

A World Gone Wrong

<i>Text</i>	Genesis 6:1-13
<i>Readings</i>	Philippians 2:12-18, 3:17-4:1
<i>Theme</i>	In response to the widespread sin of mankind God tells Noah of his plan to destroy the world but to rescue him.
<i>Purpose</i>	To analyse the extent of evil in the pre-flood world and explain God's judgement on it and his gracious salvation of Noah.

You will often hear people say that society is going downhill, that things are not the way they used to be. Many older people will look back to the better times of earlier days when they were young and when the world was a better place.

Most people around us would agree that our own society is declining at a rapid rate; yet most would also agree that things could be a lot worse!

Think of the terrible conditions in Iraq and Zimbabwe.

If we go back in history we could think of the situation in England in the eighteenth century before the revivals under Whitfield and Wesley.

Or going back even further we could name the corruption and moral decay in ancient Rome before it was overrun by the Huns and Goths.

And going back even further than that we can read this description of the world in the days of Noah before the flood.

1. Today we will consider **The Sin of Mankind** at that time.

It is helpful for us to think about this because Jesus told us that the conditions of *that* time will be repeated in the last days of *this* time. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:37). So it is helpful for us to know what lies ahead of us. We want to note four features of that period.

The first is **compromise**. Genesis 6 opens with some unusual descriptions that are a bit obscure.

It describes the "sons of God" intermarrying with "the daughters of men".

Scholars have come up with a variety of interpretations of what this means but the most straightforward reading is to see "the sons of God" as a description of the godly line of Seth, while "the daughters of men" describes the unbelieving line of Cain.

For a long time the descendants of Seth did not mix with those of Cain; they kept themselves separate. But they saw how beautiful those women were and they began to intermarry with them. They compromised. They mixed these two lines, these two families. They gave away their holy position, their separate identity.

The Bible is full of warnings against this practice of intermarriage with unbelievers, and yet it has happened again and again, and it still going on today. Yet when a believer deliberately marries an unbeliever it will have disastrous consequences for them and their marriage and their children.

This was a problem in Corinth and so Paul wrote to them; “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellow-ship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Young people, be very careful that you do not compromise your faith by marrying an unbeliever.

The second feature of sin we see here is **arrogance**. Once again we have an unusual statement in verse 4.

It describes the “Nephilim”. This word comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to fall”, and so describes those who had fallen. Later on it was used to describe people of unusual size and strength - people who were giants.

We are told that they were “heroes of old”. These people may have been heroes in the eyes of men, but as far as God was concerned they were sinners, they were fallen and evil. They used their size and strength to get their own way, to get what they wanted.

This happens today as well. Some people are physically strong, others are highly intelligent, and others are influential leaders. Those gifts and abilities can be put to good use, but they are often used for sinful and selfish goals. They usually only increase the influence and extent of sin in their lives. They become more powerful, and more intelligent sinners, but sinners nevertheless.

These men are also described as “men of renown”. Literally this reads; “men of name”. That same phrase is used by the men who built the tower of Babel who wanted to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4).

Later on God promised that he would give Abram a great name (12:3). But these men wanted to be “men of name” in their own right, by their own achievements, in their own strength. They were arrogant and proud.

So the sin of the world at that time began with compromise, it expressed itself in arrogance, and its third feature was that it was **extensive**.

In verse 5 we read; “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on earth had become...”

The phrase “The Lord saw” takes us back to Genesis 1 when “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” But when God saw the world in the days of Noah he saw its great wickedness. Evil had reached huge proportions. It was widespread through the world.

The extent of evil is described further in verse 11-12:

“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight...”

The word “corrupt” can also be translated as destroy. The people of the world were destroying themselves, they were decaying from within, they were self-destructing.

And the earth was “full of violence”. It was a world of anarchy and lawlessness. Might was right. Brute strength won the day. Those with the most power and strength got their own way. It was a world full of anger and hatred, revenge and murder. Think of what is going on today in Bagdad and in Dafur.

And this was true of “all the people” on the earth. This is what God saw.

Not only was sin extensive in that world, it was also **intensive**, it was deep-rooted in people’s minds and deep-seated in their hearts.

The second half of verse 5 explains that “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” Sin affected every inclination, every plan, every purpose, every venture. The thoughts of their hearts were only evil. There was nothing good in them. No redeeming feature. There was no kindness, no mercy, no love, no joy.

Psalm 14 describes God looking down from heaven on the earth to see if there are any who seek him. He discovered that “all have turned aside, they have together become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.” (vs 3).

The apostle Paul used those words to describe the situation of the Jews and Gentiles in his day (Romans 3:10f).

And this sin and evil in the world was constant. It was going on “all the time”. (vs 5b).

All of these features are present in our world today, and in our society. Evil in New Zealand is not as extensive nor as intensive as it was in the days of Noah, but the trend is downward. Without the grace of God society will decline, evil will increase, wickedness will grow.

When our Lord Jesus thought about this overall trend he asked; “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8)

We need to pray that the Lord will have mercy on our town and district and nation; that the Holy Spirit will give men and women a strong conviction of sin and that they might repent and turn to God before he comes in judgement.

