

The passage that we're exploring together today raises a great number of questions for us as hearers of God's word and the time we have together we won't be able to answer them all.

We're going to sit with the tension that we cannot always know exactly what every word means, especially in an ancient language, but we can take comfort knowing that God works through his powerful word and that even though we may not understand every detail of every word contained in this passage, we can certainly understand the key message.

(Slide 2) This morning as we unpack this message we'll consider God's Grief and God's Grace.

We are going to need God's help to do that so why don't we pray as we open His Word:

Heavenly Father we come before you humbly today accepting and admitting that we cannot grasp everything before us. The distance of time and language means that parts of this passage may always remain a mystery to us and yet we know that you will speak to us by it regardless. Help us to understand what we can, remind us of your grace, and strike us as we see the depth of your regret at human sin. We ask these things in the name of our saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Slide 3) Humanity has been increasing across the face of the earth and we've seen that over the last few weeks, as civilisation has progressed and family lines have grown. Cain and Seth have gone separate ways. Cain's away from God, Seth's towards hope and a promise.

(Slide 4) In verse 2 the sons of God come and marry human women. Something unnatural has occurred and we hit the first challenge to unpack today.

Who are these sons of God? There are four different ways to read this verse and I've come to settle on two of the most likely.

(Slide 5) The first is that 'sons of God' here could mean human rulers.

They're despots, they're powerful men, who submit to the rule and authority of spiritual powers which oppose God. That is; powerful earthly men who are backed by demonic forces. Such characters appear elsewhere in the Bible: there's the prince of Persia in Daniel 10 and the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28.

It could be that the men in this passage, with some kind of spiritual power that they've acquired through occult practices, have taken women for themselves and added them to their harems.

The second option is that fallen angelic beings, desiring something that was never intended for them, have begun marriage relationships with human women.

In doing so they're exacerbating the rebellion against God's good design and his natural order.

It could be those angels spoken of in Jude 6, they've 'abandoned their proper dwelling, have been kept in darkness and will be bound with everlasting chains for judgment' on the great day of Jesus's return.

What is absolutely certain is that an unnatural relationship outside the bounds of God's good design for men and women, has taken place and it has been seen by God.

In these actions an ongoing rebellion is being waged. What is natural has been swapped for what is unnatural. In this reordering of God's intent there is a false authority at play. It's a false authority that we've observed before. 'The sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful,' they see something that they think is good and they take it.

It's reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. Eve and Adam saw something that wasn't meant for them, and they took it. They reached out and defined for themselves what was good. They reversed God's natural order of creator (the one with authority) and the created (the one under authority).

What has occurred here between the sons of God and these beautiful women is perverse. These ungodly unions resulting in the birth of mighty men, the Nephilim (verse 4) are selfish. They aren't governed by love or the desire to serve the other.

To take and possess the beautiful women, is an exercise of autonomy and rebellion against God.

We know it don't we? We see something we want and we take it. We rebel against the will of God, against his good order. We follow the devices and the desires of our own hearts, we offend against God's holy laws.

Here it was a physical union between spiritual powers and women that was the problem, but it's not just a problem that is rooted in Genesis 6. In these unions this is a real problem: a problem which dwells in me and in you. **(Slide 6)** In Ephesians 2:1 and 2 we read, "as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the heir the spirit who is now at work and those who are disobedient."

That same ruler of the kingdom of the air, the old serpent we saw at the beginning of Genesis 3, the father of lies, the one who prowls wanting to devour and to kill those who follow God, Satan, still plants seeds of rebellion in our hearts and whispers to us that we should take whatever we see and want. **(Slide 7)**

Nothing has changed.

The desire to take what we see leads to the sin of pornography for both men and women. The desire to take what we see leads to the sin of prostitution. The desire to take what we see leads to human trafficking, and theft, and murder, and jealousy, and gluttony, and the

desire to define for ourselves what is good means we overstep God's boundaries in the rebellion of taking what we see and call it good.

It is clear in verse 3 that God will not be mocked. God will not allow this perverse rebellion to run unchecked. God is the creator, they will only be permitted to rebel for as long as God sees fit.

God intervenes. The rebellion will be limited to either lifespans of 120 years or another 120 years before God brings his judgment in the form of the flood.

(Slide 8) Despite God's intervention, verse 5 tells us that their wickedness increased. We've seen immoral practice: the outward results of seeing and taking, and now we see the hearts, what is going on inside, those who bear God's likeness. **(Slide 9)**

"Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled." (v.5)

When we read this we should feel a sense of horror, as we see the depths of depravity in human hearts from God's vantage point.

(Slide 10) This can be difficult for Christians because the primary viewpoint we're used to is God's view of us through Jesus Christ, where we are seen as justified.

We run to John 3:16, and God's amazing love for us. In this passage in these verses, we need to sit with a different tension. We need to be uncomfortable as we acknowledge God's regret and wrath at having created mankind.

Our sinfulness, the brokenness of our hearts, is the flow-on effect of knowing good and evil chapter 3 verse 5, and of having 'eyes opened' chapter 3 verse 7.

The effects have permeated to the very core of every person.

In this wider narrative of the flood we often feel the horror at the loss of human life. We feel that deep sadness that everybody across the face of the earth drowned in that flood. We're called to acknowledge that not one person on the earth is guiltless. No one is blameless. It says that every inclination, every thought, every person, is intent on evil, is intent on crowning themselves and rejecting God's way. It's the polar opposite of the heart of Enoch which we saw last week. Enoch's heart, his desires, was shaped towards God's heart.

