

Genesis 9:18-29 **A Sermon**

By Scott Lindsay

This morning we continue in our study of the Book of Genesis. The passage which we will be focusing upon is found in Chapter 9, starting with verse 18, and continuing through to the end of the chapter. In our study of this book we have been working to see and understand the biblical plot line – the story of the creation of the world and all its inhabitants, especially the humans who alone bore the image of their Creator.

We have seen how very early in the piece, the first man and the woman rebelled against God's authority, bringing His curse upon themselves and dragging the rest of humanity down with them. And yet, in the midst of their punishment and banishment from the garden, God uttered a promise which insured that the war that sin started would continue to manifest itself within and among people. But not forever. God also promised that there would eventually come a day when the conflict would end - a day when a "seed" or descendant of the woman would "crush" the serpent or Satan's head, even though this descendant would be "bruised" in the conflict.

And so, with this faint glimmer of hope, the storyline of the rest of the Bible is launched – the search *for* and revelation *of* this One who would come and bring an end to the conflict. The One who would come and restore what was lost in the Fall, the One who would reconcile the fractured relationship between God and his wayward creation.

Well, after Adam and Eve's sin, and the description of the curses that resulted from their sin, we saw the immediate consequences of these things, and the proof of the corruption which they brought upon the human race. This consequence and proof came in the form of a conflict that emerged between their first two sons, Cain and Abel, and which resulted in one of them murdering the other one. From there, we watched the situation continue to deteriorate until the world was filled with violence and the folly of rejecting a Sovereign Creator became painfully obvious.

In response to this situation, God rendered a terrible judgment – in the form of a worldwide flood – which was itself an act of "un-creation," and through which he wiped out the entire human race, with the exception of one family; Noah and his sons.

As we have seen before, in sending this flood God was returning the world back to a previous condition – to a time before the creation of anything else, when the world was "formless and void" and covered with water. And just as we saw in Genesis 1, where from the water God caused the dry land to appear, so in the account of Noah the water eventually recedes and the dry land *re-appears*, paralleling the original creation. Further

parallels are seen in the commission given to Noah – to be fruitful and multiply and to have authority over the creation, which is identical to the original commission given to Adam and Eve.

In the passage before us this morning, we see an even *further* parallel between the story of Noah and the original creation account. As you will remember, not long after Adam and Eve's commissioning they were tempted and led into sin which, as I've just said, affected the whole race, and manifested itself most immediately in the conflict between Cain and Abel.

In a similar fashion, it is not long after Noah is off the Ark, and re-established within the new creation that he *also* falls into sin, which then is also clearly manifested in an incident that happened between *his offspring* – Shem, Ham and Japheth. And so, the parallels between creation and re-creation continue in Genesis, and it is with this last matter – Noah's sin and, more importantly, the response it provoked in his offspring – that we will be primarily concerned.

Now, as we look at this section, it is important to keep in mind that while we are only looking at the remainder of chapter 9, you can't fully understand the events recorded there apart from the accounts which follow – the Table of Nations in chapter 10 and the Tower of Babel in chapter 11, right? The dispersment of the human race which is mentioned in Genesis 9:18-19 is expanded upon and more fully explained by these other chapters. So, again, while we are concentrating only on chapter 9, we will have a brief look ahead in order to better understand it. But before we go any further, let's pray and ask the Teacher to come,

Lord Jesus, when you walked on this earth, you did so as a great teacher who taught as no one had, before or since. But before you left this earth, you promised that while you were away, you would not leave us alone but that you would send a Helper - your Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God - who would guide us into truth. Father, we need to experience the reality of that promise right now. Would you please, by your Spirit, pierce our hard hearts and penetrate our thick skulls, with the sword of your truth? Would you remove the cancer of our idolatry and self-worship and faithlessness - that is killing us? And would you then apply the healing balm of the Gospel to our hearts so that we are renewed in the image of your Son? Father use the foolishness of preaching and the folly of this preacher, as you have so ordained, to further your Kingdom purposes. And we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

(Read Genesis 9:18-29)

The first thing I want you to see here is that the fallen condition of the human race, introduced through Adam and Eve, is still very much a reality. In spite of the flood, in spite of all that has happened, and in spite of the declarations of Noah as being a "righteous" man *in his generation* – an important qualification, mind you – but in spite of

all that, we see that sin is still alive. To be sure, much has changed. And yet, in another sense, nothing has changed. The problem that existed before the flood is still a problem afterward.

