

April 1/2, 2000

Judgment or Salvation?

Genesis 6:1-22

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This past Friday we had the Memorial Service for Paul Heffelfinger and, as we always try to do in a service like that, presented the gospel as clearly as possible at a time when people are thinking about matters of life and death. Afterward, many people shared appreciation that it was so clearly presented, and several said they wondered how anyone could walk away from that not believing. But I realized why later that afternoon when I was chatting with another family here in the church. They said the day before they had gone to another funeral and the message was just about the opposite of what I presented. It talked about the person being in heaven because they were a good person and lived a good life and were baptized as an infant. I thought in my mind that is why people can walk away from an event like that and be more confused, because one day they hear this message. The next day they hear that message, and there is a lot of confusion. What is true and what isn't true?

We've seen that in the newspaper, in the Journal-Star, in the last several weeks. There have been a series of articles about the lectures going on at the University related to this whole topic of creation and evolution. And it's been an interesting potpourri of people: those who claim to be creationists but who really don't take the Bible literally, and they've re-defined what that means. They fit more with the evolutionists than they do the creationists. This past week there was an article about people who are evolutionists, but they do believe that they are Christians. They believe part of the Bible, but think a lot of it isn't true, but think some of it's true, and they end up "picking and choosing" what they believe.

All of this takes us back to Genesis 4: the way of Cain. When Cain came to God he basically said, "God, I'm going to come on my own terms. I'm going to pick and choose what I do, and I'm going to define my own religion," hoping that God would kind of 'buy' into that. And God, of course, is unwilling to operate that way.

When Kerry Peterson and I went to Thailand in January, we were on a flight from Seattle to Tokyo. Kerry was in one seat, then there was an open seat, then there was a gentleman we had just met named Matt, then another open seat, and then me. As we were flying I happened to be sleeping during these moments when Kerry entered into a conversation with Matt. I really wasn't aware of the conversation or what they had discussed, but when I finally "came to" and was entering into the conversation, Kerry introduced me to Matt and said, "By the way, Bryan is a preacher." There was this look of horror on Matt's face. I was trying to figure that out, and over the course of the flight, we chatted about this and that and nothing terribly significant. But afterwards we got off at the airport in Tokyo, and Kerry said, "By the way, I thought you should know, Matt disdains preachers." I said, "Well, thanks for introducing me that way." He said, "I just thought he might want to know that there are some that are normal." And I don't know if Matt went away with that impression or not. But the basis of the conversation, and what irritated Matt, as he talked with Kerry, was this belief that all roads lead to God. Matt felt he could get there on his own terms and if Kerry had his way to God, that's fine. If I had my way to God, that's fine. As for the people in Thailand and Laos, they should be allowed their own way to God. Everybody kind

of defines God their own way. Everybody defines who God is in a way that's meaningful to them.

It's a view in our culture called pluralism and it comes right out of Genesis chapter 4. It's the way of Cain: that we will be gods and we will determine who God is. We will create a God that we're comfortable with who makes no real demands on our life. We'll decide how to get to that God and everybody makes that up for themselves.

Obviously, that idea goes back to Genesis 3 and the lie of the serpent who said, "You can be God. You can decide for yourself what is right or wrong; what is good and what is evil." In other words, you can re-define the rules. You can be like God. And of course we see that illustrated in the way of Cain, where Cain comes to God and determines to do things his own way and suffers the consequences of that. Then in Genesis 5 we're introduced to the seed of the woman, the godly line of Seth, who rather than determining themselves to be gods, determine that God is God and they call out upon the name of the Lord. They believe that it is through God's promised seed that there will be salvation to bring us from death back to life. To come to God, you must come to God on God's terms. All of that is a part of calling out on the name of the Lord.

