



Blessings & a Curse

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #13

Genesis 9

David Sunday

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Father, we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. We pray that today He would appear greater to the eyes of our hearts, higher in our thoughts and elevated in our affections, as we look into Your Word. Spirit of God, show us the living Christ, with Whom we are united in a living, lasting and loving union, and apart from Whom we can do nothing. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please turn in your Bible to Genesis 9. This is a chapter that answers the question, Is there hope for the world, and, if so, are we it? Are we the hope of the world? Is it our job to save the universe from extinction? Does the future of humanity depend on us?

While I was on the cusp of my high school career in 1985, the Aid to Africa group came out with the song, "We Are the World." It was played over and over again throughout my high school years. I remember this one refrain that went on and on: "There is a choice we are making. We are saving our own lives. It's true, we'll make a better day, just you and me."

That was ground into our thoughts as young people. We can change the world and make a better day. Every politician runs on a similar promise: "The world will be safer and life will be better if you elect me." There is no politician who would say the opposite of that. If you ask people today what motivates them to do what they do in life, many would say something like this: "I want to make the world a better place. That is what I am hoping for. When I die, I want to have made the world a better place." Can it be done? And is it true that we can make a better day, just you and me?

Last week, we left off in Genesis 8. Noah and his sons exited the ark after God's judgment fell on all of humanity because of what we read in 6:5-7, where 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.” After 120 years of warning, God judged the world. So the world was cleansed, but the heart of humanity was not.

We read in 8:21 that the Lord said in His heart that the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. That is still the case after the flood. The heart of the human problem is still the problem of the human heart. Humanity has not gotten better.

Noah’s name means “rest” or “comfort.” That is why Noah’s first action when he stepped off the ark was so significant. There was a vast world before him, waiting to be developed and cultivated. Noah had much work to do, but the first thing he did when he got off the ark was worship. He made a sacrifice of every clean bird and animal. That sacrifice is significant, for it points us forward in history to a greater Noah who will say, “Come to Me, and I will give you rest, all you who are weary and heavy-laden” (Matthew 11:28). He laid down His life on the cross to bring everlasting comfort and good hope by His grace to all who believe in Him.

So we must see what happened in Genesis 9 under that shadow of the cross of Jesus. That cross’s shadow reaches all the way back in history to the book of Genesis. When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma of Noah’s sacrifice, we read in 8:21, *“The Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.’”*

There is hope for the world God created. However, we must understand the nature of that hope, where we fit into it and the role that we play in it. Genesis 9 can help us see our place in this world and where our true security lies.

- In 9:1-7, we will see God entrusting some things to us as human beings.
- Then in 9:8-17, we will see God reassuring us.
- Finally, in 9:18-29, we will see God warning us.

God Entrusts Us with Great Responsibility for His Creation

Let’s first look at 9:1-7. God entrusts to humanity great responsibility for His creation. Isn’t it beautiful that the first words out of God’s mouth to Noah and his sons in chapter nine are words of blessing? That blessing is followed by a command: be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. This section is framed by that command. We see it again in verse seven: *“And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”*

We are not fired from our role that God gave to humanity back in creation. We are not demoted when we mess up on our job. It is like when I messed up on a job as a teenager working for my dad’s construction company. I ran right into a fence in the construction yard with one of

the trucks owned by the company while my dad and his boss were both yelling to me from the window, “Don’t do it, David! Don’t do it!” But I did it. I ran right into the fence, and I thought for sure that I would get fired after that. However instead, my boss took care of me, gave me a Christmas bonus and showed me grace.

God does not fire humanity from the role that He gave us back in the beginning—the creation mandate to take dominion over all the earth, to represent God’s rule and reign and to reflect God’s glory on the earth. Humanity is still entrusted with this great responsibility. So we see from the beginning of chapter nine that God’s will is for humankind to flourish. God is for us, not against us.

However, we also see that we are not in Eden anymore. Things are different now. The world is abnormal and disordered. There is darkness over everything. There is blessing, but there is also evidence that we are living under a curse of death. There is violence casting a shadow over creation and every species is endangered, especially humanity.

