

And the Rest was History

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[0 : 00] Well, if you were with us in the beginning of our series in Genesis, perhaps you remember that we began with a question, and not the question that many of us come to the book of Genesis with, but certainly the question that the book of Genesis was written to answer, the question, who is God?

Who is God? It's the question that the original set of readers, the Israelites, just recently rescued out of the land of Egypt in the time of Moses. This is the question they were asking.

Okay, who is this great rescuer who stormed the most powerful kingdom on the planet at the time and brought it to its knees so that he could set us free and bring us to himself so that we could know him?

Who are you, God? Tell us your name. Take off your mask. Show us who you are so that we can know you truly and worship you for who you are.

And Genesis, I think, hasn't disappointed as it has unveiled for us who God is, his wisdom and goodness in creating the cosmos, his love and care in creating us in his own image, his grace and mercy to the first human rebels, his patience with sinful humanity through the generations, his justice in dealing with wrong, his faithfulness to his promises.

[1 : 37] And so we could go on and on, couldn't we? Just laying out before ourselves the treasures that we have found in this book. And it is a palace of treasures for us to discover and delight in.

And I hope part of the aim of a series like this is just to help us to navigate these corridors, to come back to these truths as we read the Bible for ourselves or with our families or in smaller groups and settings and to find these truths and to delight in them.

But as we come nearly to the end of our wee series in Genesis, this book still has surprises for us. Because our passage tonight is the first in Genesis where God doesn't seem to be there.

Did you notice that? He doesn't speak. We're not told that he did something or thought something. He's only actually mentioned in passing.

But if we've learned anything from Genesis so far, it's surely that God is never absent from his world. He's never out of the picture. How could he be? Now, in this strange scene and the consequences that flow from it, we see that, in fact, God is present.

[2 : 55] He is king. He is sovereign over the nations. He is still king over the world, despite our best efforts to dethrone him. The Lord is in control of the history and destiny of our world.

And that is great news for us tonight, brothers and sisters. But before we get there, Genesis checks back in with Noah, who we've been looking at the last few weeks.

And we see, firstly and tragically, that Noah dashes daddy's hopes. Read with me again, if you would, from verse 18. The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These were the three sons of Noah. And from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth. So if you were here last Sunday, perhaps you remember the ark that had carried Noah and his three sons and their wives, his family, safely through the flood.

Ran aground at last in a sort of new creation. A freshly washed and formed and recreated world. And God called his creatures to come out of the ark.

[4 : 08] He blessed them and again told them to be fruitful, increase, and fill the earth. And so this is just picking up that part of God's restoration plan.

From Noah's three sons, we read, came the people who were scattered over the whole earth. It's a reminder, in case we'd forgotten, that this is the beginning of humanity, Mark 1.2.

Okay, a new humanity about to fill, again, a new world. So to set what happens next in its context.

Okay, that is where we are, on a threshold of a new world.

A new humanity, still with one foot on the doorstep of it. And this is what happens next. You just glance down with me at verse 20. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. It's the first thing he does in a new created world. Now, that is not a very dignified thing for him to have done, is it?

[5 : 14] It doesn't really fit with Noah that we've met in chapter 6. He was, quote, a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. And he walked faithfully with God.

And this is so out of character that some commentators go so far as to ask, is this the same guy? Is this really the one who God kept alive?

He kept safe through the flood for his righteousness. You've kind of held up Noah the last few weeks, haven't we, as a type of Christ or a shadow of Christ.

But verse 21 brings us back down to earth with a thud because it reminds us. And of course, however much Noah might point us to Christ, he himself is not Christ.

And in fact, he is very much the son of his first father. So we might be wondering, okay, it's not great, is it, to get drunk and lay sprawled naked on your bed?

[6 : 15] But is it really worth a headline? You know, why have we just read this in church on a Sunday out of our Bibles? You man steps off ark, goes on bender.

It is scandalous. But why is it in our Bibles? Well, what does Genesis want us to see here? The temptation for us, I think, is to zoom in on the wine.

Because we want an easy lesson for us to take home. Don't drink too much. Okay, and that is a biblical command. Paul writes in Ephesians 5, don't get drunk on wine.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit. And perhaps you're here tonight and you do need to take that home. And think on it and take it to heart from God's Word. But let's zoom back out, okay, from the wine.

