

The Quarterly



Genesis



Cities Church

Editor-In-Chief

Josh Adams

Assistant Editor

Michael Thiel

Art Direction & Design

Ryan Leichty

Contributors

Jonathan Parnell

Michelle Griep

Nick Aufenkamp

Sam Choi

Kyle Mclver

Linda Linder

Lily Thiel

Amelia Shumann

David Easterwood

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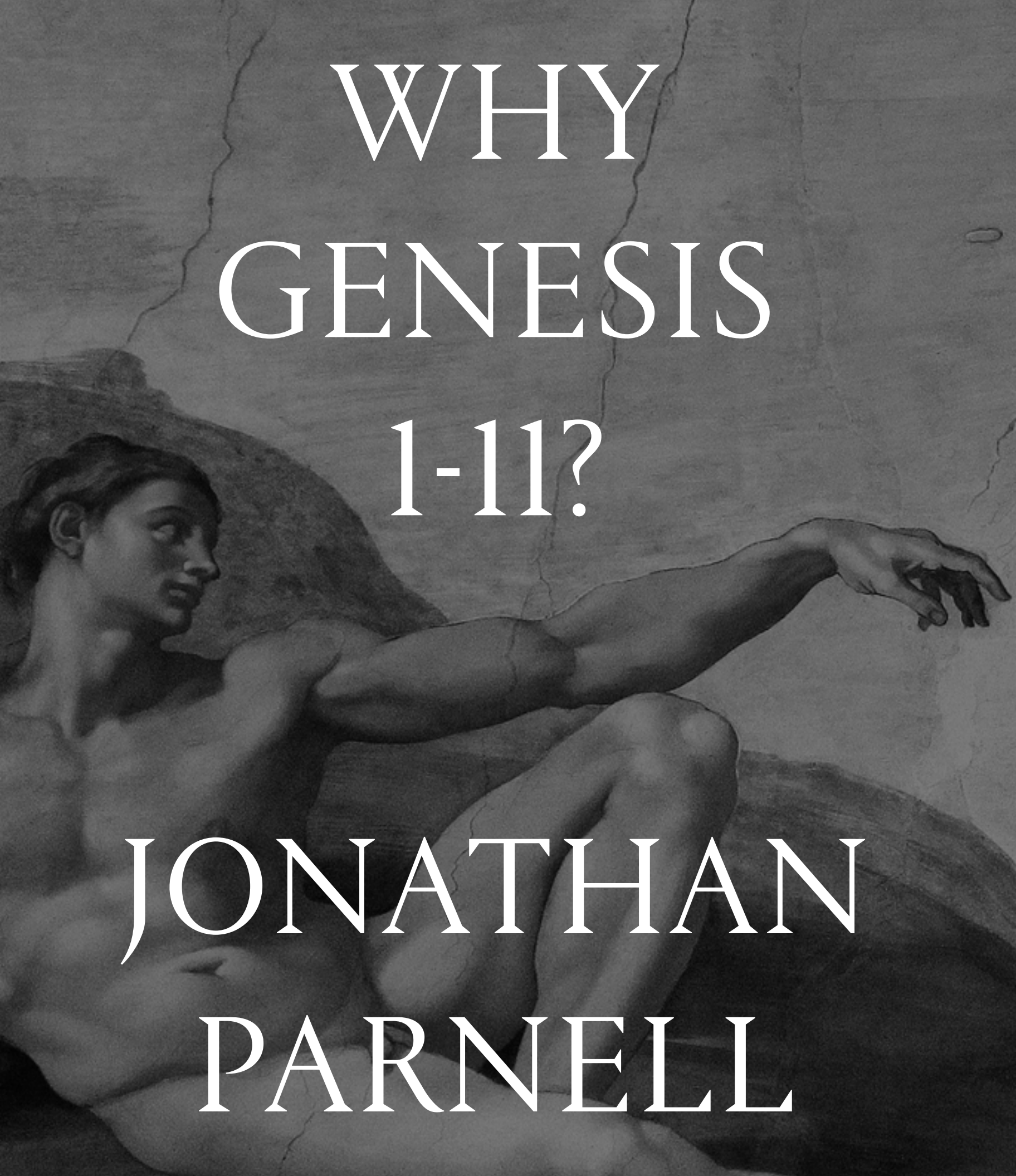
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WHY
GENESIS

1-11?

JONATHAN
PARNELL



Beginnings matter.

A few years ago I became convicted about how lousy of a storyteller I was. This conviction was partly due to reading Pastor Joe's book, *Live Like a Narnian*, which has so much to say about the power of stories. They can affect us and shape us in ways nothing else can, and yet as powerful as they are, and with the access we have to the greatest story of all, I was no good at making new ones up. Every night when I tucked the kids in bed and they asked me for a story, I'd just draw blanks.

I gotta get better at this, I thought, at least for my children's sake!

So I downloaded a couple podcasts on the topic and started listening to the best storytellers I could find. One thing soon became a standard in everything I came across: how a story starts is important. *Beginnings matter*—Who is the main character? What is the setting? How does the main character relate to the setting?

Every good story has to start here. The Christian story certainly does, except it makes a claim no other story can. The main character of the story is also the author, and his relation to the setting

is that he made the entire thing himself. The main character *created* the setting. That's what the sentence is getting at: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth* (Genesis 1:1). There was no such thing as a beginning until he said so. There was no such thing as a story until he began to speak.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

That's how this whole thing got started. Everything we see finds its roots there. God did it. He made it. It's all because of him. And there could never be a more solid foundation, or a brighter hope.

That's the aim of the sermon series this fall.

Starting in September and running through November, we'll be preaching through Genesis 1–11 in a series we're calling "Beginnings." These sermons will draw out the basic ingredients of reality, offering a firm place to stand and a glo-

rious vision for tomorrow. *How did we get where we are? And where are we headed?* The pastors believe that this is God's message for our church in these days, and I can't wait to sit under the Word with you this fall.

Profiles in Genesis Earth

02

At first it was without
form with darkness
spread across it until
the creation of light
on the first day

01

Created by God at the
same time he created
the heavens

04

Residence of mankind

03

Created in six days

Day 1

Q1 The first two verses of the Bible are the kind of verses that say so much more than it seems. What is the beginning? What does this mean? What do you think was happening before the beginning?

Q2 What does it say about God that he created the heavens and the earth?

Q3 Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. What is the Spirit's role in God's creative work? Compare this text: 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Day 2

Q1 How are “the heavens and earth” referred to throughout Scripture? What else does the Bible tell us about them? (See 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1).

Q2 What are the implications of God as the Creator? What does it mean for humanity that God created the world?

Q3 What do you feel like is hardest to believe about God creating the world? What do you feel like is easiest to believe about God creating the world?





Day 3

Study Isaiah 45.

Sermon Notes

September 4, 2016

2



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Naked and
Not Ashamed

Michelle Griep

There you are. Standing in front of a mirror after a shower. There's no hiding that turtle cheesecake you scarfed down before bedtime last night. Or the bacon double cheese-burger and fries you packed away at lunch. In fact, every fattening thing that crossed your lips in the past week barrels back with wicked speed as you try hard not to look at your jiggly belly or thighs.

Or maybe it's the opposite. You throw your heart and effort into beefing up that stick figure, yet you still lack the six-pack, the form, the definition, your body determined to undermine its exercise routine.

But it could be neither. Perhaps your gaze zeroes in on something completely out of your control . . . an ugly scar, a noticeable birth defect, the indelible remnant of an illness or disease.

For whatever reason, when most people stand naked before a mirror, shame has a way of crawling in and settling deep and uncomfortable. No one is one hundred percent happy in their skin.

But that wasn't so for Adam and Eve. Clothes hadn't been created yet. Neither had shame. Man and woman stood before each other and God with perfect bodies, perfect souls, free from blemish, guilt, and sin.

And why not? God created them in his image with an intimate touch. Used his own breath, not merely employing words but personally forming the dust of the earth into a unique creation. In God's eyes, humans alone have dignity, value, and worth in a way unlike any other. Don't gloss over that. Let's take them one by one.

Dignity is the state of being honored or esteemed.

In today's culture, this is a hard concept to grasp because the dignity of man created in God's image is not only smirked at, it's touted as an outright lie. From the killing of babies to the denial of gender, it's easy to fall into the trap that our lives are cheap. But that's not true. Humans, above any other creation, are honored to be formed into the image of the living God.

Value is a fair return or equivalent in goods, service, or money for something exchanged.

Your value is summed up in this fact: Jesus exchanged his life for your eternal salvation from God's wrath. Jesus exchanged his comfort, his communion with God, his *everything* for you because he values you, his precious creation.

Worth is the significance of something as measured by its qualities or by the esteem in which it's held.

God esteems you so much that he left heaven, rolled up his sleeves here on earth, and not only set the ball of redemption into motion but slam-dunked it, winning the game. He didn't do that for fish, birds, animals, or angels. He did it for you.

Did you hear that?
YOU have dignity.
YOU hold value.
YOU are worth more than anything—*anything*—else on earth.

Imagine the day you will stand face to face before God, naked as the day he formed you, and because of Jesus, you will not be ashamed

But it sure doesn't feel like that when you're standing in front of mirror. Why?

Because these bodies are not as they were when originally created. We, my friends, have a problem—and it's not just too much cheesecake. It's called sin. That doesn't enter the picture until Genesis 3, so you'll have to keep reading.

In the meantime, pause for just a moment, and consider how God felt when he formed you in your mother's womb—all the delight and love he experienced while choosing your eye color, your height, your shape. Then fast forward and imagine the day you will stand face to face before God, naked as the day he formed you, and because of Jesus, you will not be ashamed.

What's to come for believers is awesome, yet we are stuck in the now. Here's one last thought for you to ponder while reading Genesis 2...

Think of the 'unlovelys' in your life: the screaming kid at the grocery store, the overbearing boss, the addict on the street corner holding a cardboard sign, annoying you for money every blessed time you drive by. Sometimes the most shaming mirror of all is our reflection in the eyes of someone we discount. Yet these people have dignity, value, and worth, just like you. Next time you encounter an 'unlovely,' remember that God created them with as much delight as when he formed you.

Good news: we can all stand naked and unashamed before the Creator.
Bad news: not everyone knows how to go about that.

Best news: right now you have the opportunity to thank God that he's revealed the truth to you *and* you can share that truth with others.

Oh yeah, and next time you're staring down a piece of cheesecake, maybe save yourself some future grief and eat it in front of a mirror.

Profiles in
Genesis
Adam & Eve

01

First two humans

04

First humans to sin,
leading to the fall of
humankind

03

Adam's job was to
work the Garden of
Eden and name the
animals

02

Adam was created
from the earth; Eve
was created from
Adam's rib.

05

Adam, who was born
on the sixth day, died
at the age of 930

Day 1

Q1 Read Genesis 1:3–5. Read John 1:4, 5, 7, 8, & 9. Define and describe light. Define and describe darkness. Compare light versus darkness. What are some implications of this in this context? How is Jesus the light in these verses?

Q2 Compare Genesis 1:3–5 with John 1:9, Romans 1:18–23, and 2 Corinthians 4:6. How is the creation story thus far pointing to Jesus?

Q3 Read Genesis 1:6–25. God has taken a chaotic darkness (Genesis 1:1–2) and made a world that is good. Note each use of “good.” Describe what it must have been like for everything to be good. How is the “good” in Genesis 1 different from things that are “good” in your life?

Q4 Read Genesis 1:26–28. Define and describe the various commands that God gives man. In what ways do you see this happening in your life? In what ways is this a fresh command to change some things in your life?

Q5 Read Genesis 1:29–31. What things does God give? Are they good things? What does this tell you about the God of the Bible?

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 1:26–28. Define and describe the various commands that God gives man.

Q2 In what ways do you see these commands being lived out in your life?

Q3 In what ways is this a fresh command to change some things in your life?

