

WHEN GOD GRIEVES
Genesis 5:28-29; 6:1-8:19

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
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Maybe if Noah's wife told the story, it would go something like this:

Every time I hear rain begin to fall in the night or smell the odor of damp earth that precedes a summer shower, the memories come flooding back. I thought at first Noah had gone mad. "I'd married and born sons to a crazy man!" I said when he began to build the big boat. "What now, you're going to take up fishing, maybe? You're six hundred years old, Noah. It's time you retired." (The man's name is supposed to mean "rest," but in all the time I've known him he's never given my nerves a rest.

So I asked him, "Why the big boat?" He said God told him to build it. "What? The creator of the universe needs a yacht?"

"It's not for God," Noah told me. "It's for us."

"And what do we need a boat for? A house at the beach? That we could use, but there's not a beach for miles in any direction, Noah."

Noah sat by the fire in his rocking chair one night and told me the whole story. God had come and said that the whole creation would be destroyed by flood because it hadn't turned out the way it was intended. It's just part of God's righteousness. When people kept taking whatever they wanted, whether it belonged to them or not, and kept settling every disagreement with a rock to the head or a knife between the ribs, God just got fed up. The whole creation project was a wash-out (so to speak), and God was going to clean up everybody's act with a bath like you've never seen.

"Didn't you try to change God's mind?" I asked, since the cure seemed at least as bad as the disease.

"No," Noah told me, it was just that God's voice sounded so sad, so very disappointed." Besides, if God doesn't know when to call it quits, then who does? I must admit God had a point.

"Why you, Noah?" I asked. "Why us?" And Noah said he didn't know for sure, since he didn't seem to be any different from anyone else. But there Noah was wrong, you see, or just being modest. Noah wouldn't hurt a flea. He wouldn't take a thing that didn't belong to him. He even paid cash for all the supplies for the ark, even though he knew that before the bill would come due the store where he bought them would be under water. He's a good man at heart, a little different sometimes, but decent. A man who could even feel sorry for God.

So it wasn't long before the beautiful hills and valleys became nothing but gray sky and dark water. When my grandchildren ask how long our voyage was, I tell them, "Forever, it seemed." To this very day, when the clouds roll in dark and thick and the smell of rain is in the air, the old feelings come rushing back. That's when memories come flooding back, and I remember "never again." God said "never again."

The rainbow reminds me.

Taken from *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible* by Michael E. Williams; some parts of the story paraphrased and modified.)

I. Sin is serious and knows no boundaries.

By the time we come to our passage, we've already experienced the first sin of Adam and Eve. We've already had the first murder with Cain killing Abel in a moment of anger, in a moment of jealousy. We've had Lamech declaring, as he swung his sword, that he would require revenge like never before. At the beginning of chapter 6, we have creation going wild as the sons of God, angelic-like beings, are intermarrying with earthly women, breaking the boundaries of creation with all desire of wickedness. Why, the stain of evil was so pervasive on the earth that it was now contaminating the entire cosmos. What began with the eating of a simple fruit has evolved into a nearly universal disaster. And God must act to stop the disaster.

Look at 6:5

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.

Now that's depravity. Every intent is bad. Only evil all day long.

Look at verse 11

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

Verse 13

...the earth is filled with violence....

Violence – the word used for injustice and corruption. Is there any end to humanity's thirst for evil, power, and violence?

There was a special a few years ago about a new trend among teenagers. It's called "bum-hunting." It's a perverse trend. Across the country, packs of teenage boys are stalking homeless people and attacking them, shooting them with paintball guns, beating them with baseball bats, even dousing them with gasoline and setting them on fire. Within a five-year period, at least one homeless person has been murdered each month, for no apparent reason. Since people living on the streets usually don't report crime, there are no reliable statistics to tell us just how pervasive this perversion really is. For example, in May 2005, 53-year-old Michael Roberts was killed in Holly Hill, Florida. Four teenagers, aged 14 through 18,

confessed to the crime, saying they had stumbled across Roberts in the woods and, off and on for three hours, they beat him to death. Jeffrey Spurgeon, the oldest member of the group, said “The main thing that I can’t keep out of my head, that I keep thinking about 24/7 is Michael asking for help, and asking us to stop, and screaming for help.” (www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/28/60 minutes/main20429967.shtml)

Violence against the helpless. We live in a culture where some label ripping an infant from his mother’s womb as health care. Now, exactly how healthy is that for the baby?