In Genesis chapter 6, then, we see a fork in the road where we've already found out in Genesis 3 that there would be a battle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. It's played out in the seed of the serpent in chapter 4, and the seed of the woman in chapter 5. But now, lest there be any guesswork, God is going to tell us that the end is either judgment or salvation. To go the way of Cain is to end in judgment. To go the way of God is to experience salvation. It's one or the other and there's no real middle ground on that.

We had a beautiful illustration of that this morning, because you were forced to come into the church parking lot by the east road. At the end of the entry road there is a fork in the road where you have to choose to go to the right or to the left. There's only been one creative person that we're aware of who made a different choice by deciding to go up and over the berm. You might want to know that's not the plan out there. But even that reminds me of the professor I had at the University of Nebraska who once said in class that religion is OK, "just don't take it seriously." And I thought to myself, "What sense does that make? Either it's right; that God is who He says He is, and what the Bible teaches is true. If that's true, then we ought to go all out. Or if it isn't true, then why follow that at all? Why not just bail out and do something else? The thing I don't understand is the middle of the road. If it's true, then let's go after it. If it's false, then let's walk away from it and let's stay away from the middle of the road. That's where Genesis 6 lands, talking about judgment or salvation.

Keep in mind that the Bible is God's self-revelation. So this is God introducing us to His heart. It's interesting to get a picture of God's heart in this time of judgment in Genesis 6. God shows us really what His heart is in those moments, so we'll watch for that as we read.

Genesis 6: 1-2 says:

"Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose."

Now those first two verses in Genesis 6 are hotly debated as to what they actually

mean. There are many who believe that the sons of God refers to fallen angels – demonic spirits. And the reason they believe that is because there are some references in the Book of Job to the sons of God and, in that case, it is referring to angelic beings, although they are not fallen angels; they’re God’s angels. They also go to a couple of NT passages in the Book of Jude and 2 Peter and believe that those books are talking about this incident in Genesis 6. They put all that together, and their conclusion is that it’s talking about demonic spirits somehow having relations with the daughters of men and impregnating them, bringing forth this race of people called the Nephilim – these giants. Because that’s such a bizarre mixed race, they believe that God has to send the flood to wipe them all out and start over. Now if you’re not familiar with that view, it may sound a little like science fiction. But you do need to know there are many fine evangelical scholars who do believe that view from Genesis 6. I don’t believe it, myself. I don’t think the evidence supports that at all. As a matter of fact, one of the best ways to interpret difficult phrases in the Bible is not necessarily to run around the Bible and try and track it down throughout the rest of the Bible. But it’s often just to go back into the context of the passage and ask yourself, “What’s the flow of thought here? What’s the train of thought? What’s being emphasized?” That helps us understand a phrase like “sons of God and daughters of men”.

First of all, I don’t think sons and daughters are really the point. He’s not saying that all the sons are like this and all the daughters are like that, but he’s painting the picture. He’s painting the imagery of two lines intermarrying so that it becomes one line. To do that he’s simply setting a picture of one as a son and one as a daughter to create that marriage picture. But I think what he’s talking about are the sons of God as those who acknowledge God as God, which would be the godly line of Seth. And the daughters of men are those who have raised up men to the level of God (Gen. 4). So the line of those who worship God as God and the line of those who worship man as God were distinct in Genesis 4 and 5. But we have a crisis in chapter 6, and that is that the two lines are intermarrying. They are coming together and are becoming one line. That is creating a serious problem that God has to deal with. The emphasis since Genesis 3 has been the seed of the serpent, which are the ungodly, and the seed of the woman, which are the godly. Now the two lines are being identified.

The other thing you notice in this passage is that it’s all about man – mankind. God is sorry that He made man, and God’s judgment will be on mankind. There’s nothing in here that even hints of any type of judgment toward demonic spirits or anything like that. So I think it’s fairly simple. The two lines are coming together and they’re intermarrying. In other words, they’re becoming one. That creates the crisis that follows in verse 3:

Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

When he talks about His Spirit, we remember from Genesis 2 that the word “spirit” is the same word as the word breath. “And God breathed into Adam the breath of life and man became a living being.” What God is saying is that they will not strive forever with that breath within them. That God is going to pull that breath back out. They are flesh and they will die. God is hinting at a judgment that’s coming in 120 years. Some people take the 120 years to mean that from this time forward, people would not live to be more than 120 years old. That’s hard to support, though, because some of the patriarchs did live to be older than that. It seems more likely that he’s saying that in 120 years He was going to, in a sense, pull His breath back out and men would perish. And that’s a warning of the upcoming flood.