Q4 Read Genesis 1:29–31. What things does God give, and are they good things? What does this tell you about the God of the Bible?

Q5 Compare Genesis 1:29–31 with psalm 147. What does God provide and how should we respond?



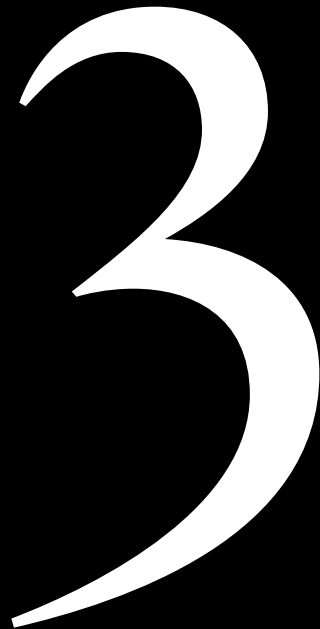


Day 3

Study 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

Sermon Notes

September 11, 2016



LITURGY

NICK

AUFENKAMP



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Every one of us has some imagined vision of “the good life.” The thoughts, decisions, and actions we take to achieve that vision are our acts of worship. That said, what is the role of corporate worship in shaping our deepest desires? My answer is that corporate worship is intended to re-captivate our hearts and imaginations with the reality that Jesus himself is the good life.

Every waking moment, we are immersed in competing narratives about what is most desirable. From conversations in our workplaces, to the advertisements we see, to the sitcoms we enjoy, we are inundated with stories that have a tendency, even at a subconscious level, to tickle our ears and capture our imaginations. And over time these things can lead our hearts to fall in love with alternative stories to the gospel of Jesus. In fact, for all of us, our hearts are much like the clock on my stove—the one that runs on a 58 second minute, which I don’t realize is off until a month later when it’s seven minutes ahead of my watch. This is why we desperately need corporate worship, because corporate worship is the Big Ben clock tower by which we check our hearts to make sure they are in-sync with the gospel story.

Every Sunday at Cities, corporate worship consists of rehearsing the gospel with the prayer that our hearts would be re-captured by it. We call this rehearsal our liturgy, which consists of five C’s.

Call to Worship

Every week we start our services recalling the fact that it is God who

has initiated a relationship with us. It is he who created us and it is he who freely chose to make himself known to us. He has called us from our spiritual slumber to awaken to him, and, remarkably, he is glad to have us.

Confession of Sin

In view of God’s holiness, we are reminded that we have disobeyed him, both in the things we have done and the things we have not done. Every week, we remember our sins against him and our need for forgiveness. And every week, in response to the confession of our sins, we are assured that because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus all of our sins are wholly forgiven!

Consecration

Every week we listen with both our minds and our hearts to God in the preaching of his word that, by the Spirit’s help, our thoughts and desires would be conformed to God’s own thoughts and desires.

Communion

Every week we share a meal at the table with King Jesus. We experience through touch, taste, and smell the body of Jesus given for us and his blood poured out for us. Being united around one table, we remember that we all—the rich and poor, young and old, black, brown, and white—have been fully reconciled to God and to one another through Jesus.

Commission

Every week we are reminded that as worshippers of Jesus we are sent out by his authority and with the assurance of his continual presence to make him known by proclaiming his gospel and teaching all he has taught us.

Because worship is not only a matter of right thinking, but also of right desiring, worshipping Jesus is almost caught more than taught. Therefore, week in and week out, as we each participate in the rehearsal of this story we start to dig deeper and deeper tracks for our hearts and minds to run on. This is the goal of involving the same liturgy and rehearsing the same story every week: that the gospel would become so familiar to us that every morning we wake up we would realize that God has called us to worship by giving us another day of life; that every time we sin, we would remember to confess and be assured that Jesus stands to forgive us; that our ears would be tuned to treasure God’s word more than gold and riches; that when we feel alone we would remember our union to Jesus and his people; and that when we feel purposeless, we would remember that Jesus has given eternal significance to our lives and work by commissioning us to make him known in all that we say and do. We gather every Sunday because we believe that corporate worship shapes our hearts to love and desire Jesus as we are once again caught up in and re-captured by the greatest story ever told.

We gather every
Sunday because we
believe that corporate
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desire Jesus as we are
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in and re-captivated
by the greatest
story ever told.

Profiles in
Genesis
The Garden
of Eden

42

01
Created after the
birth of Adam

02
Dwelling place of both
the tree of life and the
tree of knowledge of
good and evil

03
Dividing place where
the rivers Pishon,
Gihon, Tigris, and the
Euphrates originate

Day 1

Q1 What is the connection between the creation account of Genesis 2 and the account of Genesis 1? What do you see as the main difference in chapter two?

Q2 What is the significance of the tree of life in Genesis 2:9? Where do we see this appear again in Scripture?

Q3 What is the significance of the river in verses 10–14? Trace the theme of the river throughout Scripture. Consider these texts: Psalm 46:4–5 and Revelation 22:1–5.

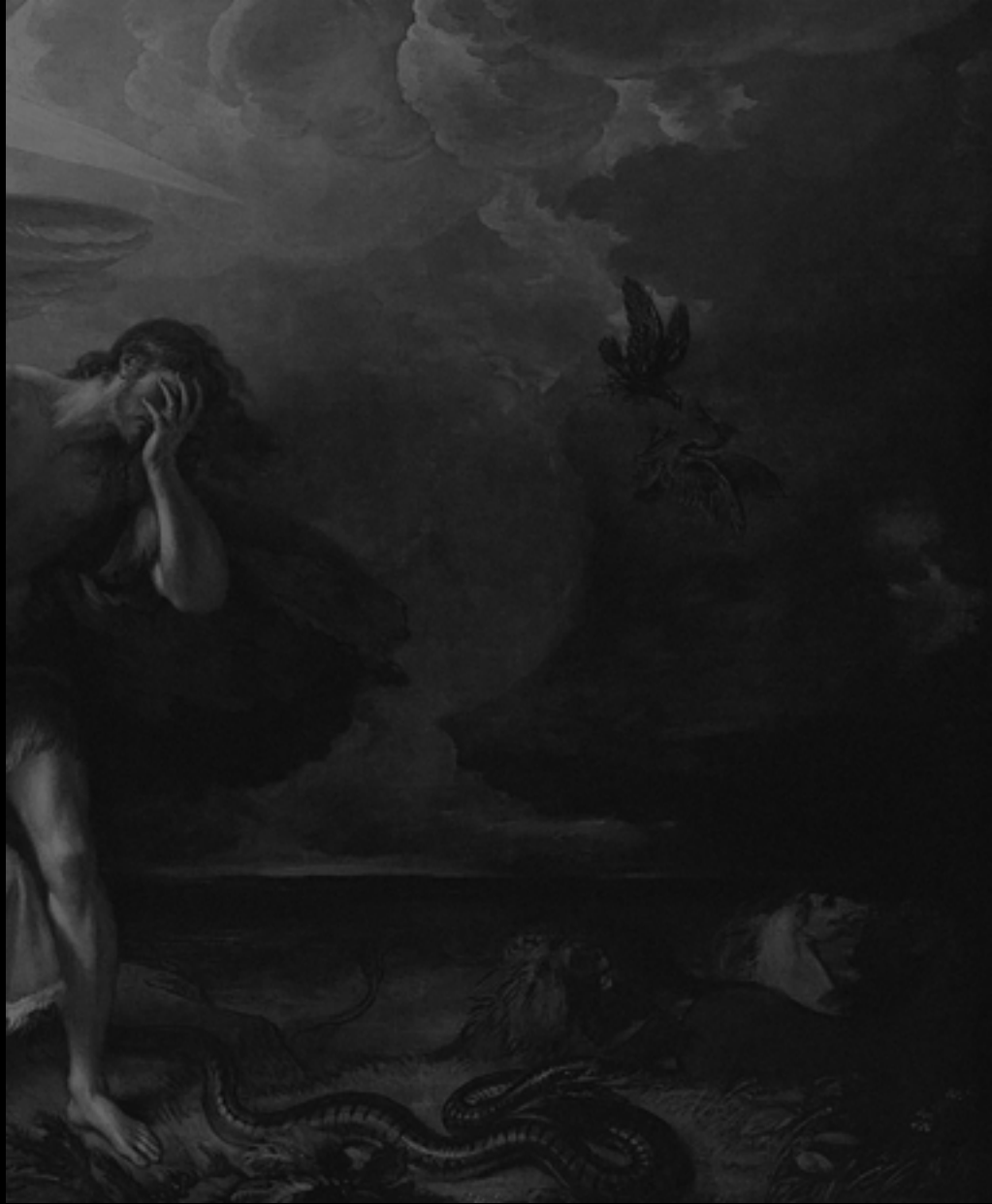
Day 2

Q1 Describe some of the key pieces in the setting of Genesis 2. What are some of the important things that will come up in chapter three? (Hint: verses 15–16).

Q2 What is the relationship between Adam and Eve? What are the implications for marriage today?

Q3 What does it mean to become “one flesh”? How does Paul use this verse in 1 Corinthians 6?





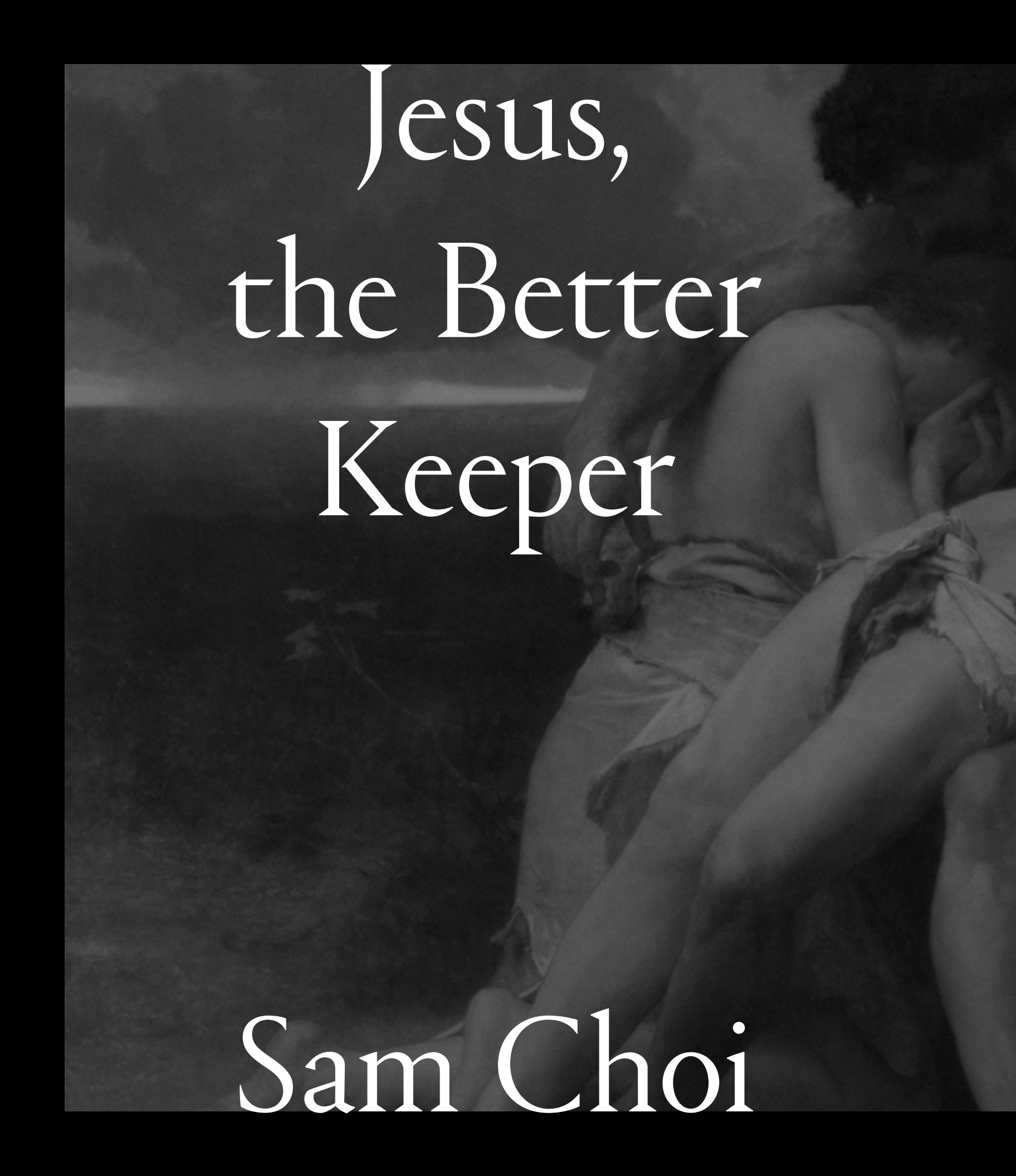
Day 3

Study Revelation 22.