We see what God saw – violence at every turn, wickedness in every thought, evil in every intent. Just this week, we learned that Amarillo, according to the FBI, is the fourth most dangerous city in Texas, with 8.36 violent crimes per 1,000 people in 2021. We have suffered a 40% increase in homicides over the last 12 months. God bless and protect our police as they try to keep us safe.

After all the evil intentions, after all the violent expressions, the creation has refused to be God’s creation. That essential fracture between Creator and creation is the premise and agenda of the flood narrative. Man was and is evil.

II. God grieves.

Now some of you aren’t going to like this, because you want to think of God in preconceived categories – regardless of the testimony of scripture. I don’t think we have a right to re-create God so that He meets our expectations. I think the only right way to know God is through God’s word which He has left for us. There is no way to read this story, or many other stories in the Old and New Testaments, without coming to the conclusion that God responds to the choices – the free choices – of humanity.

Look at verse 6

And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

In fact, God says in Genesis 6:7, “I’m sorry that I have created humanity.”

For some reason, many believers are threatened by a God who grieves and responds. A God dynamic, not static, in his decisions. Somehow they find that kind of God unreliable. Maybe because they find Him unpredictable – which, then again, leaves God in control and not we ourselves. And perhaps that is what scares people who won’t be honest with the text about this grieving, responding God. When we reject this notion of a grieving, dynamically responding God, we’re really afraid that we, ourselves, can’t control God. We want God to act predictably. We want God to stick to the rules that we have made.

But God will not be controlled by our expectations, our categories, or our pigeon holes. God is God. He is Creator, and we are creation. And He can change His mind if He wants to. And He certainly doesn’t need our permission to do so.

God sees humanity for what it has become – the conjuring, the daydreams, the self-perceptions of the world are all tilted against God’s purpose. God is aware that something is deeply amiss in His

creation. And God's dream for creation has no prospect of fulfillment. As a result, God shows a deep pathos. God is grieved. God is saddened by creation's rebellion against Him, against the Creator. At this point in Genesis, the man and woman have had pain, but now God has pain. God knows the pain of the people.

Can God change His mind? Can God abandon the world He so joyously created?

We can't honestly have a God who is unchanging and indifferent to anything going on in the world, as though God were a plastic, fixed, robotic entity. No, the God of Israel is fully a person who hurts, celebrates, responds, and acts in remarkable freedom. God is not the captive of old resolves. God is as fresh and new in relation to creation as He calls us to be with Him. He can respond. He can abandon what He has made. He can send a flood or a fire.

God wills His creation to be turned toward Him, but He does not command it. And the creation has rebelled. The God of the Old Testament is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse.

In the original language here in 6:7b, "I regret that I made Him," which the King James Version translates as "God repents," what we find out in reality is that of the 48 times in the Old Testament that the verb is used in this way, 34 of those have – expressed or implied – God as the subject. The God of the Old Testament can be sorry, repent, and alter His course. He seems to do it quite frequently in the Old Testament.

When God changes His mind, His resolution is firm and severe.

God says, "I'm going blot out" (v. 7), "I am going to destroy" (v. 13), again, "I am going to destroy" (v. 17). And in 7:23, again, "I will blot out."

Have you ever noticed it? Have you read the text? God is the one who shuts the door, protecting Noah and his family and subjecting all the rest of creation to the punishment of the flood. When the door clanged shut on the ark, all the rest of humanity was doomed to the result of their sins.

Like humanity of old, today we assume we have all the time in the world to live in our sin. And then, out of nowhere, the flood comes. It's too late. The door of opportunity shuts, and we're left, separated from God, in our sin.

Look at 7:16

And those who entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God has commanded him; and the Lord closed it behind him. Then the flood came upon the earth.

Matthew says, in the words of Jesus "But as the days of Noah were, so, also, will the coming of the son of man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

When the flood came, Jesus is saying, humanity was living in sin, going about in daily waywardness in rebellion against God. And then the door shut. The flood came. And sin was

judged. Don't ever presume upon God that you have another day to live *your* way as you run away from God's way.

