

A Good Creation Gone Bad, Part 2
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A number of weeks ago we started into our winter study program in terms of what our sermons would be tracking on and following. And we set out in front of us a fairly ambitious project this year—we wanna try to work our way through the entire story of God's grace from beginning to end, the story of God answering to ever-increasing sin with a greater grace as it unfolds in the scriptures. So we've talked about, or we've been presented in front of us, moving from the very beginning of Genesis to the very end of Revelation in kind of a summary overview of the whole story and how it fits together as a story. And we started that three weeks ago. This is the third week. And I feel a little bit like when you get on the edge of a diving board and you jump in, and you're just going down into this dark water. And I haven't hit bottom yet. Ok? Because that's what the opening of Genesis is like to me. And I can hardly wait to get next week, because that's when we come up for air. Alright? But this week—this week we're gonna touch bottom, 'cause the book of Genesis starts out with the reality that we live in a good creation gone bad.

I mean, the opening chapter is astounding in wonder and glory of God creating where there was one time nothing, and then He spoke, and now there is something. And it was grand and glorious! But we found in the early chapters of Genesis, in chapter 3 last week, that that grand and glorious creation went bad. A choice was made, and humanity crossed the line from obedience into disobedience. A decision was made, and the consequences have affected us ever since. All of creation was affected by the choice made, when Adam and Eve crossed the line from obedience into disobedience. And the question we raised as we looked at that chapter last week goes 'Well, exactly how bad is it? How bad are things now that humanity has crossed the line from obedience into disobedience?' And to answer that we're gonna do a real quick survey first through the next chapters in Genesis. The next chapters, chapters 4 through 11 in Genesis, primarily focus on communicating to us very clearly, unmistakably, just how bad things are since that day when the fateful decision was made. It looks at almost two thousand years of human history; and it'll give some genealogies, it'll give some life spans and stuff like that. But there are so many questions when we read it that don't get answered, and we're kinda 'what's goin' on in these chapters?'

What's going on is the writer is making sure that there's at least three main events that we see, so that by the time we come to Genesis 12 we understand how desperately, desperately, desperately bad things have gone. Three main events in Genesis 4 through 11, and I'm just gonna touch on 'em. They're kinda the big rocks in the narrative jar, as it were. And the first one is the first murder. It's recorded in Genesis chapter 4. The very first family—and we have a brother killing a brother. And it is so senseless! It is so irrational. You just sit there and say, 'What in the world! Why?' I mean, it's a matter of religion. One offers one thing to God, and the other offers another thing, and God appreciates one better than the other, but that shouldn't cause any problem because God tells the other person, 'Hey, just come back the way the other person did. It's no big deal.' And yet the one brother, Cain, is all upset and he's jealous. I mean, it's so irrational. And he kills his brother. No need to; totally senseless. In a fit of jealousy he kills him. And we wrestle with how irrational that was, and how it just doesn't make sense. But there's an interesting comment God makes that gives us an insight as to why that happened, and it's when God looked at Cain and He said to him, He says, 'Listen, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you. But you must master it.' In other words, 'Cain, there's something that's got a hold of you, and it wants to grip you and it wants to control you, and you are gonna have to fight it. The thing is called "sin".' And Cain didn't. In the very first family we have a murder.

Then we go on from there, and it doesn't get any better. In fact, instead of things getting' better, it just spreads. And that murder is replicated over and over again in other family situations and life situation; so that by the time we come to Genesis 6 through 9 we have God having to react. And He sends a great flood in Noah's day upon the land. It's a catastrophic, climatic change that absolutely changes the environment we live in. The weather patterns have never been the same. It's impacted geology ever since. We see the evidences of it even to this day. It was an amazing, climatic change. We all know the story from Sunday school of Noah's "Arky, Arky, Arky" and the animals that he took in two by two, two by two—and the rainbow at the end. What we usually don't talk about very often in Sunday school is why God would send such a devastation upon the earth and leave only one family surviving. I mean, it's like He pushed the reset button on a computer and just wiped all the software out, and said, 'I'll just start with one program again.' The reason, the explanation, is found in Genesis chapter 6, where we're told that "*Now the earth...*" This was just prior to the Flood. It says

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

God says, 'This has gotta go. I've gotta wipe the slate clean.' Left one family.