Sermon Notes

September 18, 2016

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Jesus,
the Better
Keeper

Sam Choi



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Bridging the Chapters

In Genesis chapter three, we experienced the most devastating event of all time.¹ As a result, the downward spiral has begun. There is now brokenness in man's relationship with God (Genesis 3:22–24), each other (Genesis 3:16b), and creation (Genesis 3:16–18). As we have also seen in our own lives, sin is never stagnant. It's never satisfied but desires to have more and more until it destroys you (James 1:15). Likewise, Genesis unfolds with increasing brokenness: murder, rape, disease, drunkenness, and death. All of these effects are the results of a world that does not have their rightful king on the throne. When God is not dwelling and ruling on the earth, it's as if someone removed the earth's core.

Genesis Four

Despite man's rebellion, God is gracious and gives a promise in Genesis 3:15.² God is going to raise up a seed from Eve that will ultimately right every wrong and bring Satan to justice. You can imagine the anticipation when Cain was born. Was this the one? Is this the promised seed to crush the head of the Serpent? We will have to see.

In verse three, Cain and Abel (the second-born), offer sacrifices to the LORD. Abel's sacrifice was received with favor, while Cain's was not. Much ink has been spilled trying to figure out the reason behind the LORD's rejection. Many propose it was because there was a need for a blood sacrifice or because Abel brought his first fruits, while Cain did not.

Although there seems to be some support for this in other texts, it's not clear in the immediate context.³ What we can see is that Cain did not do well (Genesis 4:7). Kenneth Matthews helpfully adds,

Both giver and gift were under the scrutiny of God... For the writer to the Hebrews (11:4), Abel's offering was accepted because it was offered in faith. As Luther noted, "The faith of the individual was the weight which added value to Abel's offering." Unlike a human observer, God sees the condition of the human heart and weighs the motive of the worshiper (e.g., 1 Sam 16:7).⁴

Regardless of the precise reason, at minimum, Cain's true colors are shown with his response. "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (Genesis 4:6). Rather than being broken-hearted that he did not please his God, he was angry.

Application Question

"When we are confronted over sin, do we immediately point fingers or defend and excuse ourselves?"

If we find ourselves offended, we may have shown our true colors. One of the best things we can do is to start off our day praying Psalm 139:23 and also reflecting on the great grace of God towards us. When we walk around with a confidence that Jesus is our righteousness and that he is for us, we are slower to defend ourselves

and to cling to our own self-righteousness. As a result, we can securely hear correction from God and others.

"And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Verse seven may be the most famous passage in this chapter. If this passage gives you the chills, you are in good company. Although sin isn't a living being, Scripture is using this vivid language to help us feel the reality of sin. This passage is extremely applicable for us today. Our enemy Satan is prowling around like a lion (1 Peter 5:8). In addition, we have the world and the flesh to reckon with. This unholy trinity is conspiring against us. We must remember that we are in a war and must be prepared (Ephesians 6:10–20).

Verse seven ends ominously with, "You must rule over it." As we will see in Genesis, neither Cain's nor Abel's descendants are able to rule it. Despite many attempts, they are always mastered by sin. We likewise have all followed Cain's path. Praise God that we are not left to ourselves. We have the Holy Spirit that has given us the power over sin!

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,

but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” —Romans 8:12–15

As we read on, Cain murders his innocent brother in cold blood. But again, we see the grace of God. Although God further curses Cain, he mercifully puts a seal on him in order to protect him from attack.

Glimpses of Christ in Genesis Four

Seventy-Seven

In the aftermath, Cain settles down and starts a family. After a few generations, a man named Lamech is born. In perhaps the first recorded song in the Bible, Lamech says,

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold” (Genesis 4:23–24).

Sin is like a cancer which continues to spread and worsen. Lamech is so depraved that he would sing and boast of his violence. Shockingly, Jesus later takes the number seventy-seven (the number of Lamech’s revenge), and tells the apostle Peter that seventy-seven is how many times we should forgive others! Jesus takes deep, dark wickedness and completely reverses it!

The Better Keeper

Right after Cain murders his brother, the LORD asks him, “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain responds, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). The answer is, “Yes. Yes, you are your brother’s keeper.” And thank you, Jesus, that you are not like Cain. You are our better keeper...

Rather than taking life, you willingly lay down your life to be taken for us.

Rather than being jealous against us, you are jealous for us.

Sin’s desire was for us but rather than consuming us, it consumed you on the cross.

And rather than our blood being spilled, your blood is spilled on our behalf.

And rather than crying out from the ground in condemnation, it cries out, “Forgiven! Forgiven! Forgiven! Clean! Clean! Clean!”

Thank you, Jesus, for being the true and better keeper.⁵ Keep us until the end when we can finally see you face to face (1 Peter 1:3–5).

1. It’s hard for me to say that the fall was more devastating than the horrors of the cross, but the cross wouldn’t have had to happen if it wasn’t for the fall.
2. Although debated, it seems very likely that God clothed Adam and Eve, thus covering their shame, with animals he slayed for them (Genesis 4:21). This may be the first picture of substitution in the Bible. One innocent being receives the punishment for the sake of another.

3. See discussion in Walton, John H. Genesis. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001, pp. 262–264.
4. K. A. Mathews, Genesis 1–11:26, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 268.
5. Terminology borrowed from Tim Keller.

Profiles in
Genesis
Cain & Abel

02

Cain was a farmer

04

Cain is the first
murderer in human
history

01

First born sons of
Adam & Eve; Cain is
the firstborn, Abel is
the second

03

Abel worked livestock

Day 1

Q1 Read Genesis 2:16–17 and 3:1–7. How does this compare to what Eve says of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? What does the serpent say of the tree? Why do these differences matter?

Q2 What happens with Eve after the serpent says she will not die if she eats from the tree? How does her progression in thought relate to our own temptations?

Q3 What happens in Genesis 3:7? How does this action ripple through all of history and into our lives today?

Q4 In Genesis 3:8 Adam and Eve encountered God after they ate from the tree. What was their reaction to God's approach? Why did they behave this way? In what ways has Jesus saved us from their reactions?

Q5 How did Adam and Eve respond to God's questions in Genesis 3:12–13? What do these responses say about the heart of their actions?

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 3:14–15. What results from the serpent’s deception? How does verse 15 point toward the larger picture of the gospel?

Q2 What is the result of Eve’s sin based on God’s words from verse 16? Why would God make this the punishment for Eve?

Q3 Genesis 3:17–19 lay out the punishment for Adam. What is the punishment and why would this be what Adam receives?

Q4 What core sin is revealed by Adam and Eve’s punishments?

Q5 Besides eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, why else were Adam and Eve cast out of Garden of Eden?





Day 3

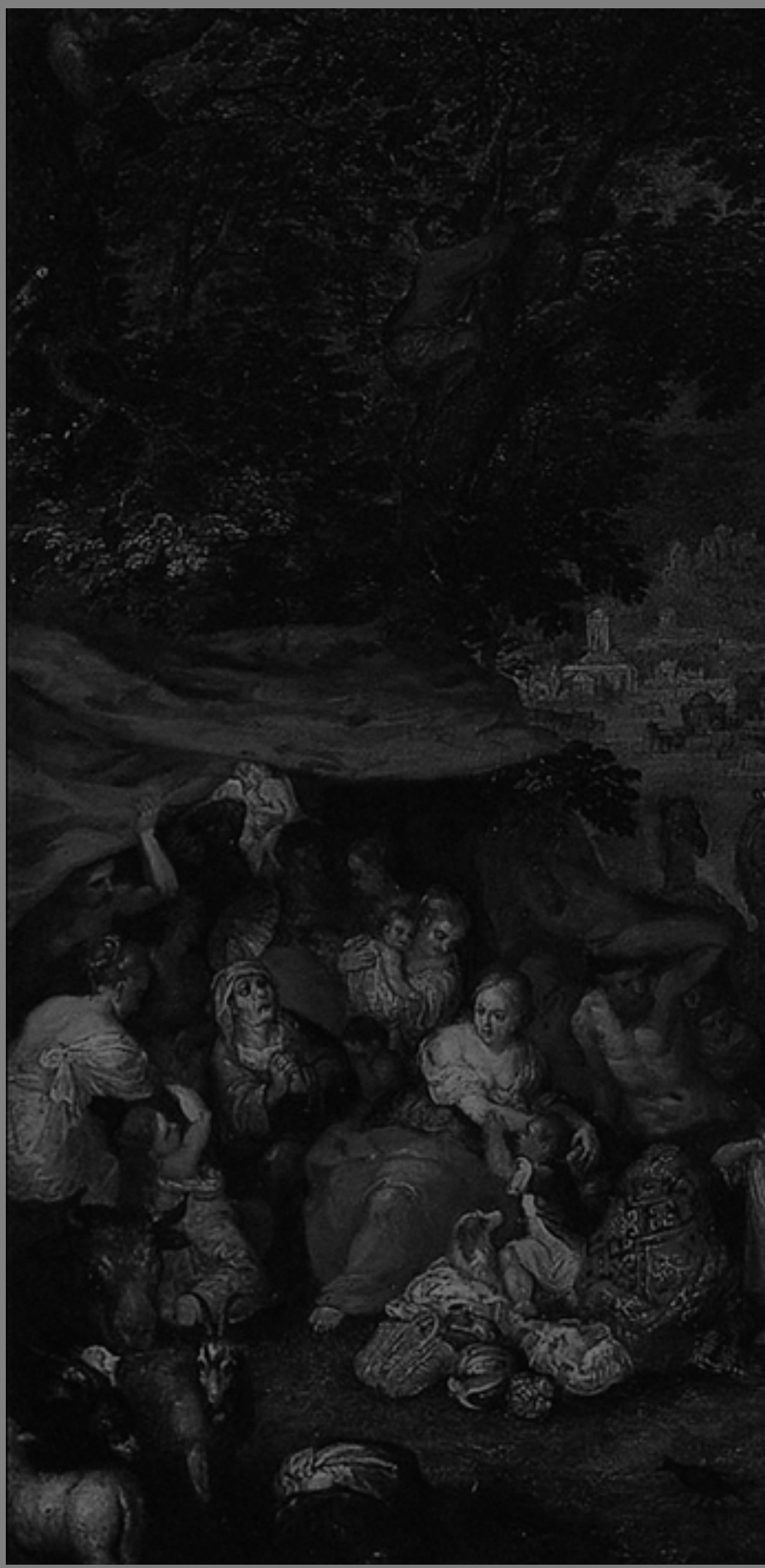
Study Psalm 139.

Sermon Notes

September 25, 2016

5

Genesis, A Genealogy, and Jesus





Genealogies. If you're at all like me you arrive at a genealogy, "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable..." (2 Timothy 3:15) floats through your mind, and you decide you should probably read on rather than skip to the next chapter. In Genesis 5 we find ourselves with a genealogy right in the middle of some of the most famous stories in the Bible: creation, Adam and Eve, the fall, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the flood. Which begs the question, what are we to do with a genealogy in the midst of such sweeping narrative?