God said in verse two, *“The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.”* Human dominion over the animal kingdom is now based on fear—and that’s a good thing. How fearful would it have been for Noah and his family to step off the ark with all those wild animals running around—lions and tigers and bears—if God did not do something to restrain the animal kingdom from devouring and destroying us?

Instead, God gave the animal kingdom to us for food. At the end of verse two, He said, *“Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.”* Does anyone want to say, “Amen! Thank you, Lord”? God gave us His creation to satisfy our needs, but the blood of the animal had to be drained out before they could eat it. He said in verse four, *“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”* That command is not for the animal’s sake. The animal is dead. It is a reminder, a teaching lesson for us. As a man would handle the animal and drain its blood from it, he would be reminded that all life belongs to God. God is the owner and Creator of life.

If God feels this way about animal life—that this is something special that belongs to Him—how much more does He feel about human life created in His image? We see in this passage that human life is a supremely special gift from God. He told us in verse five that He will demand a reckoning. An account will be demanded from every one and every thing that takes the life of a man, even animals. I don’t know how God will do that, but that is how supremely valuable human life is to Him.

He said in verse six that whoever intentionally takes the life of another human being deserves death: “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed...*” Of course, that raises the question of capital punishment. Ought capital punishment be part of our legal systems today? Some Christians would say, “No, not necessarily.” They would say that verse six is not a command, but rather a statement of fact similar to “Whoever lives by the sword dies by the sword.” So they would say that this is a statement that no one ultimately gets away with murder. There will be an accounting demanded. They would also argue from verse four that the law about eating meat with blood is no longer applicable for Christians, and so we should not infer that capital punishment must be the just law for society today.

However, in relation to verse four—the command about meat and blood—we do have New Testament teaching that declares all foods to be clean and permissible. The question is, “Do we have New Testament teaching overturning the responsibility of civil governments to carry out the death penalty for intentional homicide?” Many Christians, including myself, would see Paul’s statement in Romans 13:4 that the civil magistrate does not bear the sword in vain as a New Testament endorsement of capital punishment for intentional murder. Whether or not you believe capital punishment must be part of the criminal code of just society, this much is clear: whoever deliberately murders another human being deserves to die.

Human life is extraordinarily valuable in the eyes of God. Because humanity is created in His image, God protects, defends and honors that life. Back in January, we remembered Sanctity of Life Sunday and focused on some of the implications of this for issues in our society today. Let me just remind you that it is not the quality of someone’s life—their contribution to society or their powers of reasoning—that make human life of such infinite value. It is the fact that we bear the stamp, the hallmark, and the image of the Creator of the universe that makes human life so valuable.

Of course, no human embryo shows forth that divine image in its fullness. Neither does any human baby show forth that image in its fullness. Nor do any human adults show forth that fullness in its image. However, all are persons created in the image of God. All of us are worthy of protection, honor and respect because we bear God’s image.

Therefore, you see in this passage a real distinction and honor given to humanity. We see in our culture what happens when we get that mixed up and begin to elevate animals above humans. Does that happen? This week, I read about a judge in Manhattan who has ordered a hearing that is going to decide whether caged chimpanzees can be considered legal persons in the eyes of the law and sue for their freedoms. There is a group called The Non-Human Rights Project that is arguing for two chimpanzees that are being detained at a university on Long

Island. Their names are Hercules and Leo. The group is saying these chimps are being unlawfully detained; they are deserving of legal human rights. What happens when we start thinking like that? This underscores the importance of being clear on what verses like these in Genesis are teaching.

In an article for The Gospel Coalition, Joe Carter aptly illustrates what the problem is with that kind of thinking. He says, “The true danger in expanding personhood to animals is we won’t merely be treating some animals like humans. We’ll begin to treat some humans like animals.” When we get these categories confused in our thinking and diminish the role, responsibility, and unique dignity that God gives to humankind, we end up getting everything twisted and upside-down.