And ask, have we seen this before? Or something similar, perhaps, in this book. Can we think of a time, perhaps, when somebody has sinfully consumed fruit, which has made being naked complicated and shameful?

[7 : 25] Has that happened? If you're not there yet, here's Genesis 3, verses 6 and 7. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Why is Noah's drunken nakedness in our Bibles? Well, I think because it is a live-action replay of the very first sin.

Father of a new humanity steps out into a new world and commits the original sin again. And by now, I hope you're thinking to yourselves, not again.

You've got to be kidding. Another sermon on sin. Haven't we got this by now? Well, brothers and sisters, clearly we haven't. Because this is the truth, that Genesis does not stop preaching to us.

[8 : 39] We cannot outrun sin. It is stained into our souls. It is baked deeply into our hearts.

We cannot outrun sin. Adam lived in a very good world with a perfect God, could want for nothing, and he sinned. Here, Noah steps out into a new world with a perfect God who had saved him, a whole fresh start, and he sinned.

And so, friends, how likely do you think it is that me and you, as we live in a broken world, even with a perfect God, even washed clean by the blood of Christ, how likely do you think it is that we will not struggle with sin and fail?

It is 100% certain that we will. And it's not very with the times, is it, to have a deep view of sin?

If you hear about sins today, it's probably in the context of something like Slimming World. Our culture has all but discarded the idea, the language of sin.

[9 : 51] And if we're honest, a serious view of sin is sometimes not that welcome at church or in our relationships or in our hearts.

We don't like to think about it much, do we? We might even ask, you know, isn't Christianity about more than dealing with sin? You haven't, we kind of got past sin now that we're Christians?

Well, friends, Genesis doesn't stop telling us that sin is the problem with us, with our world, and that we can do nothing to stop it.

But praise God, it doesn't stop telling us also that sin is the problem that God has set his heart on dealing with. Christianity is, of course, about our whole lives being lived under the lordship of Christ. It's about denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following him. But in the biggest possible sense, that is not less than dealing with sin, is it?

[10:56] That is not less than God taking us in hand and crucifying our sinful flesh and bringing us to Christ, ye. Sin is the problem God has sworn to deal with here and now and forever.

Of course, that has huge implications for all of life. But sin is at the heart of it. The heart of our faith, our hope, of all that we believe.

Now, that flies straight in the face, doesn't it, of our kind of sense that we have to have something to go and do. Okay, that I am here to tell you not to go and get drunk. Okay, that is a faithful thing not to do, brothers and sisters.

Well, then I am here to tell you that it would be a good thing, wouldn't it, to go and help people who get drunk on a night out, or who struggle with alcohol or alcoholism. Okay, another good thing for us to do.

But Genesis doesn't let us shift the focus away. Okay, ever. From the desperate need of every human being to be saved from sin and be given a completely new heart by our faithful God.

[12:09] And if that is what we need, then our hope tonight cannot be set upon a kind of human strength or human promise or potential.

You remember what Noah's dad hoped for his son in the maternity ward. He named him Noah or rest. And he said, surely he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.

Surely he will comfort us. Well, imagine the look on his face. If he had lived long enough to see that son sprawled naked and drunk on his bed in a world that God had just finished washing clean and renewing.

In the words of commentator Gordon Wenham, Noah's grape growing certainly brings comfort. But the fruit of the vine proves to be something of a mixed blessing, which surely is an understatement. It is a disaster. Noah has dashed his daddy's highest hopes to bring back God's promised rest, to lift the curse of sin, to crush the head of the serpent.

[13:22] And so we'll dash our hopes, friends. Anything or anyone that we set our hope on, that is not God in Christ. We will even defeat and sabotage ourselves if we trust in our own ability to overcome our sin.

That is how deep it goes. So praise God then that he does promise to deal in full with our sin. And that is our second point this evening, that God delivers on his word.

He delivers on his word. Now Noah was always going to have his hands full, wasn't he, with three sons? Some of you know all about that. And isn't this exactly the sort of thing that you would expect three brothers to get up to on finding their father in a compromising situation?

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. You can picture it, can't you? You'll never guess what. Dad is absolutely out of it.

He's in there, sleeping off his hangover, and he's naked. That, I think, is how we're meant to hear these words.

[14:36] Not the discreet and quiet words of a concerned son, but the crude and dishonoring gossip of a rebellious son. You notice what Ham didn't do was to quietly just cover his dad up and not say anything about it.