The evil that's infected every human heart is like poison spreading further and further.

(Slide 11) And God sees its destructive spread (v.5) and what he sees he no longer describes as very good and it grieves his heart. The depth of God's feeling is plain to see the heartbeat of these verses, is God's deep regret at human sin.

Friend there is no little sin. The one drink too many that leads to drunkenness isn't a little overstep, it's an act of rebellion which causes God regret.

The odd swear word sprinkled in our speech isn't an oversight, it's an act of rebellion which causes God regret.

The secret conversation behind someone's back isn't rude, it's an act of rebellion which causes God regret.

There are a thousand examples of these sins which we minimise. Some of them we trivialise, some of them we make acceptable, but they cause our God deep regret.

So does our collective sin as people. The sins which are tolerated in our wider world, and sometimes in the church: the use of drugs, the redefinition of marriage, the prevalence of abortion or racism and violence, the bullying of nation states, the growth of modern day slavery, the rich getting rich and the poor getting poorer, all demonstrate our collective decay. They show the direction and shape of our hearts and it causes God deep regret.

In the passage before us God's regret is so deep, and human hearts are so full of wickedness, that God decides to intervene again (**Slide 12**) and in v.7 he resolves to wipe life off the face of the earth.

What a staggering insight into the deep grief in the heart of God at our sinfulness. Creation has gone so wrong and the hearts of humans are so deeply depraved, that God will not allow them to go on harming and hurting. He will act, he will bring about a judgment, a terrible judgment. He will blot them off the face of the earth. (**Slide 13**)

It is shocking, it is uncomfortable. It should be terrifying. We are meant to feel sick to our stomachs as we read this account. We should be absolutely struck down by our sinfulness as we read this.

This should drive us to God in repentance because he speaks of an even more terrible day of judgment that is coming. The flood is terrifying and it sounds horrendous, but in Matthew 24 verses 37 and 39 we see a coming judgment where Jesus references what has happened with Noah in the flood.

Jesus says, people will go on eating, they'll go on with their lives, they'll drink, they'll marry, right until the day of His return. The day when he will judge the whole earth. On that day when he returns, hearts will be exposed for all to see and those who have rejected him will be blotted out.

God is serious about sin. It's home in our hearts has dire consequences. Consequences of death, and eternal separation from God. The trajectory of Genesis 6:1-7 is grim we come uncomfortably face to face with God's regret at ever having made humankind.

ii) *God's Grace*

(Slide 14) Until we hit verse 8 **(Slide 15)**, "but Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord." This Noah who we heard about last week, as the one hoped upon to bring people relief from the curse of God upon the land, has also been seen. God's regret is great, God's grace is greater. Verse 8 ushers in a glorious moment.

"but Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord." **(Slide 16)** Despite depraved hearts, despite consistent rebellion against God, there is one other person who God sees and he shows him grace, unmerited, undeserved favour.

From this side of the cross we shouldn't be any more surprised by this action of God than we are at human sinfulness. This is a grace which redeems and it was present. It was talked about and described in one way in the curse laid on Satan in chapter 3 verse 15.

Yes Satan would strike and bruise the heel of mankind, he would attack us consistently with that disfiguring damage that mars God's image bearers, his poison would reach our hearts. But through the Lord Jesus his head would be crushed. Through the Lord Jesus, God would redeem and restore his people, not because of our worth or our works, but because of his love. Through the Lord Jesus the antidote for that poison would be freely given.

Noah isn't a recipient of grace because of his moral quality. His moral quality, his righteousness is a result of God's grace.

I find that hugely comforting. If God's grace was given out based on merit, I'd be shot, I'd be lost, I'd be done for, because my heart is broken. I'm only worthy of being blotted out, because I constantly rebel against God. I refuse to submit to his Word and his will. **(Slide 17)**

"But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. Even when we were dead in transgressions, by grace we have been saved." Ephesians 2:4-5
What an amazing truth. What an amazing thing for us to hold on to and rejoice in. **(Slide 18)**

In this passage we sit with the depth of human depravity and at the same time we're reminded of the immeasurable height of God's love, that he would show grace, unmerited favour, to broken fallen people and that through that grace they might be made safe, taken from death to life.

God has deep regret at our sin, but because of his love he bestows his grace upon any who would call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and he saves them not just from a great flood, but from the coming judgment that has eternal consequences.

God saves: he saves through the Lord Jesus who had a perfect heart, who lived in perfect obedience, who gave God his perfect trust. The Lord Jesus who lived out a perfect and spotless and blameless sinless life. We are saved by the Lord Jesus who gave up that life to a cruel death

on a roman cross so that we wouldn't be blotted out, but that we could be adopted as God's own children, safe from the coming judgment.

Through faith, Noah here in verse 8, as a recipient of God's grace, points us to the grace which is revealed in the Lord Jesus, which gives us the hope for a different future. A future where instead of our lives being blotted out as they deserve, they can instead be written in the lamb's book of life.

What an amazing gift to be reminded of, what an amazing gift that we can receive, when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus. **(Slide 19)**

Why don't we pray and thank our God for that gift of grace?
let's pray:

Heavenly Father we give you thanks and praise that you have shown us the depths of our sin in this passage. Lord we rebel against you and we admit it and we ask for your help, in the power of your Holy Spirit. Lord help us to recognise the seriousness of our sin and to bring it daily before you. Help us to know and receive your amazing grace. we ask it through the Lord Jesus, Amen.