2. This brings us then to consider, secondly, **The Response of God**.

His first reaction was **grief**: Verse 6 - “The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”

This describes God’s emotions in human terms, but they are real emotions; in fact, they are much deeper and more profound than our emotions. Here is a mixture of righteous anger over sin and a deep anguish over what has happened to humanity and to the world.

Think of a father who grieves over a son who has chosen the wrong friends and is turning away from the Lord; or the sorrow of mother who sees her daughter make foolish decisions and pursue her own selfish concerns.

In the same way the Lord grieves when he sees the people he has created choose a path of destruction and evil.

That was illustrated in the life of our Lord Jesus when he wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, deeply moved with emotion over the suffering caused by sin and death.

Do you feel something of this yourself when you hear news of another murder, of a violent rape, of a home invasion, of the senseless destruction of life and property? Do you feel a righteous anger over sin and injustice in the world? Is your heart filled with pain when you see the consequences of sin worked out in people's lives?

The Lord not only responded with grief but also with the warning of **judgement**.

Verse 7: "So the Lord said; 'I will wipe mankind...from the face of the earth'..."

This is the word used to describe washing a plate and then wiping it clean.

In verse 13 God told Noah that he was going to "put an end to all people" and that he would "destroy both them and the earth". Later on he explained that he would do this by water.

When a natural disaster occurs on a large scale, such as an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption, or a tsunami, we describe these as "acts of God". Many people use that phrase without thought or meaning. Yet these are indeed "acts of God". God is behind everything that goes on. They are all guided and directed by his power. They are warnings of the final judgement that is going to come.

We don't know when that final judgement will come, but the Lord told Noah that the judgement in his day would come in 120 years. Look back to verse 3: "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." Scholars have various interpretations of this verse but it seems best to read it as a time frame for the coming destruction. From this announcement to the time of the flood would be 120 years.

This reminds us that God is serious about sin. He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Ex 34:7). He will deal with sin. He will punish the evildoer, if not immediately, then later. Justice will be done. The scales will be balanced. Wickedness will not go on forever.

This is true of the evil in our own day and age. We easily forget about that. We have it so good in our western world with our amazing technology, our impressive motorways, our tall buildings, our lovely homes, our beautiful possessions, our delicious food. Yet we need to remember that our world, "for all its ingenious achievements lies under the judgement of God." David Wells writes; "It is all, despite its brilliance, now dying and it has no future. It can offer many pleasurable experiences, many momentary distractions, but it is doomed. It has no long term future and it can offer no meaning besides what it manufactures for the moment, which is as fleeting as the morning mist." (Above All Earthly Powers, p. 230). That's it, this world, as was the world of Noah, is under the judgement of God.

But God not only responded with grief, and with judgement, but also with **grace**.

After a comprehensive description of the sin of the world and God's punishment of it we read, in verse 8, a simple, striking statement of contrast: "But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord." The word favour is another way of describing God's grace.

It is significant that God's grace is mentioned before any mention is made of Noah's life before God. Someone has suggested that the phrase "Noah found favour" could be read backwards as, "grace found Noah".

That is the consistent emphasis in the Bible; “For by grace you have been saved, through faith...not by works so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9). That was true of Noah and it is true of all of us who believe. You and I were found by God’s grace.

Out of that grace Noah lived a righteous life. In Hebrew narrative it is unusual to get a description of someone’s character - usually we are left to pick that up from the story - but here we are given a telling description of Noah’s life.

He was a *righteous man* who ordered his life according to God’s will and obeyed God’s commands.

He was “*blameless* among the people of his time”. This doesn’t mean that was perfect or that he had no sin. It does mean that he stood out in his generation. He was exceptional among his contemporaries. His life was a striking contrast to those around him.

And he “*walked with God*”. That was also said of Enoch. He lived in fellowship with God; he conversed with him in prayer; he enjoyed a life of communion with his Creator. Noah knew God personally and deeply and intimately.

Could this be said of you? We are living in a declining civilisation. The trend is downwards. The days are getting darker. This is a crooked and depraved generation (Philippians 2:15).

Are you living a righteous life?

Are you blameless and pure, living without fault, having a good reputation with those around you?

Are you walking with God in a living personal relationship with him?

Are you praying for the world around you?

Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord and God chose him to make a new beginning. He would wipe mankind from the face of the earth and then begin with a clean slate. The Lord would start over again. This would mark a major new stage, a new age, another development in God’s plan.

Just as Adam headed the first world, so Noah headed the second world. In this he was a type of the Lord Jesus, pointing forward to him.

He did this because he was “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.” (6:9)

Jesus too was righteous and blameless - more so than Noah – because Jesus was perfect, he was without sin. Jesus walked with God in the relationship of the Son of God to his Father in Heaven. He walked with God because he had the Spirit of God with him all the time.

But Noah also pointed forward to Jesus because the next major beginning was in Christ. Jesus came as the new representative of humanity. Through his death he established the new covenant in his blood. In the Lord Jesus God began over again, so that anyone who is in Christ Jesus is a new creation.

We live in this period of time, this New Testament age, these last days leading up to the return of Christ. The end of these days will be like the days of Noah. In this darkness you are to “shine like stars in the universe, as

you hold out the word of life.” (Philippians 2:15f). Hold up the light of the Lord Jesus Christ for all to see. Walk with God in a righteous and blameless life.

Amen