Now, climate changed. Geography changed. Man did not. So by the time we come to Genesis chapter 11 we have another episode that just shows us how bad things are. And I just label this the Proud City. Chronologically it happens probably prior to or during chapter 10. And the situation is after the flood God has told the family and Noah and his sons to spread out and begin to multiply, and eventually begin to regenerate the earth, renew the earth with new population base. And as mankind are doin' this they're told, 'Now scatter.' Instead of scattering, they gather. And they say, 'We're gonna build a city.' The city was eventually called Babel. They're gonna build a city, and in the middle of this grand and beautiful city they're gonna build a tower; and it's a tower that they said, 'It's gonna take us right up into heaven.' We're told that God looked at that city, He looked at what mankind was doing, united and coordinated and cooperating with one another, and He says there's no limit to what they will do. And He says, 'We've gotta stop this.' And He dispersed them; confused their languages; and so they could never cooperate and coordinate like that again. Gotta look at it and say why'd He do that? Was He concerned they were gonna do such great things that they'd be competition to Him? No. He was concerned that if they could do this sort of thing, there'd be no limit to the evil they could do. I mean, what would they dream up next? The root problem that happened in that city is reflected in the statement they made as they set out to build it. They said

Let us make for ourselves a name.

'Let's build a city; let's build a tower, and in so doing let's make for ourselves a name.' In other words, they wanted to build a city that was all about them. They wanted to build a grand and glorious city and tower that would tell the world how great they are; that instead of honoring and recognizing and responding to the glory of God, they would be determined and focused on displaying their own greatness and their own glory. And God brought it to an end.

Those are the big events in almost two thousand years of early human history, the beginnings that the Bible indicates you need to understand these things. You need to understand that this is what went on in those early years. You need to know how bad it was. And there's probably no clearer statement of how bad things were than what God said in Genesis chapter 6, where, in the middle of all this, just before the Flood, we have this statement with respect to God. It says

Then the LORD saw the wickedness of man was great on the earth...

God looked and He said, "Man is wicked." In fact, it goes on and says

...and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

God said, 'That's man.' And then the next verse is astounding, because the next verse says this:

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

Now immediately those who are into systematic theology will jump up and say, "Wait, wait, wait; we gotta rephrase that. We gotta rethink that. You gotta remember the immutability of God, the sovereignty of God, the righteousness of God; you've gotta move all these things together. And you know, God really doesn't change His mind, He really doesn't regret, He really doesn't feel sorry about anything He's ever done.' Put the systematic theology down, and let this text speak for itself. I don't understand all the complexities of God's inner emotions as He works in and through human history. But I do know it clearly, clearly states that He looked and He was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. That's how bad things are.

There's a text later, much later, in the New Testament that goes back and gives us a sense of what happened. I mean, we can go through other passages of scripture, and later on we'll have kings that look at Israel and the people they're dealing with, and they say, 'Man, they're evil in their hearts.' We'll have wise men in the book of Proverbs that will say, 'Man is wicked inside.' We'll have prophets that stand and say 'The heart of man is wicked and desperately evil, and who can know it?' We have Jesus; He will eventually say, He says, 'It's from within; out of the heart of men proceeds the evil thoughts and fornications and everything else.' He lists the types of sins and says they're coming out of here.

And it's in the book of Romans that we have a kind of an analysis of what took place then. We talked about it last week, and what went so awfully bad. And we're told that it was through that one man, that one decision made in that garden so long ago, when mankind and Adam and Eve crossed the line of obedience into disobedience. We're told that through that one man sin entered into the world. Something happened! Sin, rebellion, resistance to God entered into God's glorious creation. It wasn't there before. But when the decision was made it entered. With that came judgment. Through that transgression of that one, as Romans chapter 5 continues...and I'm just pullin' these phrases so you get the drumbeat. It says "*By the transgression of the one...*", that Adam, "*...death reigned through that one...*", that one transgression, through that one person death has entered into the human race. It goes on and says through the one transgression there was a condemnation to all men. We all came under condemnation because humanity crossed the line in that decision, at that point in time. And then the verse that just, to me, is chilling most of all, says

Through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.