Setting the Stage

The early chapters of Genesis are loaded with theological significance. We see creation, the image of God, and marriage. Everything goes wrong in the fall and the curse. There is a seemingly cryptic, yet hope-inspiring promise about Someone who will crush the serpent. Sin progresses to the first murder. Sin continues to increase and we arrive at an immense and jarring story of judgment, mercy, and covenant in the story of Noah and the flood. These things don't even cover it all! Yet in the middle there's a genealogy, a sort of bridge from Adam to Noah that covers hundreds of years and 10 generations of fathers and sons. Bookending this genealogy is an echo of creation (Genesis 5:1-3) and a promise of relief (Genesis 5:28-29). Contained in these elements—the echo, the generations, and the promise—are subtle hints and glimpses of glory that help set the stage for the whole biblical story.

Image and Likeness

The first few verses of chapter five are meant to bring us back to the beginning, to God's creation of humanity: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created" (Genesis 5:1b-2). Then we get another interesting echo, but this time with a twist: "When Adam had lived 130 years, *he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth*" (Genesis 5:3). What's going on here? Adam is imaging God. God created Adam in his image and likeness, and Adam has fathered a son in his own image and likeness. Adam was created sinless, in perfect relationship with God. Seth however, while bearing God's image, also has the marks of his father Adam's sin. He is a broken image bearer after his father Adam. Made in God's image. Shattered by sin. This is true of all of us as descendants of Adam, and we see this everywhere as we look around the world we live in. Image bearers image God by taking what he has made, and forming and shaping it into something new. We are constantly creating technology, concocting delicious new dinners, and shaping culture—and this is good. But we see sin's effects everywhere as well. We pervert good things and turn them in on ourselves. That's what broken image bearers do. We still function as imagers, but not the way we were intended to. The genealogy in Genesis five shows us this truth. Genesis three and four have specific accounts of sin, but in chapter five there is little to no detail about their lives. Then we get a

clue about what's going on in chapter 6: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). This is sobering. In our sin, left to ourselves, things get worse and worse. Adam's sin led to Cain's sin and generations later the earth is full of people whose hearts are only after evil continually, which begs the question, what hope is there for us in the depth our evil?

Who Will Bring Relief?

Near the end of this genealogy Noah comes on the scene, and his father's words regarding his life are recorded for us: "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Genesis 5:29). This seems like the glimmer of hope they must have been yearning to hear! The author (most agree it is Moses) again calls us back, this time to chapter three and God's curse after sin entered the world. People have been laboring in a cursed world and here, says Lamech, is Noah, one who will bring relief. Reading on in the story of Noah we see that God decides to save Noah and his family from his judgment of sin expressed through the flood. So how then does Noah bring relief? Does it really seem like he does when we read this story? If I'm honest, it seems a little bit like he doesn't. The flood comes, and only a handful of people are saved.

Do you remember the Minor Prophets series (if you don't, go check it out!)? The theme that runs through those books is judgment and mercy.

Jesus is everywhere
in the pages of
Genesis. So as we
move through this
book, let's press on,
dive in, and together
grow in the grace and
knowledge of the Lord
Jesus Christ.

Over and over again there was judgment and mercy. And I think that's what's going on here in this genealogy and the surrounding story earlier in Genesis. God's judgment has *justly* fallen on the rampant evil in the world. But God, being rich in mercy (think Ephesians 2:4), saved Noah and his family. So we have to ask again, did Noah bring relief? Well, yes. And no. This promise of relief starts to make sense when we realize it is yet another call to look back; it sounds like another promise about one who will bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). It's the second time that a Coming One is alluded to. Really then, Noah isn't the true answer that Lamech and all mankind were longing for. Noah didn't bring about relief from the curse. God spared him, and humanity continued through his life, but the bigger point is that through Noah, God was bringing the One who would redeem us from the curse. Jesus "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..." (Galatians 3:13). Jesus is the One who makes sense of the story.

God's Grace and Patience

Genesis 5:1–6:4 could be seen as the narrative version of the truth that Paul teaches in Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." This is exactly what happened as Adam's line spread. The first sin in the garden led to increasing evil in the world until it defined every thought and every intention of every heart all over the world. What's incredible in all of this is the simple fact

that the story continues. Noah wasn't a perfectly sinless man. He wasn't the promised one from Genesis three. So why didn't God end it all in the flood? Because of Jesus. Because in all of this God is displaying the greatness of his grace, patience, and faithfulness. Things were only getting worse. Sin was leading to more sin that was leading to more sin for generations and generations. Romans chapter three tells us that God, in his forbearance, passed over former sins (Romans 3:25). He was patient until the time when Jesus would come and bear the penalty for our sin. All that time he was being faithful to his promise that one of Eve's offspring would be different. He would crush the serpent and redeem us from the curse.

Genesis is an exciting book. It's the foundation of the Bible. If we don't understand the start of the story, we won't understand the rest of it either. As Genesis continues to unfold, we hear a lot more about the One to come through the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God continues to show abundant mercy and grace and continues to slowly reveal his purpose to his people. Jesus is the great fulfillment of the promises made and the one foreshadowed by its great characters. Jesus is everywhere in the pages of Genesis. So as we move through this book, let's press on, dive in, and together grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Profiles in Genesis Seth & Enoch

70

02

Seth was born to
Adam when Adam
was 930 years old

01

Seth was the third son
of Adam & Eve

03

Enoch is the great-
great-great grandson
of Seth

Day 1

Q1 Read Genesis 3:15 and 3:20. Based on God's promise in 3:15 and Adam naming his wife "Eve" (literally "life-giver") in 3:20, what would you expect to happen in Genesis 4 as Adam and Eve start their family?

Q2 Read Genesis 4:1–16. Compare and contrast the sin of Adam and the sin of Cain. In what ways are their sins similar and dissimilar?

Q3 In Genesis 4:9, God questions Cain about his sin. How does Cain's response to God differ from Adam's response when God confronted Adam with his sin (Genesis 3:9–11)? Based on Cain's response, does it seem that the heart of man is becoming softer or more hardened towards God?

Q4 How is James 1:14–15 a fitting summary of Genesis 3:1–4:16?

Q5 As Abel's blood calls out for God's righteous vengeance upon Cain (Genesis 4:10), the author of Hebrews says that Jesus's blood "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). What is this "better word"? Considering we are just as responsible for the murder of Jesus as Cain was for the murder of his brother, how is the better word of the blood of Jesus a remarkable grace?

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 4:1–7. Cain’s anger towards God in verse 5 suggests that Cain believes God has been unjust towards him. Do you think Cain was right to be angry? Do you think Cain knew his offering was deficient and therefore displeasing to God? How does the implication of God’s question to Cain in verse 7 help answer this question?

Q2 Read 1 Peter 5:8–9. How do these verses help explain the meaning of Genesis 4:7?

Q3 What does Genesis 4:7 tell us about the nature of sin? What is it like?

Q4 Now read Matthew 23:1–39. Here Jesus compares the Pharisees to Cain. How is Cain Pharisical and how are the Pharisees like Cain?

Q5 In what ways do you have a tendency to be like Cain today?



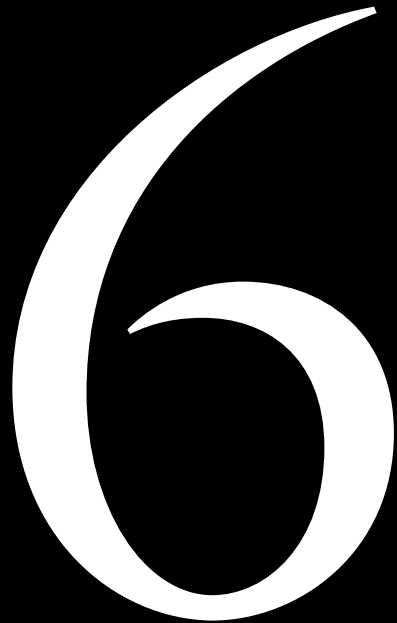


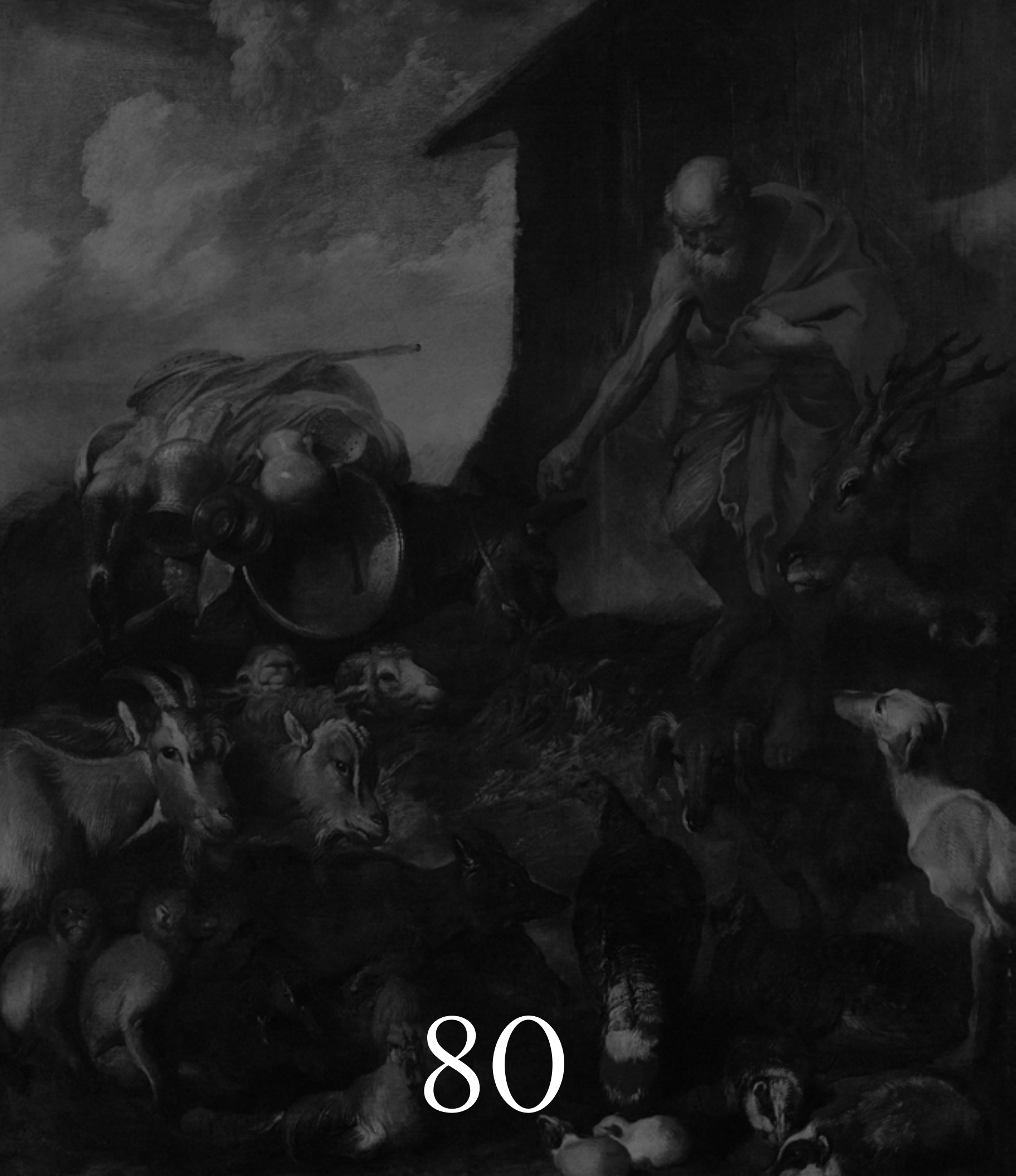
Day 3

Study Jude.