And notice, too, that when his brothers do do something about it, Ham is not even involved. Shem and Japheth took a garment and lay it across their shoulders, and they walked in backwards and covered their father's naked body.

Their faces were turned the other way, so they wouldn't see their father naked. And it's written in a way that really stresses how awkward this whole thing was for them. Trying to cover someone up with a big, heavy blanket, but without any chance of sort of glancing at them and violating their privacy.

And the best way they decide is to kind of put the blanket on their shoulders behind them and walk in backwards and try and sort of lay it over their dad. Now, there's two things going on there.

The little picture and the big picture, like the wine and the fruits. There's the lesson that we pick up straight off the surface of the text, isn't there?

[15 : 52] Which is, how do we treat our fathers? Honor your father and mother. When Noah wakes up, in verse 24, found out what his youngest son has done to him.

That is ultimately what Ham had got wrong. Dishonoring his father by deliberately deepening his shame, humiliating him. And by contrast, Shem and Japheth, they went out of their way, didn't they, to honor their father by covering his shame.

And commentators speculate, you know, why is this such a big deal? Could there be something more sinister going on here than Genesis lets on? Well, if there was, then the question is, why doesn't Genesis tell us?

In fact, why would we think that there would need to be something worse going on than Genesis tells us? For the Israelites, you read this first family honor. Respecting your parents was far more important to them than it is to us today.

Today, out of the 3, 613 laws in the Old Testament, this is one out of ten that God gave as a permanent moral law to his people.

[17 : 11] Alongside things like not worshipping other gods and not killing people and not stealing is the fifth commandment. Honor your father and mother. And our culture has really reversed that, I think, so that being young carries a special claim to honor and respect.

Young people of the future, we're told, we need to listen to them. And perhaps that is why we find the lengths these brothers go to, to honor their father so bizarre.

This whole issue, yet it is a big deal to God. Here's Paul, again, in Ephesians 6. Children, he says, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Honor your father and mother. And again, perhaps you're here tonight and that is something for you to take away, mull on, take to heart from God's word.

There's not something more sinister going on here than a son dishonoring his father. But there is something more wonderful for us to see, zooming back out to the big picture.

[18 : 21] Because if Noah's sin is a replay of Adam's sin, then what is the significance, then, of Noah's sons covering him? Who did that for Adam after he sinned?

It was God himself. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. The Lord covered over their shame. And here are Shem and Japheth covering their father's shame in very nearly the same way.

Okay, it's far more awkward. And they're not making a sacrifice to atone for their dad's sin as God had done for Adam. But in the story that Genesis is telling, the response of these sons to sin and shame mirrors God's response to sin and shame.

That he is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and full of steadfast love. And these brothers cover their father's shame.

And the fact that two of Noah's sons do that, okay, that not all three of them end up sort of rolling on the floor laughing at their dad or seeking to deepen his humiliation.

[19 : 36] It's a simple but certain reminder of God's promise earlier in this book. It's a promise he made to the serpent. He said, I will put enmity between you and the woman, your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. God promised not to give over humanity completely to sin. Instead, God is promising there would be a forever war between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring.

Until he raised up one child from the woman, he would finish off the serpent at last. And we see that promise playing out here as Noah's two sons turn away from temptation and sin.

And they don't follow their brother into sin. And instead, they share God's heart. Reflect his grace and mercy and love towards sinners.

It's a big picture reminder, isn't it? That as deep as our shame and our sin do go this evening, friends. That that is how God is towards us.

[20 : 46] Gracious and merciful and willing to cover our shame and our sin. He sent the promised rescuer, his own son, so that he could do that.

Cover our shame from his sight by his blood. So that though we have sinned, we might be covered in a righteousness not our own and stand pure in his sight.

Our trust is in Christ. Shem and Japheth's actions foreshadow that wonderful truth. And so what we see here is this outworking of God's promise that there would always be hope for humanity.

A golden thread running through a dark world. This line of promise that is unfolding and being traced through the book of Genesis. That leads ultimately to the promised rescuer.

Who would win the war, take away our sin, crush the serpent fully and finally for us. And God ensures that that promise is being carried forward into the future.

[21 : 49] Through the blessing and the cursing that Noah does when he wakes up. See that at the end of chapter 9? When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him.

He said, cursed be Canaan. The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers. He also said, praise be to the Lord. The God of Shem. May Canaan be the slave of Shem.