When Christ returns, the door shuts again.

III. Noah found favor with God.

Despite the seriousness of sin, God is still a God of grace. In the first story of Adam and Eve, we had the direct sin of disobedience – eating from the tree, the forbidden fruit. But God gives them clothes of animal skin as an act of His grace. Their blood is not shed, but that of an animal. And in the story of Cain and Abel, even though God sent Cain away to the land of Nod, a land of wandering, God gives him a mark so that no one would take his life. God gives a mark of mercy, even to the first murderer.

In this third story, we have not only sin and judgment but, once again, we have a measure of God's grace. However small it may seem, given the catastrophic nature of the flood, it's real. It's grace. It's God at work on behalf of the humanity He created.

In Genesis 6:8, we have “but Noah.” The whole world has gone astray. All of humanity has gone mad. Every thought is wicked and every way is wayward. “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” Noah was a righteous man we're told in verse 9. Blameless in his time. Noah walked with God.

What the writer of Genesis was saying is that even in the days of a crazy creation, Noah – even in faithless times – was a man of faith.

In 6:18, God says, “I will establish My covenant with you, Noah. You shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.”

Verse 22

Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

In 7:1, God speaks to Noah. “For you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.”

Again, a reference to a time of faithlessness. But Noah was faithful.

In 7:5, look what it says about Noah. “Noah did according to all that God commanded him.”

Again in 7:9, Noah does as God had commanded.

And in 8:1, notice, “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.”

Noah appears in the text, and we really don't know anything about him. But what we do know is this: in this dismal story of pain, there is one who embodies a new possibility. “But Noah found

favor.” In Noah we find a man who is responsive and accepts his role as creature and lets God be creator.

Have you ever noticed this in the story? I had not. God talks and Noah never says a word. Noah just obeys. God commands and Noah does. Noah, unlike Moses – even unlike Abraham – Noah does not bargain with God. Noah does not plead a different case or try to change the mind of God. God speaks and Noah does all that God commanded him. We’re told three times (6:22; 7:5; 7:9).

Even before God unleashes His wrath, He announces His intention to save humanity. God is a God of justice, but He is also a God of grace. And in this grace, God commands that they be fruitful and multiply. “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts (8:1).

In 8:17, God says to Noah, “Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

In 9:1, God blessed Noah and his sons and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

And in 9:7, “As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”

And then in 9:9, God reaffirms His covenant with Noah and with all living creatures by putting the bow in the cloud that the covenant is a sign that God will never again, never again, flood the entirety of His creation.

It’s a re-creation story. You remember the command all the way back in the early chapters of Genesis, the command to Adam and Eve. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” Noah becomes a new Adam. God is starting over. Creation has gone crazy and God, after His punishment, gives grace to Noah and begins again with this second Adam, this second first man. “Be fruitful and multiply.”

IV. In the midst of judgment and grace, we are to respond in worship.

When you know that God could have destroyed you, but God spared you by His grace, what’s the right response? The response is a response of worship. That’s why we worship God today. That’s why we’re here this morning. God, even in His judgment, has spared us through Jesus Christ, His Son. And the right response is not ingratitude or going on with life as usual. But the right response is the rhythm of Sabbath, of stopping and worshipping the God who gives grace.

He gave grace to Noah. And He gives grace to us through Christ Jesus, His Son.

Worship was something God had planned. He provided the animals before the trip to be used for the sacrifice.

Noah saw both the wrath of God and the redemption of God. And no human ever alive has experienced this as strongly as Noah experienced it. He had seen God wipe out all of creation except for him and his companions on the ark.

A true worshipper, saved by God's grace, realizes he has escaped catastrophe because of God's goodness. Such a worshipper comes as Noah did, to declare dependence upon God through sacrificial worship.

What about you today? Are you waiting too long to turn to the God of grace. Those in the day of Noah tarried too long in their wayward wickedness until God shut the door and the opportunity for grace was lost.

And do we come as we worship, aware of all that this grace has cost God through the sacrifice of His Son? And do we worship this morning as sinners saved by the mere grace of God? For were it but for that grace, each of us would find ourselves in the flood.