The first evidence of that is seen in Noah's actions. Beginning in verse 20, Noah is described as a "man of the soil" or a "tiller of the soil," depending on your translation, and, specifically, as the keeper of a *vineyard*. Now there is some ambiguity in the translation here. It is certainly describing the beginning of *something*, but of what scholars do not all agree. Some commentators take the Hebrew here to mean that Noah is, for the first time, engaging in farming.

Other commentators think the intention here is not to say that Noah was, for the first time, engaging in farming but that he was for the first time planting a *vineyard*, and some add to this view, saying that this was, in fact, the first vineyard ever to be planted.

Those who think that the passage is describing Noah's first planting of the first-ever vineyard, then go on to say that because Noah has never done this before, and is new to the whole wine-making enterprise, then his becoming drunk is not so much a consequence of his *sin* as it is of his *inexperience*.

Others, however, point out that the placement of this story in the overall account of Noah's life, along with the strong parallels between Noah's re-creation account and the original creation account, and the almost matter-of-fact introduction of the concepts of vineyards and wine-making without any elaboration all of these things support a different view: that this is not the first ever vineyard, nor is this the first wine that has been made and therefore we are not free to pass off Noah's actions as mere innocence and inexperience. And I personally find this latter position to be much more likely and consistent with the Genesis account as a whole, and with the rest of Scripture.

So, on with the story....

After being on the ark for quite some time, Noah returns to a more normal lifestyle and begins farming and growing things, including grapes. And apparently sometime after they had been harvested and fermented into wine, Noah had a bit too much one day and ended up in an embarrassing and shameful posture: he apparently passed out, naked and exposed which, I might add, is yet another parallel with the account of Adam and Eve. If you recall, after their sin their eyes were "opened" and they saw themselves as "naked" for the first time.

In a similar fashion, Noah is discovered to be naked in the wake of his own sin and failure. And it is in the account of Noah's failure here that we are reminded of his own sin nature, but also that this same nature is present in his children as well. As Noah is laying there in his tent, his youngest son – Ham – walks in and discovers him naked – through no fault of his own. So far, no problem for Ham.

But his sin was not in discovering his father in this compromising situation but in how he

responded to this discovery. Rather than simply covering his father up and exercising some restraint and discretion, instead, he leaves his father as he is and runs off to tell his brothers about it. He was apparently pretty eager to pass on this fairly juicy piece of gossip and maybe get a laugh or two at his father's expense.

Shem and Japheth, however, do not join in their brother's sin but do what should have been done by Ham in the first place and cover their father up, without seeing his nakedness themselves. Now, we'll come back to this in just a second, but at this point I simply want you to notice the *fact* that sin is still very much a part of the human story, isn't it? Adam's legacy remains.

And even Noah, as righteous and upstanding as he was, *in comparison with his own generation at least* – even Noah is shown to be, at the end of the day, a sinful man – which, in retrospect, tells us at least two things. It tells us that while Noah did “walk with God,” as the Scripture says, and in his relative righteousness was spared, with his family, from the *temporal* disaster of the flood - while all of that was certainly true – still, Noah could not *ultimately* stand before God on the basis of his own perfect righteousness. Because, as this incident illustrates, his feet are also made of clay. He too would be found wanting in this area.

And this leads, then, to the *second* thing which these verses tell us, namely this: since Noah was himself a sinful man, and therefore another of Satan's casualties, he could hardly be looked to as the potential “seed” spoken of Genesis 3:15 – the One who was to come and who would NOT capitulate to Satan and sin but who would, on the contrary, be *victorious* in all things. This account makes it clear that Noah, while playing an important role in God's purposes, would not be the one who would come and make everything right in God's creation. And that reality, you see, keeps us looking ahead in the Bible's story line – still waiting for the appearance of the promised “seed”.

Well, returning then to how Noah's sons responded to their father's disgraceful circumstances, we see that there is a difference between them. And in their different responses, we hear the echo of the earlier account of Cain and Abel. As many of you will recall, in that earlier story both brothers set out to make a sacrifice to God and, in the end, only one of their sacrifices is found acceptable – Abel's. Cain is angered by this and is envious of his brother and, in the midst of that, gets a warning from God that disaster was not far from his door if he did not reign himself in. As you know, of course, Cain does not restrain himself, and ends up killing his brother.

And, in that event we saw the first outworking of what was foreshadowed in the curses which God pronounced in Genesis 3. In those curses, God assured the first man and woman that their fall was only the beginning of a long chain of consequences. And one of those consequences was that there was and always would be a conflict within the human race between those who are “of faith” and are identified as the “seed of the woman,” and those who are not of faith, and who are identified as the seed of the serpent.

