

Gen. 6:1-8

Aug. 1, 2010

Before we look at today's passage from Genesis 6, there are a couple of points I'd like to make about the chapters leading up to it. In my sermons over the past several weeks I have not talked much about topics like the Big Bang theory or evolution, and this has been deliberate. I believe that it is very important for Christians to be familiar with those ideas and how they compare with the early chapters of Genesis. But I also think that the interplay between science and the Bible is extremely complicated, and a sermon is not the best way to explore those ideas. Since a sermon doesn't allow for questions and clarification, I've focused on what the Word of God itself has to say, and the purposes God had in recording them for people throughout the ages.

If any of you want to explore further about the relationship between science and faith, please let me know. We can read together, talk, and even have a discussion group if you like. But above all, I don't want to give you the impression that Christians should stick their heads in the sand and ignore the claims that scientists make, especially ones that contradict the Scriptures. I actually think the opposite. We need to be as well equipped as possible to have a grasp of the basic issues and, as Peter says, be prepared in season and out of season to give a reason for the hope we have in Christ.

The second point I'd like to make will take us from Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis 4 up to Noah in Genesis 6. I'd like to summarize what happens after Cain is dismissed by God to wander the earth. Genesis 4:17 tells us that Cain and his wife gave birth to Enoch. When I taught at a Christian school in the mid-90's, my high schoolers were quick to pounce on this verse. They asked, "Where did Cain's wife come from?" It's an excellent question about a detail that nearly all commentaries overlook, but it's important to answer for those of us who presume that Adam and Eve were actual, historical people.

First of all, we know from Genesis 5:4-5 that Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters, and Adam lived to be 930 years old. Jewish tradition contends that they had 33 sons and 23 daughters, though that is not found in the Scriptures. Whatever the case,

obviously Adam and Eve's first children would have had to marry either their siblings, or nieces, nephews, and cousins.

For us today, this is problematic because we know the genetic deformities that occur when a child is born of people who are too closely related. By the time of Moses around 1500 BC, the Lord gives directions in the Book of Leviticus for Israelites not to marry close relatives. But prior to that, it was common for people to do so. Abraham lived 600 years before Moses, and married his half-sister.

So when we think of Adam and Eve's children, God had not prohibited marrying close relatives and practically speaking, there was no one else to marry. But if we think about this from a genetic viewpoint, Cain was only one generation past parents who had been created perfect. Today, the more closely related two people are, the more likely it is that they will have similar mistakes in their genes that were inherited from the same parents. But at this time, Cain and all of his siblings would not have carried a great number of genetic mutations handed down from Adam and Eve.

Clearly God also could have extended special grace to these early generations. He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, so He may have protected them from suffering the genetic issues we know today. God Himself was not concerned about interbreeding until the time of Moses, so we can assume that marrying close relatives was a common and accepted experience in the early years of humanity.

Adam and Eve may not have passed many genetic mutations on to their children, but they did pass along sin. God cast Cain away to live as a nomad, but allowed him to take his wife with him. God blessed Cain with a family so he would not be utterly alone. Cain apparently was not grateful, though, because contrary to the Lord's command to wander, he settled down to build a city, as Genesis 4:17 notes. While later godly men will name their cities to honor and praise the Lord, Cain named his city after his son Enoch. And then Genesis 4:24 explains that Cain's descendant Lamech was not only a murderer, but was boastful about. In contrast, the Lord keeps a godly line of descent alive in Seth, who is born to Adam and Eve in Genesis 4:25. Through Seth and his son Enosh, and not through Cain's descendants, the true worship of God continued.

Chapter 5 gives us the first genealogy in the Bible, and what sticks out is that many of those mentioned lived far longer than we can imagine. Even taking differences in

calendars and time-keeping into account, other cultures of this time also have records indicating that people lived much longer prior to the great flood, when God declared that humans would no longer live past age 120. But there are other points chapter 5 also makes. First, no matter how long people lived, they still died, just as God had declared they would. The wording plainly says “he died” with every name mentioned, highlighting human mortality because of sin. This chapter also demonstrates the fact that humans did go forth and multiply, as God had commanded and desired.

But the most important aspect of chapter 5 is that Adam’s line is traced from his creation all the way through to the birth of Noah. Noah’s father Lamech makes a prophecy about him in Genesis 5:28, saying that through Noah, God “will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.” Those very words recall the declaration God made to Adam about the consequences of his first sin. But through Noah, God will mercifully bring relief and hope to humanity.

So that finally brings us to Genesis 6:1-8, which is printed in your bulletin.

“When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days— and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

⁵ The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

This is the Word of the Lord.

As we saw with Cain’s lineage, the more populated the earth became, the more sin was manifest, and this shouldn’t surprise us. What’s important to focus on in these

verses, though, is what exactly grieved God so much that He decided to wipe nearly everyone out with a great flood. The first problem is described in verse 2, where the Sons of God married any women they chose. There have been several ways of interpreting this verse through history, but all of them have to do with a corruption of the marriage covenant that God established with Adam and Eve.