Verse 4: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons

of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Now what is a Nephilim? There were those who believed that demonic spirits were relating with the daughters of men creating this strange race called Nephilim. But Nephilim really just means giants or, more literally, it means “fallen ones”. I think what he is talking about are those fallen ones, in other words, the ungodly who are giants of men and women. When he talks about giants, I don’t believe he’s talking about physical giants, but those who’ve raised themselves to a level of tremendous influence. Dynamic leaders. Those who have set themselves up as gods, similar to what we would see later in Egypt with the pharaohs. As a matter of fact, that is how they are described later in verse 4. He calls them “mighty men as of old, men of renown.” “Men of renown” means “men of a name”. It means these were people who had made a name for themselves. These were people who had established themselves as gods. They were men of tremendous influence. And they were very powerful. They were, in a sense, giants of men.

We’ve had this wrestling match over the concept of name for several chapters here. We learned at the end of chapter 4 that it was the godly who called out upon the name of the Lord. And that means to acknowledge all that God is, all that He is about. It would include His promise of a seed that would provide salvation. That’s what it means to call upon the name of the Lord. Early in chapter 5 we were reminded that when God created us in His image, He named us ‘dust’. He named us man, which is a word that means dust, as a way of saying, “Never forget: ‘You’re dust. I’m God.’” If we can keep that straight, then He says everything will work out.

But what keeps happening is man determines that he’s not dust, but rather, that he’s God himself. And they formulate their dust into positions of great power – into positions of great influence. You remember in chapter 4 that Cain was sent away from the presence of God because Cain had determined, “I will be God. I will do things my way and nobody is going to tell me what to do.” He went off and he founded a city, and what did he name the city? He named the city Enoch after his first son, as a way of saying, “I will make a name for myself. I will found a city. It will be great. It’s named after my son.” It’s the same thing that Moses is talking about here. It’s that drive within to be God himself and to make a name for himself. So there’s been this wrestling match between whether or not we are going to understand that we are dust and He is God, or whether we are God and we will make a name for ourselves. That’s what is being said in verse 4 – that these men had made a name for themselves. They were powerful. They were influential. In a sense, they had created tremendous momentum for people to go the way of Cain..... for people to turn away from God and be influenced by their own thinking. That brings us to verse 5:

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Notice the words that are used here. It says that the wickedness was great.....that every intent was only evil continually. There is a lot of redundancy here, which is a way of saying absolutely everything that these people were about was ungodly. They were evil. They were wicked. They were absolutely walking away from God, with no thought or intent of ever looking back at God. You remember when God entered into the discussion in Genesis 4 with Cain and God said to Cain, “Cain, if you don’t change right now, sin is crouching at the door like a wild animal. And it is going to pounce on you and it is going to control you and dominate you and basically you will no longer even think of me, but you will be dominated

by evil.” That’s really what He was saying. This is simply the playing out of that. God is basically saying that everybody on the face of the earth is now like that. They have become so influenced by these powerful men who have set themselves up as God. All of the momentum is going one way, so that everybody who’s born, everybody who lives, are getting caught up in the momentum, and they’re all going down this path of destruction. Obviously God needs to respond to that:

Verse 6: And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”

This is a beautiful picture of the heart of God. Often when we think of the flood of Noah, we see this imagery of God being an angry, wrathful God who’s pouring out judgment on the earth, and we fail to see what God said about Himself. What God said about Himself is that He was grieved. He was brokenhearted. He was sorry that He had made man. He was sorry that this was the way they had chosen. God made man in His image with a will to choose. But God’s desire, all the way back to Genesis 2, was that people would experience the goodness of God. That people would experience the grace of God. That they would walk in intimacy with Him. But these people have believed the lie of the serpent that they can be gods; that they can do it their own way. Now every intent of every thought is evil, and God says “It breaks My heart. This is never what I wanted for people, but they have chosen the way of judgment. They have chosen the way of destruction.”