So we see in this first section that human beings still have a role of great dignity and responsibility. God places extraordinary value on you and me. However, it does not take any convincing, I’m sure, to believe that this world is now a troubled and violent place because of sin. We carry in our own hearts potential for self-destruction. Now God has to protect us from man’s inhumanity toward man in this world.

We see this as we watch the rise of ISIS around the world. Christians are murdered and persecuted. The trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is in the news these days. We see it in the hatred in our own neighborhoods. Is there hope for this world? And are we the hope of this world? It is why this middle section here is so important for us to grasp. That is why what we read in verses 8-17 is so reassuring for God’s world and creation.

God Reassures Us that He is a Friend, Not a Foe, to His Creation

If you were living in a war-torn country, went out at night and saw a heavily armed soldier, what would be on your mind? “Are you a friend or a foe? Are you someone I can trust to protect and uphold me, or are you against me?”

As Noah and his sons got off the ark, you can imagine that they wondered that about God. “Can we trust that God is for His creation, or is God against His creation? He has just flooded the whole earth; are we next?” We should be thankful for the covenant that is expressed by God in this passage. It was a covenant that was anticipated in Genesis 6:18, then we see also God speaking these words of covenant in His heart at the end of chapter eight: *“Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease”*

How thankful we should be that here in the middle of Genesis 9 God reinforced that covenant with a sign. It is a sign visible to every living creature—the rainbow. The sign is also a reminder to God of His own promise He made to never again destroy the earth by a flood.

Derek Kidner says, “This covenant is remarkable for its breadth, its permanence and its generosity.”

- We see its breadth as we read verses 9-17. This covenant is for every living creature. Verse 10 tells us that all of creation is included in this covenant. God is not just concerned about saving individual souls. God’s design in redemption encompasses the whole created order.
- We see the permanence of this covenant when God says that it is an everlasting covenant. Look at verse 12: *“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations...”* Thank the Lord for the everlasting nature of this covenant. Verse 16: *“When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”*
- Finally, we see that this covenant is incredibly generous. It is unconditional and undeserved.

Notice that God is the subject of all the verbs in this covenant. He keeps saying, “I establish... I establish... I make this covenant. This is My initiative in establishing this covenant.” Regarding the rainbow, God said in verses 14-15: *“When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.”* He says the same thing in verse 16: *“When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant...”*

What good news this is for humanity! It is good news to know that the Creator of all things is not against His creation and that we are not living in a world that is subject to chaos and disintegration because the Maker might destroy us all. Rather, we are protected from the results of our sin by a God Who maintains order and Who establishes the rhythms and patterns of His creation in such a way that there is regularity and dependability. We do not need to worry. We probably go to bed worrying about a lot of things, but do any of you go to bed worrying if the sun will come out tomorrow? It probably doesn’t cross your mind very often. It probably doesn’t cross your mind in the winter. Sometimes, you worry, “When will spring come?” but you don’t worry that it will. There is a faithful, dependable pattern that is maintained by a gracious God, Who is a Friend, not a foe, to His creation.

This was reassuring for Noah and his sons. You need that reassurance if you believe in a holy God Who hates sin. If you believe God is just a divine teddy bear who cuddles everyone and does not hold anyone accountable, this assurance will mean very little to you. However, if you

understand God's holiness and our sinfulness, to even see a rainbow in the clouds will speak peace and comfort to your heart, knowing God is a Friend, not a foe, to His creation. Christ's covenant of peace that He made with His own blood to establish peace with God and bring us under God's favor forever is built upon this covenant with Noah. This is the covenant God makes with all His creation.

So is there hope for the world? Yes. It is a hope that is grounded upon God's unconditional covenant. Notice this middle section is all blessing and no cursing. Salvation encompasses not just individuals but all of creation. We do have a responsibility, but we are flawed and fallen. If it were up to us to make this world a better place, the world would fall into chaos and catastrophe. Thank the Lord it is not up to us! If God gave us what we deserved, there would be a daily deluge, as John Calvin observed. Thanks be to God that He doesn't give us what we deserve! He maintains order in His creation, so that humanity can live and flourish along with the rest of creation.