An analogy that is not perfect but somewhat fits here is those instances where a parent's lifestyle choice may lead to the contracting of HIV that is then passed on to the children. The children didn't choose it; they didn't ask for it. The lifestyle choice was made by the parent. But the kids inherit the condition. That's the way it is with sin. We don't ask to be born resistant to God, self-centered, and the type of people that we may call on God, we may ask for God, but we want God to come on our terms and our way to do what we want. That's sin. And we're born with that; it's a consequence of a choice made long, long ago.

Let me take that analysis of the human condition and put it into to...how does that apply, how does that relate, how does that affect our perspective of specific sin that we're around. 'Cause this isn't just abstract; it relates to the sin in our own life. Take a particular one, 'cause when we go back and we really recognize how bad things really are it should deepen our understanding of sin. And the illustration I'm gonna use, the illustration I'm gonna take to is an act of homosexuality, the practice of homosexuality. And because this is an issue and a question, as soon as you begin to talk about it communities begin to divide, and they start having long meetings, and they yell at each other and they carry signs and everything else. And so I wanna be very careful when I talk about it. In fact, what I'm gonna do is make sure I read my comments. I'm gonna be that careful speaking, and I'm gonna ask you to be that careful listening.

The reason I choose this one as a particular example to illustrate the application of what we're talkin' about is not because it's particularly evil in comparison to other sins. It's not particularly evil compared to other sins. There are other sins more respectable in appearance, but far more devastating in effect. I would much, much rather deal with homosexuality in a community than pervasive gossip, and the damage that gossip does. The reason I picked this particular sin is not because it's particularly evil. It's just that, in an unusual way, this sin has had more research than most with respect to its root causes. It has been studied more than almost any other sin I know of, as to why do people act this way. You understand biblically the homosexual act, the practice of homosexuality, is a sin. It's against God's intent, His design, and His command with respect to sexual relations. It is a human will making a choice, a responsible and an accountable choice, against God's will. But you need to understand there is more to it than that basic analysis. There's more to it than that basic analysis. And if we don't stop and recognize that there is more to it, in this sin and every other sin, then we will never address it with the compassion and with humility and with redemptive hope of one sinner speaking to another sinner of the glorious, wondrous grace of Jesus. So we need to be more careful when we analyze it. We need to go beyond 'a choice was made.'

As in any sin, there are factors which influence the choice, that incline the will toward the act. In this particular case, with this particular sin, those factors may be varied and many; in fact, they are varied and many. Two particular factors that are not always at play, and always in influence, but two that have been studied extensively in research projects, can be identified. For simplicity we'll label the one 'nurture', and we'll label the other 'nature'. The family system in which the person grew up in, in which the person was raised, and the genetic predispositions of birth—those are two different things. And research indicates that both factors can and have, in many cases, produced a very real same-sex attraction that exerts powerful influence upon the choices individuals make. In some cases the pattern of relationship within the family during crucial years of development strongly shapes the attachments within these individuals, without them even being aware of what is happening. In other cases it has nothing to do, absolutely nothing to do, with patterns of family behavior. The child simply grew up attracted to the same sex, like some children grow up left-handed. And not even a perfect family pattern would change that attraction. Let me say it clearly—there are people who live with the same-sex attraction which they did not seek, and they did not choose.

One of the most powerful testimonies I've ever heard was that of a woman who was a practicing homosexual in a committed same-sex relationship when she first became a Christian. As she told her story of growing up and struggling with the attraction that grew within her, she paused to point as she spoke to the group, and there were tears in her eyes at this point. And she just simply said, "I did not choose this desire. It wasn't like I sat down with a checklist when I was a young person and said, 'What are the characteristics that I want,' and I came down to sexual attraction and I checked the mark that said, 'Make me same-sex.'" There are individuals who struggle with same-sex attraction which they did not seek and they did not choose.

Now, it ought not be a surprise that some family systems influence a young person towards homosexuality. Family systems are made up of sinners. All sorts of sins are incubated in varied family patterns. You can trace greed, gluttony, gossip—you will find all those incubated in families of greed, gossip, gluttony; or various family patterns that cultivate those without even intent. It ought not be a surprise to us that it would be the same with this sin. There are family systems that influence a person this way. And neither should it be a surprise that some are born with a same-sex attraction. We are a fallen race. We are all born with a predisposition to sin; a resistance to God's design and intent is woven into the very deepest fabric of our being that will manifest itself in various ways—everything from lying to lust, from greed to gossip, from alcoholism to anger, from sloth to stealing, from pornography to pride. The seeds are here within us. We are part of a good creation gone bad. We are born sinners. Sin is not just an act that someone does. Sin is an inherited heart condition that is made manifest in a wide diversity of sinful actions and attitudes.

