

GOD'S GRIEF GENESIS 6:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

Arnold Toynbee has indicated there have been in the past more than 21 different civilizations, each one in turn collapsing and giving way to another. Scriptures record for us the rise and the fall of the first of those civilizations. It gives us insight into the things that bring about the collapse of a civilization.

In the inspired record of the collapse of the civilization in the day of Noah under divine judgment an emphasis is given to the role that God played in that collapse. The writer of Genesis was concerned that we see the offended creator God as being the prime mover in the collapse of that civilization. It collapsed under the judgment of the Creator God. In the midst of that collapse we gain a new sight into the character of God. The inspired historian wrote, "The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain." We learn that the Creator is capable of grief and inner pain. He is capable of changing directions. He is capable of replacing his blessing with judgment. Some have so separated God from His creation that He is incapable of any kind of response to what goes on in the creation. This is not the God revealed to us in the Bible. The God revealed to us in the Bible has such a love for that which He has made, man and the things that are a part of man's world, that his heart is broken when the man that He has made chooses a course of action that is destructive to his own well-being.

These verses that open the sixth chapter of Genesis give us insight into what it is that grieves God and what happens when God is grieved. I want us to seek an understanding of both of these so that we may not be party to bringing grief to the God who made us and the God who continues to love us.

I. THE CAUSE OF HIS GRIEF.

If you have done much study in the book of Genesis, you will recognize that this chapter is one of the most difficult chapters to interpret in all of the Old Testament. You will find a sharp division among able Biblical scholars concerning the interpretation and meaning of this passage. I offer to you my interpretation of the passage with a genuine sense of humility. I do so with the confession that I have made a change in my own understanding of the passage as the years have gone by. I find myself offering to you an interpretation that I have never offered before when I was dealing with this passage. In the passage I believe we can find four basic things that cause grief to the heart of God.

1. The union of the human and the demonic.

This is the point of greatest difficulty in the interpretation of the passage. The record reads, “When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.” Then he adds, “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by

them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.” The critical point in interpreting this passage is the identity of “the sons of God” and the “daughters of men.”

There are two primary identities given to these two groups. One group understands the sons of God to be the righteous descendents of Seth, those who called upon the name of the Lord. They understand the daughters of men to be the beautiful daughters of the Cainites, or the descendents of Cain. They see the sin being involved here as the intermingling of the righteous descendents of Seth and the unrighteous descendents of Cain. This is obviously something that is always offensive to God.

The oldest interpretation of the passage available to us identifies the “sons of God” as angelic beings and the “daughters of men” as being the human daughters of Adam’s descendents. It is this interpretation that is first found among the interpreters of the Old Testament among Hebrew scholars. They identified the sons of God with the angelic sons of God described in Job 1. As I have struggled with the passage across the years, I have come to a tentative conviction that there was something out of the ordinary that went on in that ancient world. We do not know in our experience anything about women being sexually joined to demonic beings and producing children even though this theme has been explored in some movies in fairly recent years. The fact that there was nothing in my realm of experience with which I could identify kept me from making a commitment to that interpretation across the years. But the production of the phenomenal personalities that are called the nephilim in the passage indicates that we have something going on out of the ordinary. Evidently we are to understand that when

man turned his back upon God and began to build a world without God that he opened his life to the powers of darkness. Some way this even involved the cohabiting of the daughters of men with these evil angelic beings. Out of this unacceptable union there came sons that were physical and military heroes in that ancient world.

This may well explain some of the mythological figures of the past, such as Hercules, who were reported to be both man and some kind of deity. The thing of which we can be sure is that any time there is a co-mingling of the human and demonic realm the heart of God is grieved. When this happens, the man who is created to be inhabited by God and used by God has become inhabited and used by God's adversary.

It is of interest I think that there has been a rise of demonic activity in our own culture in recent years. This must not be taken lightly. It is something that grieves the heart of the Creator.

2. The trust of man in man.

The Genesis record gives attention to these heroes of old, "men of renown." Evidently they were men of such charisma and strength that they were able to marshal the energies of men under their control and became powerful figures in their day. The implication would be that men began to place their confidence and their hope in the hands of these monstrosities rather than in the Creator God who made everything. Any time mortal man begins to trust in another mortal man instead of the immortal God, the immortal God has

pain and grief in his heart. This was one of the things that brought grief to the heart of God.