And so it is that this conflict which we saw earlier in Genesis re-appears in the account of Noah's sons. Ham is shown by his actions to be of a different spirit than his brothers, just as Cain showed by his actions that he was of a different spirit than his brother. Later on in Genesis, we will see the same sort of thing going on between Jacob and Esau. Indeed, this pattern will continue to appear, in various forms, throughout the remainder of the Old Testament.

Well, returning to the story, we see that after Noah's older sons had covered him up, he eventually awakens from his drunken stupor and through some means not revealed to us he finds out what his youngest son has done and how his older sons acted in return. And in response to all of that, Noah proceeds in verse 25 to issue both curses and blessings upon his sons. In particular, he announces curses on some specific descendants of Ham and blessing on Shem and indirect blessing upon Japheth – to the extent that he aligns himself with Shem.

Now, we'll say more about what this all means in a moment. But for now notice who is speaking here. This is *Noah* saying these things. These words are NOT like what we saw in chapter 3 when God himself pronounced certain curses on the man and woman and the serpent. This is different. What we have here is something like a prayer or a *wish* or *hope* on Noah's part that God would respond to what has happened in a particular way.

Because, you see, Noah is not God and has no power *in himself* to affect either curses or blessings upon anyone. Noah is simply speaking aloud curses and blessings that he hopes will be "ratified," so to speak, and enacted by God in heaven.

Now, in reading about all this you might very well wonder why the only one we hear from is Noah. To be sure, what Ham did was wrong. Noah's response to what he did was not unjustified. But what about Noah himself? Why are there no words of condemnation for him?

The answer is simply that Noah and his actions are not really the primary focus in these verses. That is not why this story, out of all the stories that Moses might have preserved for God's people — that is not why this story has been included in the Genesis account. If Noah was the main focus of this section, then I'm quite certain we would have heard a lot more about that.

And, at any rate, the fact is that Noah stands pretty much self-condemned here, laying about naked and exposed. Not a lot more needs to be said really.

But again, that's not why these verses are here. This story is serving another purpose. What is the purpose? I think the main clue is the repeated reference to a certain person, a certain descendant of Noah's son, Ham. The descendant I'm referring to is *Canaan*. Look, first of all, back at verse 18,

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth....

And then notice the added comment,

...Ham was the father of Canaan...

Now the interesting thing about this comment is the way it sticks out. The fact is, Shem and Ham and Japheth had lots of sons. Moses could have picked any one of dozens of names here, but he picks Canaan. He doesn't bother to mention the name of any of Shem's sons, or of Japheth's sons, at least not at this point. He's not interested in us remembering that right now. But he definitely wants us to keep in mind the fact that *Ham was the father of Canaan*. Now, skip down to verse 22,

...And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father....

Once again, Moses goes out of his way to remind us of this connection between Ham and Canaan. In the next verse, when he mentions Shem and Japheth, he doesn't tell us who their sons were, right? Do you think Moses is trying to get our attention? And there is more emphasis still to come. In vs 25 he says,

...Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...

And then, even though he has already made this point, he repeats it two more times, in vs 26 with reference to Shem and in vs 27 with reference to Japheth. Clearly, then, Moses is making a point about Canaan. But why?

Well, look ahead at chapter 10, and verse 6. There we are given the names of four of Ham's sons: Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan. Now skip down to verses 15-19,

Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

Now, with the names of all those people still ringing in your ears, listen to God's words to Joshua, who has just been made the commander-in-chief of God's people after Moses, and just prior to his taking them into the promised land. Listen to Joshua 3:7-10,

The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and

that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Where have you heard those names before? In Genesis 10, the Table of Nations, from among the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham. So, do you see what's going on here? Moses is providing a *theological justification* for taking the promised land. He has recorded this story, this event, to illustrate to the people of Israel that the Canaanite peoples that are now occupying the land before them are descendants of Ham. They are descendants of a man who ages ago dishonored his father, bringing a curse upon himself and his descendants, and as a result showing himself to be among the seed of the serpent – who is always in conflict with the seed of the woman.

And so, by going in and taking the land, they are simply acting as God's agent, as He has in fact chosen to honor the curse uttered by Noah in Genesis 9:25, making Canaan's descendants "a servant of servants" to their brothers.

And this, of course, is the *other* side of this whole thing – the brothers and their descendants. This is another great purpose that these verses and the following chapters serve: to show not only the connection between the Canaanites and Ham but also the connection between the people of Israel and *Shem* – the blessed one. Let's take a moment to look at this as well.

First of all, look at Genesis 9:26. As we have seen, Noah pronounced a blessing which, in actual fact, was a blessing on Shem, although in a roundabout sort of way. He says, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem". In other words, Moses is saying that Shem's blessing is *God Himself* – i.e., that fact that God is Shem's God and has shown favor to him. Well, if you skip ahead to 10:21, you see the description of the descendants of Shem – the blessed one. In vs 22, you notice that one of his descendants is a guy named *Arpachshad*.