That is why the argument that says "I was born this way, so it must be ok", or "I was born this way, so it must be right", that argument does not hold because this is not the pure and glorious creation over which God said, "*It is good.*" That creation passed when mankind crossed the line from obedience into disobedience. And we now live in a creation that is corrupt. And that corruption touches each one of us. We did not ask for it, we did not choose it; it is simply the consequence of a choice made at the very beginning.

That is why, for example, education will not eradicate sin. It's why environment, changing family systems, is not gonna eradicate it. Inspiration, really motivating people well to be good, is not going to eradicate sin. And that's why moral law will not do it. Listen, if inspirational talks combined with moral law really would work, Moses and the Law (Ten Commandments) would have worked. And they did not. And when we can't use moral law, religious law, maybe civil law will accomplish it. No, it won't. And then we think yes, maybe just consequences—if people finally come up hard against all the consequences of bad choices made they will finally change. They don't. They don't. They'll go back and keep doin' the same thing over and over and over again.

I have a friend who works with...he teaches leadership. His whole career has revolved around teaching leadership, everything from highschoolers to NASA astronauts—special classes from the academies will come up and go through courses up here that is run through his organization. It's called National Outdoors Leadership Schools. And they train people in leadership, and they do it very specifically by taking them into the out-of-doors and making them cope with the harsh realities they meet in the out-of-doors, in the wilderness setting, in the back country. Anyway, I was in a meeting once, and this man was talking, and he looked at us and he made the comment at one point and he says, "Truth is the river." And I'm going, "Whoa! That's kinda Zen-like." You know, it was kinda cool. Then he elaborated on what he meant by it, and why he likes teaching leadership in the back country. What he said was this—you can have all the abstract ideas you want; you can sit around the campfire and debate all you want. You can sit in a coffee shop and run through philosophies of life. "But," he says, "you know what? When you come against that river, rushing, wild river, in the wilderness, you have just met truth."

Listen, we can get philosophical about this, we can sit over coffee and debate it all we want, but what I've done is taken you to the river today. And it's a river that runs through our culture, and it's a river that runs through each one of our hearts, and it's a river named sin. And you're born with it. And you'll wrestle with it your entire life. That's how bad things are.

Question—Larry, is there any hope before we come back for Sermon Number 4? Yeah, and I don't say this lightly. It is the one thing that keeps me going day after day after day. It's the one thing for why I would stand up here. It is the glory and the mystery and the grace of a person named Jesus Christ. That passage in Romans chapter 5, when it talks about what happened that day the decision was made so long ago, when humanity crossed the line from obedience into disobedience, when Adam and Eve stepped across that line—it is matched by another parallel description of somebody else who crossed the line...didn't cross the line, excuse me...but accepted the position of obedience all the way to the cross. And in describing that and putting it in contrast to what happened with Adam and Eve, it says

...much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

Sin is increasing, and it continues to increase, but there is a greater grace and it is found in a person named Jesus Christ and what He did. “*Much more,*” it says,

...those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life...

Those who respond to it will reign in life; they will have life

...through the One, Jesus Christ.

Nobody else, just Him. Goes on, says through that one act of righteousness, that one thing He did—Him going to the cross,

...there resulted justification of life to all men.

Anyone and everyone can be set right with God because of Jesus’ one act, that one day on the cross. And then the phrase I love most, it’s

...through the obedience of that One that many will be made righteous.

The summary statement near the end of that chapter is where sin increased, grace has abounded more. There’s our hope, and that is our only hope.

Listen, if those things right there—education, environment, inspiration, moral law, civil law, consequences—if all those things really worked and dealt with the problem, the newspaper you pick up when you go home today would read completely differently than it will read. We have not solved sin, because it’s not ours to solve. It takes somebody bigger than us, and His name is Jesus.

I ask you to stand with me.

The pressure put on churches throughout history has been to simply be an educational institution that will give people instruction, an environment that is loving and caring and supportive, and will inspire people with strong moral teaching. That is not what the church is about. The church is about being salt and light as a witness to the reality of Jesus.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in that truth, and grip that grace. Amen.