel)

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INTRO TO FLOPS

For the next four weeks we are going to have some fun with movie flops. And we're going to look at how our lives can sometime parallel movie flops when we think about how we've messed up.

Before we dig into today's flop, the movie *Evan Almighty*, let's look at some different types of movie flops and their Biblical parallels.

TYPES OF FLOPS AND THEIR BIBLICAL PARALLEL

Not-Really-a-Flop Flop. The Not-Really-a-Flop Flop is when a movie doesn't meet or match expectations. Entertainment news these past weeks was what a flop the *Star Wars* movie *Solo* has been. Please explain to me how a movie that made \$168 million in its first weekend is a flop. It is clearly on track to make a profit at the box office and don't forget the action figure/cereal box/video game revenue that will keep piling up as well.

The Not-Really-a-Flop Flop reminds me of the resurrection story. Far from a flop, but didn't match expectations. Those who followed Jesus, the Palm Sunday crowd who thought he was going to swoop in and save the day as the next Messiah were counting on a blockbuster! If it would've been a movie, they would've demanded a refund on that Saturday morning! But as we know that wasn't the end of the story. I think God often works out of the Not-Really-a-Flop Flop model.

Fickle-Flop. This is a movie that is actually really good, but for whatever reason doesn't appeal to a fickle public. Maybe the timing wasn't right, or it got a few bad reviews early on and people stayed away. A movie that fits this model is *The Wizard of Oz*. It barely broke even when it was released and was considered a failure. You might have a favorite movie that fits this category of Fickle-Flop.

2 Biblically, I tend to think most of the prophets fit in this category. No one really ever wants to hear what a prophet has to say about societal excess at the expense of the poor and outcast. Or how we've strayed from God. Prophets never get high ratings from a fickle public.

Then there's the **Flip-Flop**—This is the movie that starts out horribly, doesn't make a lot of money when shown in theaters, but then becomes a cult classic and maybe even makes money in the end. *It's a Wonderful Life* lost more than \$500,000 when it was released in 1946. Come to think of it, maybe this should be a flop-flip instead of a flip-flop because these are movies that flop and then become hits.

Biblically, there are those who hear God's call and turn themselves around. Paul went from persecuting Christians to traveling the world sharing the good news—a flip-flopper in the best way possible. King David flip-flopped flip-flopped over and over again.

The outright **Flop-Flop**. There are failures, and then there are failures. These are movies that are ill-conceived, poorly acted, badly produced, blatantly racist. It's hard to even name any of these because we haven't even heard of most of them! They are the straight to DVD specials.

Biblically we can think of like Judas or King Solomon as flop-flops, but I don't know because they both had their good moments too. I'm going to go with Pontius Pilate and Pharoah as flop-floppers.

Movie Flops have a lot to teach us. They show us that expectations can be inflated, the fickle public is not always an accurate measuring stick of what is truly good, that what starts off as bad can turn out quite nice thank you very much.

And of course, that sometimes we really do fail, but that we can come back. Movies aside, flopping and failing is part of life. It mirrors life. We mess up. The Bible would be pretty thin if we took out all of the flops and failures. But it is our life-giving text because it goes past the flop to show how time and again God's people can rebound with God to create a smash hit!

FLOP OF THE DAY

Today's flop is the story of God, Noah, and a flood.

Genesis 6.5–7

God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. God was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart. God said, "I'll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes and bugs, birds—the works. I'm sorry I made them."

Now, we remember that this is early, early Biblical text. In the narrative scheme of things, humanity had just come on the scene. And to put it bluntly, the world had flopped. Humankind had gone off the rails so badly that God's heart aches, and so God calls for a redo. Here in our movie series it's as if god said "Humanity. Take 2!" Was humanity God's Great Flop?

This scripture has long been studied. This is one of those scriptures that we usually see as having more allegorical and symbolic truth rather than literal. Because literally, we've got all kinds of problems on the ark if we think there were two of *every* animal. And we literally cringe at the realities of the post-flood human repopulation plan. On the other hand, metaphorically, we appreciate the covenant that God makes with humanity in the end—in essence, God makes a commitment that no matter how difficult things

4 get, God will always remain with us (and oh, yeah, won't commit genocide again).

As odd as it sounds, it seems that God *and* humanity had something to learn here...that God loves humankind, and that God and humankind make a great team.

EVAN ALMIGHTY

We see this cooperation between God and humans in the movie, *Evan Almighty*. Now this movie wasn't exactly a flop, but neither was it a smash hit. It was a sequel to *Bruce Almighty*. This reboot had a mostly different cast and a refreshed setting. A little bit like post-flood earth.

In the movie, Evan is a hometown hero from Buffalo, elected to US Congress on the campaign slogan *Change the World*. And he really does want to change the world. But he wants to change it on his terms. And his terms don't include prioritizing his marriage, or his children, or others who got in the way. And those plans certainly don't include God. But God has other plans. Which brings us to our first clip: things are starting to get weird for Evan, and after an unwanted lumber delivery gets dropped in his driveway he has an encounter he'll never forget.

Evan wants to the change the world. For Evan, changing the world includes the classic delusion that if he becomes more powerful, if *he* gains more influence, if *he* keeps up appearances, *he* can change the world on his terms (and the luxurious perks along the way...they won't be so bad either). He buys a massive new Humvee, gigantic house replete with 300-year-old Brazilian Cherrywood cabinets, starts prioritizing his political accession over his family, and begins to sacrifice his principles for a powerful senior congressman. Going back to the scripture, I can't help but wonder if this the kind of thinking that makes God regret creating humanity.

Just like in the story of Noah, here in *Evan Almighty*, God had something else in mind. The movie has a nice story about protecting God's creation over human profiteering and what happens when we misplace our priorities. But perhaps the biggest takeaway is that when we want to change the world we have to work with God; we have to follow God's lead.

In *Evan Almighty* Evan transforms into a Noah-like figure. His beard won't stop growing. His neighbors and peers mock him and don't understand. But he begins to understand that it's not all about him. He takes on God's calling and accepts the help of his family, and a few other friends as well, as we'll see in this clip.

LESSONS LEARNED

In true Hollywood fashion, everything works out in the end. The day is saved, and Evan learns a lesson. And so can we.

First lesson, **Humanity is no flop**. At the end of the flood story in the Bible, God reaffirms the value of humanity in a covenant. God acknowledges that humanity is, well, human. And no matter what, God will never again leave us.

Genesis 8.5–6, *The Message*

Noah built an altar to God. He selected clean animals and birds from every species and offered them as burnt offerings on the altar. God smelled the sweet fragrance and thought, "I'll never again curse the ground because of people..."

Next lesson learned, **we must listen to and follow God's call for our lives**, whether we are called to build an ark, speak a word of kindness, give a gift, or reprioritize our lives or careers. God has something in mind for us all.

6 Last lesson, **we must work with God. God is counting on us.** The story of the Bible is a little bit of God working alone, and a lot of us working with God.

I don't know about you, but I'm ready to get to work.