God Warns Us Not to Put Our Trust in Any Mere Man

That brings us to the last point in verses 18-29. What is God doing in this last section of Genesis 9? Boy, I wrestled with this! Look at the story of Noah in his tent. Why does God put this here? I think it is here to warn us not to put our trust in mere man. Let's summarize this story and demystify it a little bit because it is a head scratcher for many people. I want to acknowledge the help of Christopher Ash here, whose teaching really helped me hear the music of this passage.

What we need to do as we look at this last story is focus on what is in the text, not speculate on what is not there. We get tripped up because we bring a number of questions to this passage that the Bible is never going to answer. Let's not ask those questions. Rather, let's look at what is here in this story.

First, we see that Noah planted a vineyard. Is there anything wrong with that? No. Then what did he do? He drank some of the wine. There is nothing wrong with that. What does Psalm 104 say? *"Wine is a gift from God to gladden the heart of man."* There is nothing wrong with drinking wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It is a gift from God.

However, the third thing we see is that Noah got blackout drunk and indecently exposed himself in his tent. Is there anything wrong with that? Everything is wrong with that. One of the medieval commentators said, "With the opportunity to start an ideal society, Noah was found drunk in his tent." Is man the hope of the world? If so, we should get nervous at this point.

Notice the parallels to Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, there was a tree that God said Adam and Eve must not eat of its fruit. Eve, and then Adam, took of its fruit and ate, resulting in nakedness and shame in Genesis 3. Here we are at a new beginning for creation and Noah is kind of like a second Adam. We are hoping he is going to fair better than the first one did. But what did he do? He planted a vineyard, took of its fruit and sinned, which resulted in nakedness and shame.

Humanity has fallen all over again. This world is desperately fallen. Is there hope for this world? If there is, I sure hope it doesn't rely on us. We are fallen and flawed. Ham saw the shameful nakedness of his father. At first, it may have been by accident, but he did not respond appropriately. He took some kind of mocking pleasure in his father's sin. He went out to his brothers and told them about it. He wanted them to share in the frivolity, shame and scorn. However, instead of delighting in their father's disgrace, they took a garment, laid it on both of their shoulders, walked backwards and covered the nakedness, shame and disgrace of their father (verse 23). They took great care not to look at him and gloat in his shame. Instead, they covered his shame. Noah woke up and found out what happened. He cursed Canaan, Ham's son, and blessed Shem and Japheth. In chapter ten, which we will look at next week, we will see the family trees of these three sons.

Why in the world is this story in the Bible? I just want to go on record and say I'm really glad it is. I'm really glad that the Bible does not whitewash its heroes. The Bible does not idolize men and spiritual leaders, putting them up on a pedestal, showing us only the good things about them and hiding their faults. I'm really glad the Bible's not a book of hagiography—the glorifying of saints—where everything they do is perfect and wonderful. I am thankful for that because it tells me this Book is authentic. This Book is not trying to paint me a rosy picture of people. Rather, this shows me what real people are like. Even the best of men are men at best. Do you believe that?

This story shows us that Noah was a great man. Do you remember what God said about his character?

- Genesis 6:9: *“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”* That is a rare accolade for a human being. He walked with God. That was Noah.
- Genesis 6:22: *“He did all that God commanded him.”* Wonderful!
- Genesis 7:1: *“Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.”*
- Genesis 7:5: *“And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.”*

We just want him to keep on doing everything the Lord commands of him. We want him to stay perfect, don't we? We are rooting for Noah to be blameless. We love this man! Oh, the

disappointment and shock! He was naked in his tent, stone drunk. What went wrong? Noah was a sinner, just like you and me. Just like Moses, whose anger got him into trouble. David committed adultery and then covered it up with murder. He was a man after God's own heart. Elijah's self-pity was a blemish on godly character. James and John argued: "Can we be at Your right hand? Who is going to be the greatest in Your Kingdom?" They were afflicted with selfish ambition. Think of Peter. I love Peter, but he was filled with folly and impetuosity.