Sermon Notes

October 2, 2016





80

The Days of Noah

Linda
Linder

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:36–39).

What is Jesus telling us here? How are the “days of Noah” relevant to you and me today? To answer these questions, it’s helpful to take a step back and look at the metanarrative of the Bible.

From the first verse¹ to the last,² the Bible tells the true and glorious story of God and man. What is somewhat surprising is that the flow of this glorious story runs into and out of the deep waters of the flood. Although Genesis chapter 6 comes relatively early in the Bible, it’s the turning point of the story.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including man and woman, and declared his creation to be very good. Into the beauty and perfection of God’s creation the enemy, Satan, appeared and drew man into disobedience and rebellion against God and his word. At this point, known as the fall, sin and death entered into the human race and corrupted all that God created. Between the fall of Genesis 3 and the “days of Noah” in Genesis 6, the development of man progressed rapidly. On the positive side, mankind multi-

plied according to God’s blessing and developed a sophisticated culture by building cities, cultivating livestock, creating music, and forging beautiful objects from the things of the earth. For approximately 1650 years, from the days of creation to the “days of Noah,” mankind made great strides in creating a complex and cultured life.

At the same time, mankind moved farther and farther away from God. As a result of the fall, sin was deep in the heart of man. Murder, polygamy, and sexual perversion were systematically pervasive. And death reigned. In fact, Genesis 5 is basically a long obituary, recording one death after another.

So for over 1600 years, life marched on—progress on one hand and perversion on the other. No problem, or was there? Let’s take a closer look at the “days of Noah” as recorded in Genesis 6.

The chapter begins with a new and alarming low. It’s not clear who the “sons of God,” “the daughters of man,” or the “Nephilim” were, but we *do* know that there was an evil that had taken hold on earth (perhaps through demons or demon possession). This systematic evil somehow involved these three groups and included the element of sexual perversion.

In Genesis 6:3 the line was crossed and God warned that his Spirit would not abide in man forever. Being gracious, it seems that God did give man 120 years to turn back to the principles put in place in the beginning. They didn’t turn. And in Genesis 6:5 God saw that this wickedness in mankind had reached such a level that the peoples’ hearts were

thoroughly and completely evil. His own heart was grieved. Sorrowfully, what he had seen as good he now saw as corrupted and as a just God he had to wipe out his creation.

However, God saw one man and his family on whom he could pour out his mercy and grace—Noah. Noah “found favor [grace] in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8).

Now Noah was not a perfect man, as we’ll discover later on, but he was “righteous,” “blameless in his generation,” and he “walked with God.” So Noah and his family were chosen by the Creator God to be saved—saved by grace.

God gave Noah specific instructions. He told him to build an ark and he told him exactly how to build it. What an amazing God we have! He called Noah out from the generation in which he lived and then he told him exactly what to do and how to do it. And Noah did all that God told him to do.

What can we learn from the “days of Noah” that will help us in our day? Here are some thoughts.

1

Satan’s tactics and the pattern of sin never change.

In Genesis 6 we find the echo of Genesis 3 when the serpent drew Adam and Eve into sin. The serpent, before the fall, caused Eve to doubt God’s word (“You will not surely die”) and stirred in her the desire to be her own god (“You will be like God”). Genesis 3:6 reads, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to

make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

Compare these words to Genesis 6:2, before the flood: “the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive [good]. And they took as their wives any that they chose.”

Satan’s tactics, whether directly from him and his demons or through those who are sold over to him, are always the same: Doubt God’s word, be like God, see evil as good, take and eat.

Satan is very crafty, but he’s not very creative. He still uses the same tactics today. Because sin is still in the heart of man, awareness of these evil tactics can equip us to be more like Noah than like the rest of those in Noah’s day.

2

God’s Word and purposes
do not change.

The pattern God set in place at the beginning is still the pattern today. For example, God created mankind in two sexes, male and female. He brought the male and female together as husband and wife and blessed their fruitfulness.

When God put Noah and his family and all of the animals into the ark to preserve them from destruction, he specifically and pointedly said they were to go into the ark as couples—male and female. This is not to be perverted.

When we pervert the order and pattern God set in place at creation and reaffirmed through the flood, we are being deceived by the enemy, and

before long we too will bite the apple of destruction.

3

God will not be mocked.

Our God is a gracious and patient God, but he is not a pushover. He has drawn the line of truth and when we step over that line, individually or as a culture, he will at the time and manner of his choosing bring about justice and punish the guilty.

God warned the people of Noah’s day and they paid no attention. After all, life had gone along for 1600 plus years and there was no evidence of judgment. And 120 years is a long time, even in that day, to hear about a flood that never seemed to come. There had never been a flood. There had never even been rain! Noah had to be crazy. Poor Noah.

4

There is hope.

Our gracious God is always looking for men and women who are blameless in his sight—not perfect, but righteous. He still saves by grace—not through the ark, but through the cross. And he still specifically and precisely equips his people who will obey him.

“... do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass

away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:8–13).

Maranatha!

1. Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created....”
2. Revelation 22:20–21 “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”

Profiles in Genesis Methuselah

01

Son of Enoch

03

Father of Lamech, the
father of Noah

02

Lived 969 years,
making him the oldest
man to ever live

Day 1

Q1 Why would the author of Genesis list out the genealogy of Adam's descendants?

Q2 Who is the third son of Adam and Eve? How does his birth (and life) connect to God's statement to the serpent in the garden back in Genesis 3:15?

Q3 In Genesis 5:24 it says, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." What does it mean that Enoch walked with God? What does the result this has on Enoch say about walking with God?

Q4 Why did people during this period of history live such long lives?

Q5 After Noah was born it is said, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." What does this mean?

Day 2

Q1 Read Luke 3:23–38. Why does Luke trace the lineage of Jesus all the way back to Adam?

Q2 Read Matthew 1:1–16. What is the significance of Jesus being in the line of David?

Q3 What does the presence of the women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary) say about the lineage of Jesus and what his life means for those that belong to him?

Q4 Why would both Luke and Matthew care about the genealogy of Jesus? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Q5 How does the genealogy of Jesus relate to God's message to the serpent in Genesis 3:15? What does Jesus represent in that text?



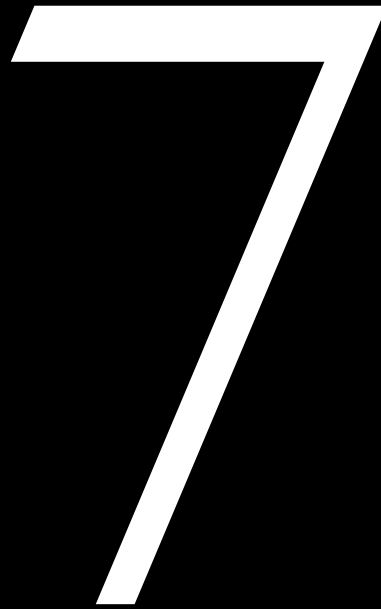


Day 3

Study Hebrews 11:4–6.

Sermon Notes

October 9, 2016



Pastor's Kid Confidential

The Thiel's



95

Michael Thiel is one of the pastors at Cities Church. He and his wife, Emily, have three children (Lily, Henryk, and Frannie). What follows is the no-holds-barred interview with Lily (6), who wants you to know that she's a good babysitter for her little sister, Frannie.

→ How old are your parents?

Emily, 31; Michael 33

Correct answer: Emily is 31 and Michael is 33

→ How did your parents meet?

In college.

Correct answer: They always knew each other but became friends in high school. Their first date was to the movie Pearl Harbor. Emily was 16 and Michael was 18. They got engaged Emily's freshman year (and Michael's junior year) of college. So Lily was just a few years off but give her a break, she's six and was close.

→ Where did your parents grow up?

Wisconsin, in Kohler and up north.

Correct answer: Both Emily and Michael grew up in Howard's Grove, Wisconsin. Kohler and up north are where their parents live now.

→ What do your parents do?

Take care of me and my sister and brother! Dad is the headmaster at his company.

Correct answer: Michael is a regional sales manager at an engineering company. Emily quit her job at Ameriprise to stay at home with the kids and is currently getting her masters in Biblical Counseling. The interviewer was unable to verify whether or not Michael is considered the headmaster at his job.

→ What did your parents go to college for?

School. My dad didn't get along with one of his teachers.

Correct answers: Michael has a degree in Chemical Engineering while Emily has a degree in Entrepreneurial Management and Marketing. The teacher Lily referenced was Michael's fourth grade teacher. If you're a teacher just remember that grudges can last into the lives of your student's children.

→ Favorite book/movie?

Emily: *The Trumpet of the Swan* (book); *Cinderella* and *Harry Potter* (movies)

Michael: *Harry Potter* (book); *Harry Potter* (movie)

Correct answers: Emily couldn't give a favorite book but she's currently reading *The Martian*. Her favorite show is that TV staple from the 90s, *Frasier*. Michael's favorite book is *Unbroken* and his favorite movie is *Grumpier Old Men* (yep, the sequel, not the first one).

→ What do your parents do in their free time?

Cook! Dad does bible study. Mom takes care of me.

Correct answer: Michael is a pastor in his free time. As a family they garden and do family activities together. Emily likes to work out with her free time. In the summer they do strawberry picking and in the fall they go apple picking. Michael also goes on road trips with Lily. He has never gone on a road trip with the interviewer.

→ What's their favorite holiday?

Michael: fall and summer

Emily: summer

Correct answers: For Michael Thanksgiving is his favorite holiday because he gets to go deer hunting, enjoy really good food, and watch football. Emily struggled to come up with a favorite holiday, but Michael confessed that it's her birthday. Feel free to treat Emily's birthday as a holiday from now on too!

→ What's your favorite thing to do with them?

Watch *Harry Potter* and *Cupcake Wars* with them. I like to make surprises for them! Tag along ride. *Monopoly Jr.* with my dad. Going swimming with my dad. Baking with mom. Everything!

Correct answers: Emily's favorite thing to do with Lily is to read to her. She also enjoys it when the family plays family tag at the park. For Michael, his favorite thing to do with the family is their Saturday morning big breakfast. His favorite thing to do with Lily is the road trips they go on together.

→ What's their favorite part of the week?

When dad gets to stay home. And when we get to eat pancakes with him.

Correct answers: Emily's favorite part of the week is when they can all be together and when Michael gets to work from home. Michael kept his answer short and sweet: Friday.

Profiles in Genesis Noah

98

02

Father of the survivors
of the flood

01

Builder of the ark

03

Inspiration for
a horrible, very
unbiblical movie
starring Russell Crowe

03

Recipient of a
covenant from God,
promising to never
again destroy all living
things

Day 1

Q1 Genesis 3–11 is tracing this downward spiral of humanity. Read Genesis 6:1–4. How has the multiplication from Genesis 1:28 gone wrong? Compare the progression of “saw” and “took” in Genesis 6:2 with Genesis 3:6. How can identifying this progression help you correct some things in your life? Where in that progression is Jesus needed?

Q2 Read Genesis 6:5–8. Describe the state of creation. Define “grieve.” What do you think it means that God was grieved to his heart? Why was God so grieved?

Q3 Read Genesis 6:8–10. Describe Noah. What things did Noah do well? Was Noah perfect? Why do you think God loved Noah?

Q4 Read Genesis 6:11–12. Define “corrupt.” Since humankind falls into this category of being “corrupt” do you see yourself in this category? In what ways do you see this corrupt nature come out in your daily life? How is Jesus needed to change this?

Q5 Read Genesis 6:13–22. God wants to wash creation clean with a flood through his grief and passion to preserve this world. God saves Noah and his family on this boat. From Genesis 6:17–19 describe God’s mercy on Noah and his family.

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 6:8–10. Describe Noah. What things did Noah do well? Was Noah perfect? Why do you think God loved Noah?