May God extend Japheth's territory. May Japheth live in the tents of Shem. And may Canaan be the slave of Japheth. And so just as God did once in the garden, so Noah now pronounces a blessing and a curse.

A curse on Canaan is Ham's son and a blessing for Shem and Japheth. Now, people have asked, why doesn't Ham get cursed?

Why Canaan, his son? What is that all about? And there's loads of different answers. Perhaps you can go and find out for yourself. Partly, I think, because this curse will stand for posterity.

[22 : 55] Not just finishing with Noah's son, Ham. But partly, too, I think, because the name Canaan carries so much freight for the original readers, the Israelites.

We're going to see in a moment, Ham's sons cause all kinds of trouble for the Israelites. Not least the family of Canaan, which lives in the land that God has promised to give them, where they are heading presently.

In fact, whenever Ham's mentioned in this section, he's called the father of Canaan. There in verse 18, and in verse 22, and now in verse 25.

Again, why is that? Well, because it flagged for the Israelites, surely, that the people they're going to meet on the other side of the river are the sons of this guy, Ham.

That is, offspring of the serpent, enemies of God, and therefore, cursed. So now they know, or should know, who they are dealing with.

[23 : 56] And by contrast, Shem and, to a lesser degree, Japheth are blessed. Noah praises the Lord, the God of Shem. Which, of course, gives us a clue as to which of these two sons will carry the promise into the future.

And Japheth is blessed with a lot of land. And so, through these blessings and curses, through the grace and mercy of these two sons, God's promise is secured for another generation.

You're meant to read this, brothers and sisters, and think. Round 11, and the serpent has still not won. He has still not been able to tear humanity out of God's firm grasp.

Okay, Noah finally dies, but God's promise is not. His sin has not and will not ever win, because God has said so.

He will cover his people's sin and shame, even if it costs him his one and only son. That is what we see in this blessing. And tonight, his promise to rescue sinful people still stands.

[25 : 04] It stands for us. And we can take heart in that great promise, can't we? Those who have been covered, our shame, our sin covered by Christ. And we can take hold of that promise tonight, if we have not already done so, for God to save us, to cover our shame, our sin, by his son.

Because good news, that promise of a rescuer, it drives world history. It has not finished. So this is our final point, that God's word drives world history.

I would love it, actually, if at this point a few of you glanced down at your Bibles and got up and stormed out of the room. Okay, my clear and obvious error. Because what is that you see there in verse 1 in chapter 10?

It's a Toledot, a count of the family history of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

And I'm just going to blast straight through it. And my defense is that this bit makes no sense on its own, without the blessing and the cursing that we have just heard. I just cannot work out how else to preach it.

[26 : 21] So I'm glad that you've stayed. And we're going to carry on. Because in chapter 10, we basically see the fulfillment in history of the words that we have just read in chapter 9.

God's word drives history. His promises and blessings and curses set the course for the history and destiny of our world. Up to this point in Genesis, humanity has been one.

But now different nations begin to form and to grow in different parts of the known world, stemming from Noah's three sons. And you'll notice just looking at the page there that the three brothers don't all get equal airtime.

Japheth's family gets just four verses. Ham's gets 14. And Shem's gets 10. So clearly Japheth is just not that important to the rest of the story.

Whereas the sons of Ham have a much bigger part to play. Verse 6, the sons of Ham. Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan.

[27 : 26] We recognize, don't we, at least two, if not three of those names. All nations that end up fighting against God and his people. Egypt, we read, fathered the infamous Philistines.

Verse 13. And Canaan, of course, fathered that big list of nations that live in the land beyond the river that God was giving his people. And if that wasn't bad enough, verse 8 tells us that Cush, the father of a guy called Nimrod, who founded, verse 10, Babylon, and then, verse 11, Nineveh, both cities that would grow into vast empires and would one day crush and nearly destroy God's kingdom.

So on the monopoly board of world history, it's as if Ham holds all the superpowers of the world that hate God and his people.

Cush, Egypt, Canaan, Philistia, Babylon, Assyria. If you were writing a list of the enemies of God's people in the Old Testament, you would need to go no further than Genesis chapter 10.

So what does that tell us? It is that God's word through Noah's curse is driving the course of world history.

[28 : 46] Those ancient nations were cursed. They followed the serpent into rebelling against God and one by one they were overthrown and defeated. Israelites had seen it with their very own eyes.