3. The corruption of the human heart.

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. This is another element that brought grief to the heart of God. It should be understood that these things do not stand alone but as a collective group that make up the things that brought grief to the heart of God. Man's wickedness and the continual perversion of the thoughts of His heart is a part of a life that has replaced God with someone or something else as the object of His trust. This descriptive word given by the writer is a reminder to us that humankind in general had become twisted and perverted from the original intention of the Creator.

These words should bring to mind a contrast between the creation account and what God saw in this record. In the creation account when God saw what He had made, He was pleased. He saw that it was good. Now, as the Creator looks upon what has become of what He made, his heart is grieved. Instead of seeing something that was good and pleasing in His sight, He saw humankind totally corrupted, depraved, degenerate, living at the very lowest level. It was this corruption of His creation that brought to His heart such grief and such pain.

4. The violence of man toward man.

What first expressed itself in Cain's murder of Abel now becomes a way of life. The record reads, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on the earth had corrupted their ways. In God's first word to Noah He said, "I'm going to put an end to all people, for all the earth is filled with violence because of them." The word translated violence in this text means outrage, assault, insolence, terrible cruelty. He is describing a society where man has become violent in his ways against his fellow man.

When you realize how much grief violence causes God you become uncomfortable when you remember how our own society has glamorized violence. We glamorize it in our movies and books. That which we have glamorized in our entertainment has become a part of our way of life. When you put together all the abortions that are performed, all of the personal acts of violence that one human being does against another human being, all of the acts of violence involved in warfare around our world, you become aware that you and I live in a world that is given to violence. We live in a world in which men and women choose to use violence when they believe it is in their own best interest. They will destroy anything and anyone who gets in their way.

When you put these four things together you have a picture of what broke the heart of the Creator. He was grieved by the lifestyle that the human beings that He had created, the stewards of the earth, have brought about on the earth He had made. It makes you wonder if He may not be grieved with this generation in a similar manner!

II. THE CONSEQUENCE OF HIS GRIEF.

We are given insight into the passage and made to understand that the grief of God was not just a passing emotion. The grief of God became the motive behind His response to the corruption of the human family. There are two primary insights that we can gain concerning the consequences of his grief.

1. The removal of the cause of His grief with a broken heart.

Moses gives us insight into what God felt about what was happening on the earth so we would correctly understand what God did. What God did was to completely destroy all life on this planet with the exception of one man, his wife, their three sons and their wives, and a selection of animal life that was preserved on the ark. Otherwise all life on the planet was destroyed. This destruction came about because of the grief of God.

Listen to the way God described what He did, “So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind whom I have created from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them.”

The expression “will wipe” gives us a graphic picture. God intended to wipe the earth clean of life like a woman will wipe a dirty dish. It is particularly meaningful when we remember that a woman will use a pan of water in wiping the dirty dish. God used water in that first wiping that He did of the human family.

Later, God said to Noah, “I’m going to put an end to all people for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.” He then added “everything on earth will perish.” When God became grieved, nothing is safe. He

has both the authority and the power to do with His creation whatever He pleases. When His creation becomes a continual source of grief to Him, you can expect God to act in judgment. When God does wipe the earth clean He does so with a broken heart. It is this grieving Creator who moves in judgment.

2. The perseverance in His purpose.

There was a limit in how far God would go in His destruction. While He wiped the earth clean, He did not abandon his purpose. His purpose announced in the Garden of Eden was to bring to the earth a Savior for man. This is the significance of the statement that we find in this passage, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” Right in the midst of this record of divine judgment we are introduced to this man Noah, the son of Lamech. This man would be the man through whom the promise of God that He made in the Garden would be fulfilled. He is a descendent of the third son of Adam, Seth. He is a grandson of the man that God carried away to heaven, Enoch. This man becomes the chosen channel through which God will do His work. God is grieved and He acts in judgment, but He does not abandon His purpose to save. The whole earth has become so corrupt that it is obviously not worth saving but God still acts in a way to make salvation available to humankind.

As I meditate on this passage it creates in me a desire to be a part of a people who will be pleasure to God rather than a grief. My own evaluation of the society in which we live is that it must indeed be quite a grief to the heart of the loving Creator. But just as there was a Noah in the midst of that corrupt society, I want there to be in the midst of our

corrupt society some Noahs who will be faithful in the midst of unfaithfulness; who will have fidelity in the midst of faithlessness, who will be holy in the midst of sinfulness, who will choose fellowship with God over the approval of the world. The purpose in exposing you to this passage tonight is to invite you and to encourage you to be a part of such a company in the midst of a corrupt society. Let's be a joy to the heart of our Creator instead of a grief.