Now, skip down to Genesis 11:10. Here we are told again that Shem fathered Arpachshad and then, if you keep reading all the way through to verse 26, you get this list of Arpachshad's descendants, ending on the name *Terah* who fathered *Abram, Nahor, and Haran*. And of course Abram, as many of you will know, goes on to become Abraham, the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel – descendants of Shem – the blessed ones whose blessing is God Himself.

And so, again, here's Moses, preserving this account for the people of Israel, giving them a theological justification for what they are about to do – a justification that explains both why the Canaanites are being driven out AND why Moses' people are taking their place. The basis for both of these things is rooted in the story of Noah and his sons.

Clearly, then, this story had great value for the people of God in Moses' day. Likewise, for the people of God in our own day there are a number of important things to be found

in these verses but, in the interest of time, we're going to look at just two.

For starters, there is an *exemplary value* to these verses. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, after reminding them of some specific events in the OT, Paul said this to them, in verse 11, *...Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come...*

Just as Paul expected the people of Corinth to look at the events of the OT and learn important lessons – such should be the case for us as well. And in looking at Genesis 9:18-29, one of the most important things to take note of is Ham's disrespectful and unjust response to his father's sin. To be sure, Noah was in the wrong in what he did. But Noah's failure was not a license for Ham to misbehave.

Let me put that more plainly: the sin of others – especially significant others like parents or husbands or wives – is not and should never be an occasion or excuse for our own sin. As Paul said in another place, "love does not rejoice at wrongdoing." Or, as Peter said even more pointedly, "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). Indeed, I wonder if Peter did not have this story in mind when he wrote those words.

The fact that someone has sinned against you in some way, or let you down, does not give you permission to return sin for sin. You are not allowed to keep score. That doesn't mean that we condone sin, or approve of it. It doesn't mean we don't rebuke sin or confront it. We do. But there is more than one way for these things to happen. In this account of Noah, I am quite sure that when Noah finally awoke, realized what a shameful situation he had placed himself in, discovered what his youngest son did and, in contrast, what his older sons did – I am quite certain that when all of that sank in, Noah was quite humbled and deeply impacted by the righteous behavior of his older sons who chose to treat him with respect when there was no compelling reason to do so. That action would have far more effectively rebuked Noah than anything else they might have done in that situation.

A second significance of these verses has to do with the words which Noah uttered regarding *Japheth*, in vs 27, *...May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem...* Noah's words about his son Japheth are indeed words of blessing, but in a more indirect fashion than that of Shem. Noah talks about God enlarging Japheth – which must simply be a reference to his descendants becoming quite numerous on the face of the earth. But to that he expresses his added desire that Japheth's descendants would "dwell in the tents of Shem" – to unite with him in some way. And so, to the degree that this happened, to that degree would the descendants of Japheth share in the blessings Shem had received.

Now, as one scholar points out, the descendants of Japheth described in Gen 10:2-5, would in the days of Moses and afterward, have been found to the west and north of the promised land, generally speaking. Or, as this scholar (Hamilton) puts it, "As a generalization we may say that the Japhethites are Gentiles."

Another scholar, named Candlish, sees in this something of great importance. He sees in these hopeful, prophetic words of Noah, the prediction of the eventual calling in of the Gentiles to become part of the blessed family of God. Like the descendants of Ham, the Japhethites are not part of that particular line of descent of whom God would make a great nation and out of which the promised “seed” – Jesus Christ – would eventually come. That privilege belonged to Shem and his descendants, alone and illustrates the particularity of God’s grace.

Nevertheless, just as Japheth’s descendants might enjoy the blessing of God by “dwelling in the tents of Shem,” so too have the Gentiles now received the blessing of God by becoming fellow-heirs of the grace of God, with the nation of Israel. This was the great “mystery”, spoken of in Ephesians 3, and which was inaugurated through Christ’s own ministry and to which Paul dedicated his life as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, which came to the “Jew first” as Paul says, did not *remain* exclusively with the Jewish people. In Christ the ethnic barriers are torn down such that there is “no longer Jew or Greek” but, instead, all are one in Christ. Noah’s blessing on Japheth is the very blessing by which you and I, as Gentiles, have come to be included in the grace of God. And it is the means by which you and I can also be a vehicle of blessing to others – as we continue to “enlarge Japheth,” so to speak, by inviting more and more people to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and to join the family of God’s people –

the God of Abraham,
the God of Shem,
the God of Noah,
the God of Adam,
The God who created all things.