One interpretation marks this as the start of polygamy, which became a very prevalent practice and a sin that runs throughout Israel's history in the Old Testament. The phrase "Sons of God" can also refer to spiritual beings like demons who interbred with humans and gave birth to particularly evil children. Another possibility is that the "Sons of God" were men who were worshipped as being divine, and instead of having children who honored the Lord, they continued with dynasties that claimed divinity. The Egyptian Kings and Japanese monarchies would be later examples of this idea.

Whichever interpretation we prefer, and there are none that are clear-cut, it is obvious that the Lord is so repulsed by humanity's sin that He limits our life span to 120 years. Why? To limit the amount of time we have to sin against Him, as well as limit the time we have to repent. The mysterious Nephilim are also mentioned as a reason for God's extreme displeasure. No one is exactly sure who they were, but they are different from the "sons of God" mentioned before. They may have been a group of warriors who terrorized people. To those who knew about them they were the heroes of old, but in God's eyes they were rebellious against Him. Their Hebrew name means the "fallen ones," so they seem to be prime examples of evil incarnate.

All of this leads up to God's observation in verse 5, which is striking. "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, all the time." Now since we have already traced the line of Adam through to Noah, we know that there were some godly people. God mentions many times in the Scriptures that He will always keep and protect a remnant of faithful people. But verse 5 shows that the general extent of evil on the earth must have been horrific, even compared to what we know today. We also know that the Lord is tremendously patient, so the fact that He would send a flood indicates the severity of the evil on the earth. The Lord simply couldn't take it anymore. His patience ran out.

Verse 6 tells us something crucial about the Lord. Sometimes people have the mistaken idea that God is wrathful, and even hateful. But verse 6 states that the Lord was grieved, and His heart was filled with pain because of all the sin He beheld. In contrast to the creation scene, when God saw that everything was good, here the Lord sees horrors. While man's heart was inclined to evil all of the time, God's good and holy heart was distressed by how far people had strayed from Him. Some translations use the word "regret" for God's emotions here, but that is not quite right. It's not that God thought he should have done something other than create humanity. Instead, God has a very strong emotional response that includes sadness and anguish. He is indignant against the evil people have done against each other, and in violation of His holiness.

This is helpful to remind us that God is not some distant being who is indifferent to us. When we obey Him and do what is right, when we worship Him in spirit and in truth ☺, when we try to express our love for Him, He has an emotional response to us, just like we emotionally respond to each other. God is not a cold, detached robot. He takes pleasure in us, for who we are as His children. But we also may sadden Him, disappoint Him, and even anger Him. Jesus has paid the price for the punishment our sin deserves, but God is still affected by how we behave and how we show our love for Him. In fact, I would say that God is even more emotional than we are. We are made in His image, but our emotions are distorted and confused by sin. His emotions are full and perfect. We are persons, but God is the ultimate Person, and He has feelings that our emotions only hint at.

Getting back to Genesis, the Lord's grief due to sin was so great that He decided to wipe everything away, and basically start over again. Even though His creation had been very good, He was willing to give humanity another chance to live righteously. The words for "wipe out" here refer to cleaning a slate, or erasing names from a record. This is the ultimate "do-over." God will cleanse what has become soiled and corrupted. Because of His love for humanity, He will reverse what He accomplished in creation for the sake of giving us another chance. In a sense, God does here what He will later do through Jesus Christ. He washes us clean of our sin, reverses our corruption, and makes us a new creation.

The purification God brought about through the flood is the first of many instances where the Scriptures refer to washing for righteousness. One example of this is in Titus 3, which reads, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated, and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth, and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs who have the hope of eternal life.” This same washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit is what Jesus referred to when He washed His disciples’ feet. And the flood is the root of the sacrament of baptism, as we’ll see in a few weeks.

In the midst of all this wickedness, there was one person who found favor with the Lord. This does not mean that Noah earned God’s favor, but that the Lord blessed Noah to be able to remain obedient and faithful despite the wickedness that surrounded Him. God blessed Noah by choosing him to undertake a strange and gigantic task— building an ark for a flood, even though it had never rained. This is why the Book of Hebrews attests to Noah’s great faith, and why even today his story captivates our imaginations. While the picture of escorting animals two-by-two into a boat stirs a sense of wonder, what is most commendable about Noah is his faith. As we will see when we finish Genesis 6, God asked Noah to do things that were completely ridiculous and nonsensical to human wisdom, but through eyes of faith they were God’s wise commands that delivered the human race.

In the 21st century we can certainly relate to the challenges Noah and his family faced. Like then, we live in a culture that is steadily eroding the meaning and preciousness of marriage. The intimacy that should be reserved for marriage is no longer protected, but exactly the opposite. Sexuality is thrown in our faces every day, with the result that God’s good gift is cheapened and degraded.

Just as with the Nephilim, the mighty men of old, our world is full of humans committing violence against one another. Whether we speak of terrorists or the criminals who end up on the news every night, the destruction of human life and peace happens with frightening frequency. No wonder that Noah’s dad hoped for God to use his son to

bring peace and hope to their world. That's just what we all need today: peace and hope. That's just what we Christians have to count on as we worship our Lord and live in a way that brings Him delight and joy. Jesus is our peace, and our only hope. And that's exactly what we Christians have to offer today in the Gospel of Jesus Christ: peace and hope.

As Romans 15 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Let us pray.