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard people say to me, “You know, if God were really a loving God, He would never send anybody to hell.” What people need to read are these early chapters from Genesis and understand that God has made us with a will. And that will is the ability to choose. God has said, “What I’ve always wanted for you is goodness. When you sinned I provided the promised seed that would allow you to go back to Genesis 2 and experience my goodness, to experience my salvation.” God said, “I’ve done everything possible, even to the extent of giving up My own Son to make this possible. But you still have to choose.” And for those who choose the way of death, God says it breaks His heart. It says He grieved. He was sorry. But that is their choice, and they would experience God’s judgment. These are beautiful verses to help us understand the heart of God in the midst of this judgment.

But I also see in vs. 6-7 a reminder of the goodness of God. What’s being said is that these people had made their choice. Just like Cain, they had decided they would be God. They were completely dominated now by sin. They were headed for destruction and they would not listen. But what God was saying is that the influence on the earth was so strong toward evil, that unless God steps in and stops it, many thousands and even millions of people to follow would also experience that same judgment. So God, in His goodness, brought an end to that and started over with Noah and his family; that people might know God. That people might call out upon the name of the Lord, and that they would not experience that judgment. So, in a sense, even though it was judgment to those people, to every generation that would follow, including ours, it was God in His goodness saying, “Understand that this is the way of Cain. This is the end of those who choose to be gods themselves.” There was a need to stop the momentum and start over with a godly line. Many thousands of people followed after Noah and responded to God because of God’s choice to step in. (v6-7)

When I finish reading verse 7, I find myself longing for grace. I find myself longing for a simple word, and that is the word “but”. Because I’m wanting some hope here. I’m wanting an alternative. I want to believe there’s got to be hope in the midst of this much darkness, and that’s what we get in verse 8: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” I think to myself, “Thank God for Noah” because there’s something good out of this.

Verse 9: These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.

What’s being said here is that the entire world, however many were on the world at that time and nobody really knows, were all bent on going the way of Cain and experiencing eternal destruction. God says, “It’s breaking my heart.” God did find one man in the midst of that who was obedient. There was one who walked with God, and God said, “I will provide salvation for this one that he might be saved from my judgment to come.” It’s a beautiful picture of God’s grace. It’s a beautiful picture of God’s salvation.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be Noah? Can you imagine what it would be like to be the only family on the face of the earth that walked with God? Talk about peer pressure! Imagine the youth group – it’d be only you! Imagine the accountability groups and the Bible studies and the worship services – it’s just you! And for 120 years it was just Noah. That is a long time to remain faithful and obedient and to walk with God. While the rest of the world thinks it’s a joke that God’s going to bring judgment, there was one family who acknowledged God as God and walked in obedience to God – and that was the family of Noah.

Vs. 10-22:

And Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them, and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. And this is how you shall make it; the length of the ark three hundred cubits its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. And behold, I, even I, am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind shall come to you to keep them alive. And as for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them. Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

Now there’s a lot of details in here about the ark which I won’t go into, but there are those who have given their lives to figuring out all of the details, such as the type of wood, the size and dimensions and everybody comes to the same conclusion: Yes, it could work. The ark was big enough, and imagine how many animals there were on the earth. And so maybe the details are there for those analytical types who just want to figure it all out and say, “OK, it could work.”