Q2 Read Exodus 33:12–23. What do you learn about finding favor with God?

Q3 How is Noah and the flood used as an example in 2 Peter 2:4–9?

Q4 Read Genesis 6:11–12. Define “corrupt.” Since humankind falls into this category of being “corrupt” do you see yourself in this category? In what ways do you see this corrupt nature come out in your daily life? How is Jesus needed to change this?

Q5 Read Genesis 6:13–22. God wants to wash creation clean with a flood through his grief and passion to preserve this world. God saves Noah and his family on this boat. From 6:17–19 describe God’s mercy on Noah and his family.



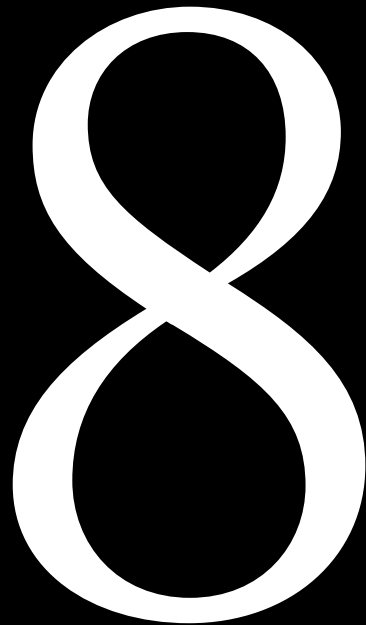


Day 3

Study Romans 8:18–25.

Sermon Notes

October 16, 2016





108

The Flood
Showed Us
Christ

Amelia
Shumann

What jumps out at you first when you read Genesis 8? This description of the receding floodwaters can teach us many things. We can find much comfort when we see God bringing Noah's family to safety. But stop to consider: where does your mind and heart immediately gravitate as you read?

Do you skip over the uncomfortable reality that God has just purposefully slaughtered most of the humans and animals he created? Do you skim for words that make God seem tame and manageable? Do you instantly put yourself in Noah's shoes, or do you see yourself as one of those who deserves to be wiped away in the flood? I only know to ask you these questions because I have wrestled with them myself. I am much more likely to come to Scripture with a heart that seeks to be appeased with comforting words than with a heart that seeks to be humbled and enlarged to love the mighty God who shows himself to us. Let's face it—it's easier to skip over gruesome details rather than exert a great effort to work through them.

But there is emptiness in skipping the gruesome details. First, by overlooking any details that God has given us about himself, we begin to construct a false image of God. We can end up creating an idol in our own image, or according to our own preferences, and naming it "God." All the while the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the One who existed before all else, wants to be known and loved for *all* of who he is. If we overlook hard details, we miss something that God wants to communicate to us. Further, good news isn't truly good and comforting unless we understand the bad news first!

Only when we work through the hard details can we truly be comforted, because we see a more holistic picture of the God who authored himself into this story.

God Hates Evil

So the reality is, God hates evil. He hates when his creatures rebel and turn away from him—yet that is what humans naturally do. Moreover, God is in control of all things. By a simple command, God sent the flood to "blot out" most of his creatures. The floodwaters obeyed his voice, the winds and waves obeyed his voice, and people died because of it.

You and I are naturally just as wicked as they, and we deserve a punishment just as deadly. When we allow anger to wrongly manifest itself in our words and actions, when we give into the lustful desires of our flesh, when we act differently in front of certain people to gain their approval rather than God's, when we blame people or circumstances for the stench of sin that bubbles from our own hearts, we prove that we are just like those whom God wiped away in the flood. *That* is hard to swallow.

God Is Merciful

But it is just as true that God is merciful. He saves those who trust in him. In Genesis, he sent Noah and an ark so that all who entered it would be saved from the deadly floodwaters. Years later, he sent his own Son as a man who died on a cross so that all who trust in Him would be saved too. And Jesus doesn't just save from physical, earthly death but from eter-

**If we overlook
hard details, we
miss something
that God wants to
communicate to us.**

nal death. For he is not just a mere man like Noah; Jesus is the very God whose command created and then flooded the world. Jesus proved that the wind and waves obey his voice, and people were saved because of it (Matthew 8:23–27). Jesus was the perfect human we (and even Noah) could never be, and he took on himself the full blame for our sins. That means, Christian, that for the times your temper flared up unjustly, Jesus was pierced for your transgression instead of you. For the times you rebelliously indulged in things forbidden, Jesus was crushed for your iniquities. Jesus felt the sting of the cross because of your fear of man so that you wouldn't have to. So you don't have to blame someone else for your sin in a futile attempt to escape punishment; Jesus already took it for you. And the pleasures he earned by his obedience, he freely gives to you to enjoy.

God Keeps His Promises

Finally, Genesis 8 reminds us that God keeps his promises—those we'd love to see fulfilled as well as those we'd rather ignore. As he promised in Genesis 6:17, he punished humanity. As he promised in Genesis 6:18–21, he saved Noah and all in the ark. After months of flooding and waiting for waters to recede, the ark *really did* rest on solid ground again. After more weeks of waiting, the inhabitants of the ark *finally* walked on solid ground again. And God made a covenant with Noah, just as he promised he would in Genesis 6:18.

God is so good to show his promise-keeping nature to us in Genesis 8 (and throughout the entire biblical

record) so that we can have confidence that he will keep his promises to us. Just as God punished the world during the flood, he will punish those who do not turn from their sin to trust in Jesus. Just as God saved Noah and his family from the flood, he will save from the wrath to come those who have confessed and repented of their sin and place their hope fully in Jesus. Just as Noah and his family walked again upon the earth after the dark flood days, God will resurrect from the dead all those whom Jesus has saved, and they will walk with him in perfect harmony.

Profiles in
Genesis
The Ark

112

02

Vessel that kept Noah
and his family safe
from the flood that
wiped the earth clean

01

Built by Noah

03

Large enough to fit
at least 20 standard-
sized basketball courts
inside of it

Day 1

Q1 Read Genesis 7:1–16. At the end of verse 16 who do you think shut the door? Describe in the moment what God was doing to and for humanity through Noah.

Q2 Read Genesis 7:17–24. Define “blot.” What does it mean to be blotted out? Compare with Isaiah 44:22–23. What else does God blot out? What is God after in all this? See also Acts 3:17–21.

Q3 Read Genesis 8:1. God remembered. Compare with Exodus 2:24. Take a tragic event in your past, and explain the significance of God remembering you. How could this bring healing?

Q4 Read Genesis 8:12–19. If you were in the boat would you be thinking that this flood would fix creation or not? Explain.

Q5 Read Genesis 8:20–22. Do you agree with God that the intention of a person’s heart is evil? In what ways do you agree with him and in what ways do you disagree with him? See Matthew 15:17–20. Did the flood fix this? What was needed to fix creation?

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 8:1. God remembered. Compare with Exodus 2:24. Take a tragic event in your past, and explain the significance of God remembering you. How could this bring healing?

Q2 Read Genesis 8:2–11. How do you feel about this flood? How would you defend God in regards to his reasons for doing it?

Q3 What bothers you about the flood?

Q4 Read Genesis 8:12–19. If you were in the boat would you be thinking that this flood would fix creation or not? Explain.

Q5 Read Genesis 8:20–22. Do you agree with God that the intention of a person's heart is evil? In what ways do you agree with him and in what ways do you disagree with him? See Matthew 15:17–20. Did the flood fix this? What was needed to fix creation?





Day 3

Study Hebrews 11:7.

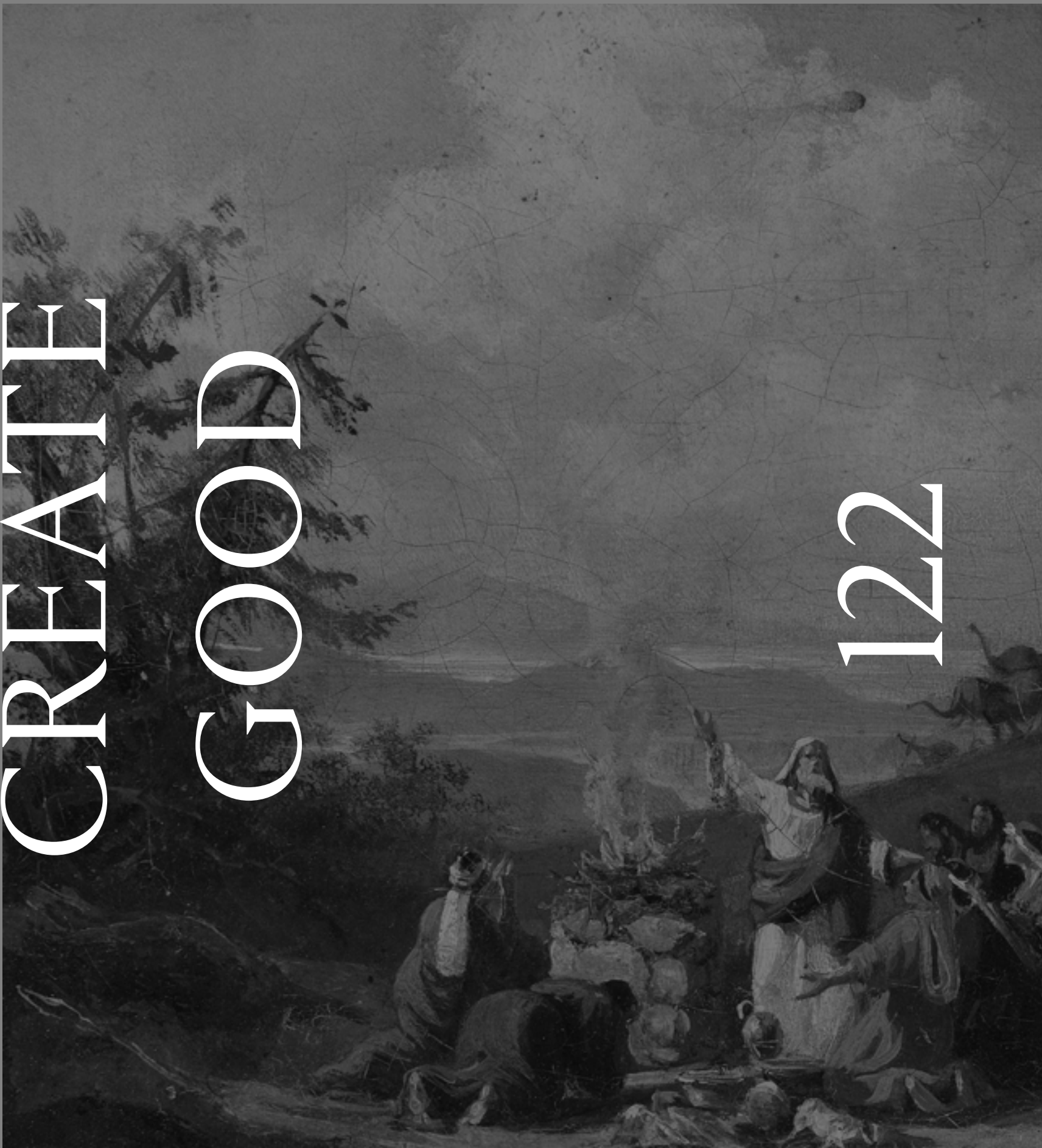
Sermon Notes

October 23, 2016



CREATE GOOD

122





NICK AUFFENKAMP

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good.*”
Genesis 1:31

In six dramatic days God literally created the entire universe and all that is in it. He made it all and he didn't use copy and paste, an assembly line, or outsource any of his work. From supernovas to quarks, and from the kiwi bird to the narwhal, God handcrafted each one of them. And he looked out upon all of his creation and said to himself, “Very good!”

Since we also are created by God in his image, we cannot help but to create. Or, using pop-terminology, we are all *creatives* (not just the Uptown hipster in his paint-stained skinny jeans). My eighteen-month old son exemplifies mankind's natural wiring to create when he makes up and belts out his little melodies, engineers the most unorthodox block towers, or draws with any object he can find that will leave a lasting impression upon our walls. And he, like us, will never grow out of creating.