Do you see it? We are no better and no worse than any of the saints in Scripture. I think one of the reasons this story is here at the end of this chapter that entrusts such responsibility to man is a reminder to us not to put anyone up on a pedestal, especially not yourself. You may think, "Wow, I have been a wonderful Christian this week! Look at me. I had my quiet time every day. I am loving people and witnessing. I am good!" Boom! You get angry and blow it. Lust seizes your heart and you are down in the ditch. What's wrong with you? You're a sinner. That is what's wrong. None of us is better or worse.

Do not put yourself up on a pedestal, and, dear ones, do not put any of your spiritual heroes up there on that pedestal either. It just gives them a longer distance to fall. Don't expect too much out of your spiritual heroes. What happens if they do fall? Yes, you will be disappointed. You will be discouraged. It is sad to see Noah in this state. It is sad! However, we should not be utterly shocked. Whenever we see our heroes fall, may it never weaken our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. May it never cause us to think less of Him. May it never shake our faith in Him. And may it never become an excuse for us to harden our own hearts in sin.

Back in 1554, John Calvin, commenting on Ham's sin, said this: "We see many like this today who take trouble to pry into what religious people do wrong. They do it so that they themselves may do the same sort of things without shame." Is that why Ham was glorifying his father's sin? Was it reinforcing the hardness of his heart? Was he saying, "Oh, good! My righteous father is down in the ditch. Now I can sin with abandon." Calvin said the human heart looks at the sins of the righteous and uses it as an excuse. "They even use the faults of other men as an excuse to harden themselves against God." May it never be!

Whose sin is greater in this narrative? It is striking to me that the real focus is not on the sin of Noah but on the sin of his son, Ham, and the result of that sin for generations to come. The Canaanites' whole society and culture was marked by sexual immorality in a form of religious syncretism that was fueled by orgies. The Canaanites were a thorn in the side of the Israelites and the people of God were constantly warned not to be like them. We see that their sins that carried on for generations and generations went all the way back to their father, Ham. His sin is really the focus.

Contrast his behavior with Shem and Japheth. Ham found his father's sin amusing and he went out and joked about it. Japheth and Shem covered their father. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love does not take pleasure in exposing and gloating over the sins of others. Jared Wilson says, "This doesn't mean that drunken exposure is not a sin, but it does seem to mean that denying a sinner grace is a bigger one." Ham denied his father grace. He did not show him honor. He did not cover. Love was not there.

Noah died after cursing Canaan and blessing Shem and Japheth. Canaan was the son of Ham. Noah died, and we can be very depressed at the end of this story. Here we have a dysfunctional family who is the only one on earth. What does that mean for us? Is there hope for this world? And is it you and I? Can we make a better world, just you and me?

If it rests on us, I think we are in trouble. However, there is a Man Who was not a failure as a hero. We read about Him in Luke 3. What do we see in His genealogy? Luke 3:23: "*Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli...*" It goes backwards, from the time of Jesus all the way to the beginning. We trace all the forefathers of Jesus and look at what we see in verses 36 and 38: "*... the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech... the son of Adam, the son of God.*"

Is there hope for the world? Yes, there is. Are we it? No, but Jesus is. He is the true Mediator between God and man. God has entrusted great responsibility to us as human beings. God has demonstrated that He is a Friend, not a foe, to His creation and He will redeem all of creation through the redemption of a people for Himself in Christ.

We see in this passage that we are all deeply fallen. We are all enslaved by our sin. We are entrapped by it. Even the best of us needs a Savior, but thanks be to God that this Savior has come! Right after His genealogy in Luke 3, He went into mortal combat with Satan, the enemy of our souls. He triumphed over His temptations and stood as the worthy Hero, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. He is able to keep us from falling. Praise His name! Praise God for coming to make His blessings far as the curse is found! Praise His name!

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