I think, though, that the point of the passage is not that. The point of the passage is Noah and Noah's obedience to God. One of the questions that arises in my mind is why a flood and why 120 years to build an ark? Why couldn't God just say, "Noah, I've provided an ark. Here it is. It's parked out in the back lot. Go ahead and load up." Noah spent 120 years of his life building this thing. Building an ark on dry land. They'd never seen a flood. They'd never seen rain like this. One of the reasons I think God had Noah build the ark was grace. Because for 120 years there was a constant reminder that judgment was coming, lest there be one person among those people who would believe. And so, God in His grace, rather than just ending it right there, said, "I'm going to give them another 120 years." It was God, in a sense, going the extra mile of grace to say that one person might believe. Nobody did, but I'm still convinced that there was room for one more on the ark if someone would have believed.

The New Testament calls Noah a preacher of righteousness and it's talking about the fact that for 120 years he built on the ark. As the hecklers came by and said, "Hey, Noah, what's up with the big ark?" and Noah tried to explain it to them, he became a preacher of righteousness, trying to tell them there was a judgment coming. And that was an opportunity for people to respond. But I also see the reason that those details are laid out and why God did it that way. Think of the animal thing. Why didn't God just start over? Why all the hassle? Why not build a speedboat to let Noah survive and just start over with the animals afterwards? I think all of this has to do with Noah's obedience. The point that God was trying to make was that Noah walked with God and Noah was obedient to God and that's what God wanted. That is what God has always wanted. He wants people who to call upon the name of the Lord, and walk in obedience to Him, and to just trust Him by faith.

So God says to Noah, "Noah, by the way, I'm going to send this great flood and it's going to drown everybody except you, and here's the blueprints for the ark." "Well, God, that seems kind of big, you know, how long will it take?" "Oh, about 120 years." "OK, what are we going to do about the animals?" "Oh, by the way, I'd like two of every kind on the ark." Noah's got to be thinking, "How are we supposed to do that? Maybe a dog and cow. But we won't even get the cat on board." All of that is God's way of saying, "Noah, would you just trust me. I know it sounds impossible." And so Noah was obedient.

If you look at verse 22, that is the point. The story concludes with a statement: "Thus Noah did." You could put a period there and say, OK, Noah was obedient. But he wanted to make more of a point here. "Thus Noah did according to all that God had commanded him." Noah obeyed. God commanded. Noah obeyed. OK, we get it. Put the period there. But Moses says, "No, I'm not sure you got it yet, so I'm going to say it one more time: 'So he did.'" The redundancy is to say that Noah obeyed. "By the way, in case you didn't get it, obeyed everything God told him to do because Noah walked with God." OK, we got that. "By the way, Noah did it." There's a final statement that just says, "That's the point." What God wanted was someone who would trust Him; someone who would walk with Him; someone who would obey Him. And God says, "Even if you're the only one on the earth, I will provide for you a salvation. I will not pour out my judgment on you. As a matter of fact, I will use you to repopulate the earth and we're going to start over again."

That's really the story of Genesis chapter 6. It's taking the line of the seed of the woman and the line of the seed of the serpent. They come together and the whole world is continually evil and God says, "This is the way of Cain. These are people who've chosen for

themselves judgment.” And God says, “It breaks My heart. I’ve never wanted that for them. But that is what they’ve chosen and that is what they will experience.” But for those who call upon the name of the Lord; for those who will acknowledge Me as God (and we know from the NT the seed of the woman was Jesus Christ who was nailed to a cross in payment for sin) and for those who will trust Him as Savior and believe Jesus died for their sins and make it personal. They will enter into the ark. The ark is really a picture of the salvation that is provided through Jesus for those who will experience life.

God has literally done everything He can do to provide salvation for each one of us. But then each of us must choose. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to the Father but through Me.” It is not true that all roads lead to God. It is only true that to get to God we must go to God on God’s terms. And God said it is only through Jesus.

So the choice is ours. We can be determined to do it our way and suffer an eternal judgment, or we can do it God’s way.

Call upon the name of the Lord and experience God’s salvation.

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