It took 10 plagues from God, but even the great and mighty superpower of Egypt could not ultimately stand up to him.

So he would do again to the Canaanite nations in the promised land and one day to Assyria and to Babylon. These verses are basically a 10-second summary of the whole Old Testament.

But before, of course, any of it has happened. Which tells us that God's word not only records world history, but that God's word drives world history.

He is king over the nations. The histories and the destinies of the nations of the world unfold according to his stated purpose and plan, even those that oppose him.

[29 : 53] It's worth just pausing a minute to say that that principle, actually from these verses, has been horribly misapplied in history. In the past, by people who wanted to defend the practice of slavery.

It's the slaves from Africa, so they claimed were descended from Ham and therefore were cursed and therefore could be rightfully enslaved. Now, brothers and sisters, that is so clearly wrong on so many levels.

That is not how one uses the Bible. Not least because that's not in any way what these verses are here to teach us, what the whole Bible is here to teach us. And that wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last, that people use the Bible to justify doing what is right in their own eyes.

And that is a grievous sin. And it's clear enough to us, I hope, that that doesn't cast a shadow on the Bible's authority and people choose to read it in ways that it was never intended to be read.

Because the point of these verses is to foreshadow the history of God's people in the Old Testament and therefore show that God is the author of that history.

[31 : 10] So application is this. Ham's family tree confirms that God is completely in control, even over the history and the destiny of his fiercest enemies.

those that reject his will, those that do not choose to live under his loving rule, that he is still the king of them.

What good news that is, brothers and sisters. God's word still drives history. It's driving in one direction, and it is the end of sin and the arrival of the serpent crusher.

Because finally, we get the sons of Shem. This is where this is all heading. And we're actually quite familiar with Shem's family whenever we hear about anti-Semitism.

That is opposition to those who trace their descent back to Shem, people we know as the Jews. And in a word, that is where Shem's family goes.

[32 : 13] And one branch of his family tree, in particular, that would come to flower many thousands of years later when God sent his son into the world.

Speaking of the Jews, people of this line, Paul writes in Romans 9, theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen. And that is where the history of the world and its nations was always heading. Because God had said that it would. Jesus' birth was the turning point in history because it was the fulfillment of all that God had said up to that point.

And history, ever since then, has been a record of God's fulfilling that same promise, bringing people from being his enemies to being his friends, bringing people from death to life, from curse, to blessing, from sin, to his son, the Lord Jesus.

And if that is what God's word tells us, then one day we know that he will come again to crush the serpent completely, to rid the world of sin entirely, of evil, take away death forever.

[33 : 31] her. The destiny of our world, friends, is signed, sealed, and delivered in God's promise of new and eternal life in Christ.

He has given us his word. And this strange chapter of Genesis, as difficult as it is to work our way through, is a confirmation of it.

So take heart this evening, friends, when you look at the world, when you read the news, when you see the nations of our world and their rulers, and know that it is all still going in God's direction.

It is all still playing out according to his promise and his plan and his word. As incomprehensible as it is to us, his word our hope assures.

He is the Lord of history. He is king over the nations. He is the savior of sinners. And therefore, he is worthy of our trust and praise and adoration. Let's pray to him now.

[34 : 38] Let's pray together. God, our Father, we thank you that you are indeed king.

Father, we praise you because our world is so often a mystery to us. Father, we look at what goes on in it and we are confused and saddened.

Father, we confess that we often don't know what to pray. But we thank you, Father, that that does not leave you at a loss for what to do. That you need consult no one or ask anyone for advice on how to run the cosmos.

We thank you that you do that sovereignly and powerfully and for the good of your people. Father, we thank you for your word. We pray, Lord, that you would help us and guard us from ever misusing it.

Lord, we thank you that we live in a world that is ruled so perfectly and so well by you. And we pray, Father, that when we doubt that, when we question that in our hearts that you by your spirit would lead us back to you.

[35 : 58] Lord, to turn to you in prayer, to rest our hope upon your word and to look ultimately for the coming of your son. We thank you for him. We thank you that you promised him, Lord, through long ages that he would come.

We thank you that he has come, that he has broken the power of sin in us, that he has taken away its penalty and we praise you that he will come again to take away its presence from us and our world.

How we long for that day. Come, Lord Jesus. We ask in your wonderful name. Amen.