So, the question is not *if* we will create but *what* we will create. On one level this question is easy to answer. For instance, an accountant may create several expense reports or spreadsheets. A painter may paint a beautiful landscape. An IT consultant might create programs and systems that make sharing information more user-friendly and efficient. But the question I am asking is about the *telos*, or end goal, of *all* our creation. Sure, a chef will create food, but *to what end?* That's what I'm wanting us to consider.

The answer is in Genesis 1. It is strikingly satisfying for God to look

upon his work and call it *very good*. This sticks out to me because my desire to look on the things I've made and say to myself “very good” stands in stark contrast to how often I make something and think to myself “very average.” I want to image God in creating things that are truly good. And, because God made us in his image, I believe he wants that for all of us. Why? When we create anything that is genuinely good, God is glorified *and*

**God is our Creator.
Creative work is
fundamental to who
we are as those made
in his image. And
we want to create
good works because
God's creative work is
always good.**

our enjoyment of him is increased. In other words, accomplishing good work is inseparably tied to the reason for which we all were made as creative people.

God is our Creator. Creative work is fundamental to who we are as those made in his image. And we want to create good works because God's creative work is always good. Now, here are three ways that we can grow and encourage one another to be good creators:

First, we must tear down the prevailing assumption that some people are born with creative talents while others are not. There are some who are naturally gifted in and gravitate towards the fine arts. We thank God for these people and their gifts, and all of us have much to learn from the fine artists in our midst, but none of us are excluded from having creative gifts and abilities. Creativity, on a human level, is simply imagining something that does not currently exist and using the resources and tools available to bring it into reality. Thus, the activities of parenting and teaching, or the creation of budgets, business plans, or trucking routes are all creative tasks. After all, God created both calculus and the Grand Canyon. So, the question is not how well we can paint or play music, but how we can be faithful and create with the gifts God has given us. Think on the things you create each day and reflect upon how your intentionality in them communicates what God is like to your kids, neighbors, or coworkers.

Second, as the previous sentence suggests, we must be intentional in our creative endeavors. I'm willing to wager that if you asked any painter, graphic designer, or writer in our congregation what the most difficult part of their craft is, they would say making the time and putting forth the effort to *do it*. For me, the most difficult part of song writing is sitting down to write a song! I get a line or two in, find that I don't like it, and am tempted to crumple up the paper and start playing songs other people wrote. Well-written songs *rarely* come easily, and this principle is true for any craft. All creative work takes dil-

igence, a commitment to finish, and the humility to accept that creativity is a muscle that must be exercised and conditioned. The first few efforts are going to seem pretty lousy and disappointing—and that is perfectly okay! So much of the boredom many of us face within our jobs or daily routines may be directly attributed to us not endeavoring to imagine and create new and better ways of doing things in our workplaces and homes. We can all learn from the painter who sits down every day to apply paint to the canvas. Little by little she is shaping and creating something beautiful. As you go to class, to work, or are raising your kids, don't settle for doing average work. Glorify God and find superior joy in exercising the creative capacity he has given you to bring life and beauty to everything you do. It's hard, certainly, but being able to look back on your project, whatever it may be, and think "very good" is well worth the extra work.

Finally, press in to God by looking to Jesus, and trust that the Holy Spirit will meet and empower you in your creative effort. The ultimate test of the goodness of a creative work is the measure by which it reflects God in his attributes. To reflect him well in our creativity, we must know what he is like, what he considers good, true, and beautiful. Moreover, we can be encouraged as we are not left to our own devices in our creative work. In fact, the first example we have of the Spirit empowering man to accomplish a task is found in Exodus 31 when he filled Bezalel and Oholiab to construct the tabernacle and all its elements. God, by the power of his Holy Spirit, is faithful to empower the creative

work of our hands as we make every effort to display his glory in our homes, neighborhoods, and cities.

So, for God's glory and your joy, and by his help in every sphere of life, endeavor to create *good*.

Profiles in
Genesis
Shem, Ham,
and Japheth

126

01

Father of the nations
that spread across the
earth after the flood

02

Ham seeing his father
naked caused Noah to
curse Canaan, Ham's
descendants

03

Egypt comes from the
lineage of Ham

Day 1

Q1 Compare Genesis 1:28–30 to Genesis 9:1–3, 7. What is similar and what is different or added in Genesis 9:1–3, 7?

Q2 In Genesis 9:3–6, what instruction does God give mankind for eating meat? What does he explicitly condemn?

Q3 According to Genesis 9:6, why is murder wrong? What significance does this give to human life?

Q4 How does the contrast between Genesis 9:6 and 9:7 display God's heart and desires for humanity?

Q5 What are ways today that we, as a society, do not recognize the unique status of mankind as being made in the image of God? In what ways do we recognize that man is uniquely made in the image of God today?

Day 2

Q1 Read Genesis 9:8–17. What is the covenant that God makes? Who all is included in the covenant? What is the sign of the covenant? What are the obligations for mankind in this covenant? How does this covenant display God’s sovereign glory and mercy?

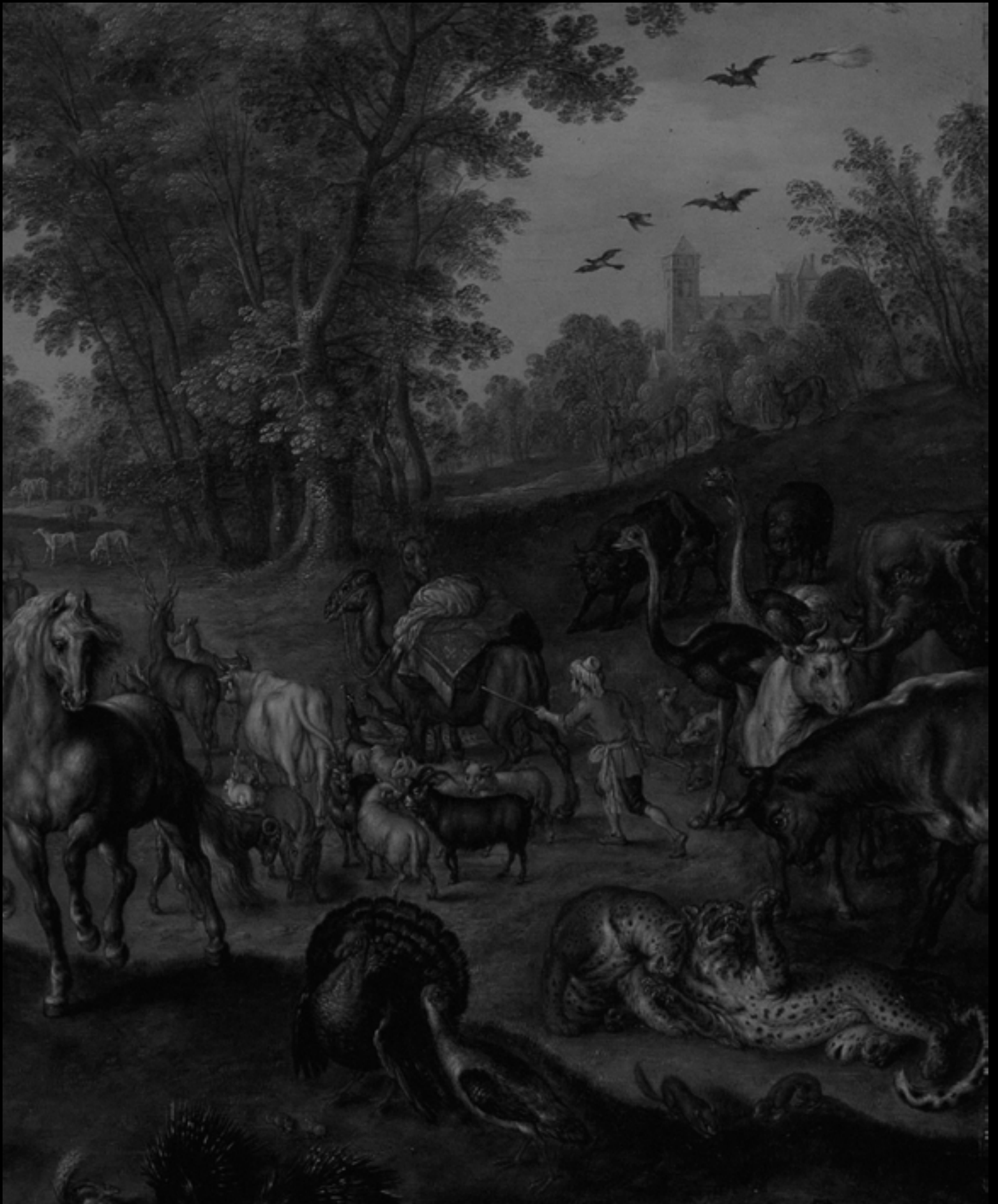
Q2 What is Noah’s “fall” in Genesis 9:20–21?

Q3 Read Exodus 20:12 and 21:15, 17. How do these verses help us understand the gravity of Ham’s sin in Genesis 9:22?

Q4 God called Noah “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” and one who “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9) and therefore spared Noah and his family from the flood. In many ways, Genesis 9 mirrors Genesis 3 and 4. What does the similar fall of Noah and his son, Ham, show us about the nature of sin?

Q5 How exhaustive is the corruption of sin?





Day 3

Study James 3:1-13.

Sermon Notes

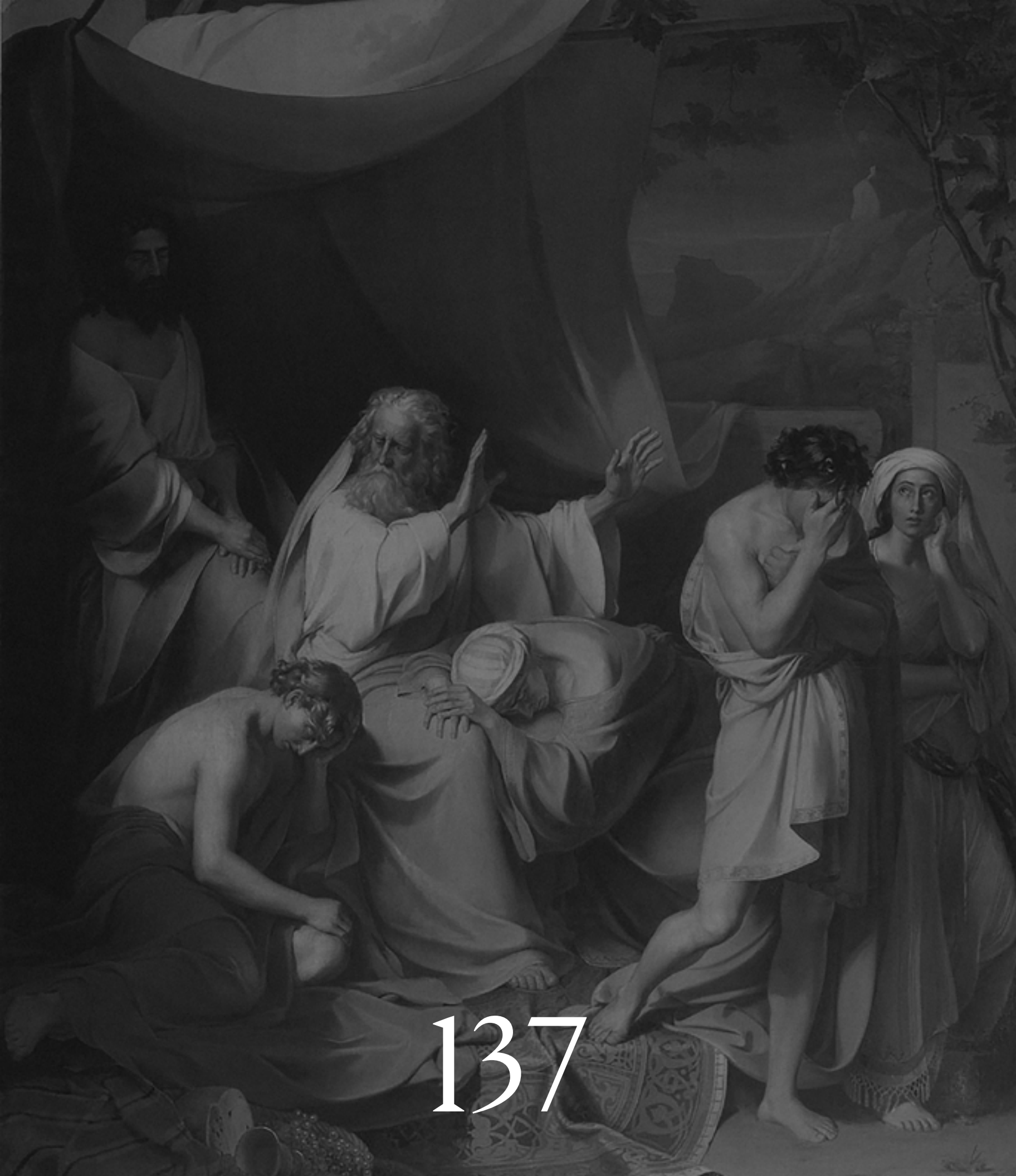
October 30, 2016

10

Hope Amid
Hopelessness

David

Easterwood



137

One of the things I look forward to each fall is the new TV line-up. I love a good story and the fall series premieres promise any number of new stories. I also have this dream of being in on the ground floor of the next big series, the one everyone is talking about. I know that time and other constraints will limit my TV investment, so each fall I try to pick very carefully. And each fall I fail and my shows are usually cancelled after just a few episodes. So, I'm usually left playing cultural catch up. What's on? What's most popular?

One of the most troubling things about some of the most popular shows recently, is that I don't know who I am supposed to root for. I can't find the hero. The protagonist is just the least wicked of the main cast and sometimes just barely. And with this lack of a hero, there is a lack of hope. No one is coming to help. Things will never get better. These are the narratives that capture millions of viewers each week and even more advertising dollars.

Christians have a better narrative, a true story, with a real hope. If the rider on the white horse racing to save the girl is a good story, how much better the rider who made the horse and who gives it its strength, who rides with the confidence that the dragon has already been defeated. If the story of the man who takes a bullet so that another might live a little longer on this Earth is compelling, how much more so the story of the One who died in our place and came back to life so that all who believe would live forever?

The prophets we've been studying hoped in the One who would

come, the One who would save, even though they only had fragments of the story. How much more should we hope, and live in such hope, given that we have the whole story! The Bible says that the prophets longed to see what we have seen.

But do we live like we really believe the Gospel story, like we really do hope in Christ? It's easy on Sunday mornings to chuckle at Pastor Jonathan when he tells us that, "Jesus is real, guys!" Of course He is, we know that, right? But what about Sunday afternoon through Saturday night? Do we believe that Jesus is real in a way that saturates us in a living hope? Do we drive to and from work as hopeful people? Would our co-workers characterize us as hopeful despite circumstances? What about our families? Or friends? Do our individual stories reflect the hope of the Gospel story? Does the story of Cities Church demonstrate the hope found only in Jesus?

I fear that too often we indulge and even encourage the hopelessness of the stories that fill our culture. This reminds us of our need to confess our sins, so let's seek him together now.

Prayer of Confession

Father, there are a great many things around us that would tell us there is no reason to hope. Global calamities and strife, local disasters and even personal tragedy join with the ever-growing din of this world in which fallen people, marred by sin, continue to collide with one another. It can be so easy to believe the cultural narratives that implore us to despair. And too often we give in and we let our

guard down. We believe the lie that this is all there is and things will never get better. We numb ourselves with hopeless TV shows.

Father, forgive us for our lack of hope. Forgive us for the distractions we allow into our lives that cause us to lose sight of who you are. Help us, God, and cause us to turn and to meditate on your Word and be reminded that we were separated from Christ and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

We know, Father, that if we in the church regard sin in our own midst or in our own hearts, our prayers will be ineffectual. So we confess our individual sins to you now.

Do we believe that Jesus is real in a way that saturates us in a living hope? Do our individual stories reflect the hope of the Gospel story? Does the story of Cities Church demonstrate the hope found only in Jesus?

Profiles in
Genesis
The Tower
of Babel

140

02

Until the fall of
the tower only one
language was spoken

03

From here God spread
the inhabitants all
across the earth

01

A tower meant to
reach into the heavens

Day 1

Q1 Who are the descendants of Noah?

Q2 What key peoples or nations grow from Noah's descendants? (Hint: You'll see these names appear several times throughout the Bible.)

Q3 What do you think is the significance of naming genealogies? Why does the Bible do this?

Day 2

Q1 What is the significance of Shem in comparison to his brothers? What makes him special in Genesis chapter 10? (Hint: trick question)

Q2 Genesis 10:32 tells us that these are the clans that populated the earth after the flood. In other words, we all trace back our history to one of these three men: Shem, Ham, or Japheth. What do you think about that?

Q3 Each of these clans spoke their own language. What kind of challenge do you think that presented to rebuilding the world after the flood?





Day 3

Study Acts 2.

Sermon Notes

November 6, 2016

11



150



BABEL

ON

JOSH

ADAMS

Language is fascinating. Not the construction of sentences, not the debate over the Oxford comma, and definitely not whatever a gerund is (or ending a sentence in a preposition). No, the very idea of language, the ability to communicate with another living being via a shared understanding of symbols and sounds, is what is absolutely fascinating. The mere fact that electronic impulses in our brain result in noises emanating from our mouths in a manner that can be understood by someone completely disconnected from us is astonishing. These words, the very ones that you're reading right now, are just squiggles on a page (that were typed on a computer) but have a meaning that you and the other members of Cities Church can understand even though you and I may have not previously met. Language, let me say it again, is astounding.

Now think about the world we currently live in. We live in a world of husbands and wives, engineers and salespeople, Democrats and Republicans, a world where people can speak the exact same language fluently and still not actually be completely understood. A husband says something he thought was a compliment only to have his wife feel hurt. An engineer talks about an exciting new product feature that will solve a client issue but the salesperson thinks the engineer is only explaining why the product will be delayed. The Democrat talks about the need for government programs to help the poor and the Republican only thinks about a tax increase. Within one language there are barriers between people without even considering the struggles of attempting to communicate with one of the

The very idea of language, the ability to communicate with another living being via a shared understanding of symbols and sounds, is what is absolutely fascinating.

other 7,000 languages on earth at the moment. As amazing as language is it is also extremely complex.

But it wasn't always this way. There was a time when one language existed (a time which most likely existed before the events of at least Genesis 10 since Genesis 10:5 mentions multiple languages) and all the people spoke it. With the diverse cultures all around the world and the increased intermingling of those cultures (and their languages) this time of one language might seem like a paradise. It could have been, but as humans have to a tendency to do, the people of this time used this single language to raise themselves up while attempting to diminish God.

In Genesis 11:4 ("Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower

with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth") the people of this time make their intentions clear. Their first desire for building the tower is so that they will not be spread across the globe. At first read it might seem a trivial thing. They were a unified people and they wanted to stay together; what's the harm in that? The harm, the offense, is that the desire to stay in one place went directly against what God intended for these people. All the way back in Genesis 1:28 God said to his children (Adam and Eve), "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Filling the earth does not happen by building a tower that stretches high into the sky.

The second intent of the people is to glorify themselves with their technological prowess (displayed by the completed tower). Plain and simply, they made an idol to their own power. Rather than using the gifts bestowed upon them by God they built a monument to themselves.

The refrain here is the same as it is throughout the Bible and history: mankind finds/achieves/develops some amazing piece of technology or tool only to attempt to use it to make themselves gods that know better than our all-knowing Creator. We see the things he has given us but we don't like that we aren't in control so we strike out on our own in order for us to be in charge. We allow ourselves to be seduced by sweet words (in the case of the serpent) or by justifications of supposed good intentions (as is possible with the tower). Instead of obediently trusting in God to know what's best, we set the course for in-

dependence from him so that we may rule our destinies.

It's a great thought, thinking that we can be our own masters, that we don't have to listen to God, that we're the bosses. We're not, though. We can never truly be independent of God. We are not in charge. We are not the bosses of our lives (apologies to fans of the 1980s TV show *Who's the Boss* but it's not Tony, Angela, or Mona, either). Again and again God gently (and sometimes not so gently) guides us away from the false idea that we can operate apart from him. With the corruption spreading across the earth generations after the fall, he opened up the heavens so a flood could cleanse the world. With the people at the tower, he disrupted their language, confusing their words amongst each other. He took the tool that enabled their idolatry and distorted it so that they could no longer understand one another.

After the confusion of the unified language, God did for the people what he had originally intended. He spread them across the earth just as he had instructed Adam and Eve (and their descendants) to do in Genesis 1. He took from them the means to coordinate and build another idol to their own greatness.

Of course the Tower of Babel isn't the end of the story for mankind. Our rebellious, independent behavior manifests itself over and over again. Genesis itself is a repeat of the same theme (God blesses mankind, mankind rejects/rebels against God, God reacts by bringing mankind back again) because we do not learn our lesson. On our own we fail to see who God is, why he deserves our undivid-

ed love, and why we are blessed to belong to him. On our own we only build idols that deserve to be toppled.

Through Jesus, though, we have been given a new opportunity to be united, not just in a common language, but as a people. Through Jesus we belong to God in a way never capable by our own actions. Through Jesus we have a unity that surpasses even the astounding nature of language.

Thanks to Jesus we know something far sweeter than the satisfaction of a tower in the heavens; we know the love of God. Thanks to Jesus we are ultimately saved from our idolatrous ways. Thanks to Jesus we no longer have to babble on but can, instead, be forever and truly unified with God.

Profiles in Genesis Terah

154

03

Lived for 205 years

01

Father of Abram,
Nahor, and Haran

02

Grandfather of Lot

Day 1

Q1 For what purpose, according to Genesis 11:4, did the people build the tower?

Q2 Why did God decide to disrupt their language?

Q3 Why would God send the people out across the earth?

Q4 Think about the reason the people with one language were looking to build their city. How does this behavior show up in your daily life? How can you combat it?

Q5 How does God's action toward the people relate to Jesus's commission in Matthew 28:16–20?

Day 2

Q1 In Genesis 11:10 the author picks up the genealogy of Shem, the son of Noah, and carries it through to the offspring of Terah. Why would the author stop at this point?

Q2 Why would the author, in Genesis 11:30, make it a point to state that Sarai was barren and childless?

Q3 Read Acts 7:1–7. What happens to Abraham (Abram) after he leaves Haran? How does this connect to God’s purpose of dispersing the people back in Genesis 11:5–6?

Q4 In Acts 7:1, why does Stephen refer to Abraham as “our father”?

Q5 How does Acts 7:6 connect with God’s action of dispersing the people in Genesis 11:9 and Jesus’s great commission?





Day 3

Study Acts 4:32–37.

Sermon Notes

November 13, 2016

BEFORE YOU

EXODUS

SOME FINAL,

RANDOM

THOUGHTS

ABOUT

GENESIS



163

01

Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament)

03

Genesis was written by Moses (along with the other four books that comprise the Pentateuch)

02

Genesis is set in three general areas (The Fertile Crescent, Canaan, and Egypt). This edition of The Quarterly (Genesis 1–11) focuses on the section set in The Fertile Crescent

05

In Greek "genesis" means "origin" and in Hebrew it means "in the beginning"

04

Genesis is the book with the second most words (around 32,000). Jeremiah holds the title for the book with the most words at around 33,000 words

06

The band Genesis did not take inspiration for their name from the biblical book