

Adam's Family

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[0 : 00] Well, we have had two long genealogies this evening, and I wonder how far in your family you can go back before you hit a dead end. Most of us, I hope, would know our parents' names and our grandparents' names. Some of us might know our great-grandparents' names, but further back, I imagine that very few of us know our great-great-grandparents' names, and probably much further back than that, the names are lost in the mists of time. My own grandparents are working very hard at the minute, trying to put together a family history for our son Caleb when he's bigger. We were recently given a binder titled My Ancestors, which had the names of family members going back several generations. But even for me, there's a point kind of beyond living memory where the names, even though they're written down, don't really mean much anymore.

Now, if our own family histories begin to feel a little bit foreign to us going back just four or five generations, well, how much more foreign should we expect Adam's family tree to feel to us? Now, that's where we've come to in the book of Genesis. Chapter 5 and verse 1 begins with that word that you will have studiously learned if you've been following our series together, Toledot, Toledot, the family history of Adam. Okay, so this is Moses tearing off a new sheet to start a new family tree, a new section. He recaps briefly, as he normally does in verses 1 to 2, how we got here. And then he begins, at the top of a fresh page, the family history of Adam. Now, I've titled this sermon A Little Bit Tongue-in-Cheek, Adam's Family. For those of you too young or too holy to get the reference, let me read you a Wikipedia summary of the TV show, The Adam's Family. I promise this is relevant.

The Adam'ses are a satirical inversion of the ideal 20th century American family, an odd, wealthy, aristocratic clan who delight in the macabre and are seemingly unaware or unconcerned that other people find them bizarre or frightening. The Adam's family consists of Gomez and Malticia Adams, their children Wednesday and Pugsley, close family members Uncle Fester and Grandmama, their butler Lurch, and Wednesday's pet octopus, Aristotle. Later, the thing, a disembodied hand, was introduced along with Gomez's cousin It and my favorite bit, Malticia's pet lion, Kitty Cat.

[3 : 07] Now, last time in... Oh, hang on a minute. It would help if I knew why this was relevant, wouldn't it?

Ah, double-sided paper, saving the planet. It's awful, isn't it? There we go.

Okay. Let me remember why that was relevant. The point is, the reason I just read you that silly introduction to the Adam's family, okay, is that Genesis chapter 5 probably feels as weird and bizarre and as removed from reality as that.

Okay, partly, if we're honest, because we don't often turn to this chapter of Genesis frequently. It's a genealogy kind of sandwiched between two well-trodden bits of Genesis.

But it also feels weird because of what it says, right? These guys lived nearly, mostly, for a thousand years. And strange things happen.

[4 : 19] One guy, Enoch, it says, walked with God. And one day, he just wasn't there. Weird marriages take place between the sons of God and the daughters of men.

And mysterious warriors seem to walk the earth, the Nephilim. So perhaps we're wondering, you know, is this kind of still set on planet Earth? Are we meant to actually take this seriously?

Or rather, how can we take it seriously? Well, remember, this is all still set before the flood. And lots of ancient civilizations, not just Hebrew people, lots of ancient cultures, recognized and wrote about the flood as an end of an era or an age in world history.

We come to talk now about things being pre-COVID. Well, in a much deeper sense, the ancients would have talked about the world pre-flood. I sometimes hear the word antediluvian.

So it is a strange world. Just get that out there. It's strange what happens in this chapter. But Genesis doesn't try to hide that. It would have been as strange for Moses to be writing of ancestors who lived for 900 years, as it is for us to read about it now.

[5 : 38] But as the commentator Gordon Wenon points out, the ages attributed to these men of old convey both their remoteness from the writer's own age and yet their reality.

He's saying, yes, it's strange, but these ages are not random or symbolic. They simply claim to record how long these guys actually lived before God sent the flood and the world changed forever. So as foreign as this feels to us, Genesis is, if anything, again, breaking the mysterious darkness of the ancient world, cutting through the tangled spiritual knots of ancient history to give us a right view of reality as it has done before.

So what does Genesis want us to learn from Adam's family? Well, firstly, that even in a sin-scarred world, God's promise has not failed.

His promise hasn't failed. Now, I said before, verses 1 and 2 take us back to the beginning. But by now, we find ourselves in a more complicated world than we started with.

[6 : 51] If you just glance down with me at verse 1. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. He named them mankind when they were created.

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, and named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years, had other sons and daughters.

Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died. Now, last time we were in Genesis in chapter 4, we spent time thinking about how sin was passed from Adam to his sons and daughters, and it spread to human life.

But things are more complicated than that, aren't they? Because chapter 5 reminds us that God did create men and women in his own image, and verse 3, that image of God was also passed from Adam to his son.

He had a son in his own likeness, his own image. So that's really hopeful, but it's also pretty complicated, isn't it? It's much simpler, I think, to think of ourselves as either totally good or totally evil.

[8 : 09] That's the direction much of our world has gone, hasn't it? People being completely cancelled, written off for holding certain views their whole life, deemed unfit for human consumption, while others take the spotlight and project this vision of pure virtue or the good life.

But the reality is, we are all more complicated than that. We bear God's image, and we also carry... All capable of some of the best and the worst decisions humanly possible.

Most of the time, we live in the grey. And in a lot of ways, this genealogy is here to underline that complexity in our lives.

There are a couple of bright spots in the darkness that we'll get to, but mostly there's a kind of greyness to it, a rhythm that never really reaches a climax.

I wonder if you picked that up as we read, when so-and-so had lived X number of years, he became the father of his son, then he lived Y number of years, had other sons and daughters, then he was Z years old, and then he died.

[9 : 27] That is the rhythm, the pattern, repeated for nearly 10 out of 10 generations that we just read. It's incredibly sparing with detail, especially if you compare it with the ancient myths of its day, which go into the great sagas and histories of kings and warriors in this period.

Well, Genesis isn't interested in any of that. It's only interested in two things. How many years did these guys live before they died? And who comes next in the line?

It almost feels like it's just here to kind of catch us up a little bit with the story to get us to Noah, but it's doing more than that. Because these two things, their deaths and their offspring, are very significant for the story as it goes on.

I get made fun of, actually, at home, when Susie and I read the Bible in the mornings, because every single morning, every chapter, I say, this chapter is a very significant chapter of the Bible. And it's true. Okay, they all are. God doesn't put unimportant stuff in his book. So two important things we learn from this genealogy.

[10 : 43] Number one, what happened to nearly every single one of these guys at the end of their lives? This is the only genealogy that actually tells us that from here on the Bible will assume that we know this.

But just skim, okay, the last words of each paragraph in chapter 5. What does it say? And then he died. Okay, this is the heartbeat running through this family history. He died. He died. He died. He died. Now, we all know, don't we, that that is what happens at the end of somebody's life. So why does Genesis remind us every time? Well, because this is still me. Okay, think about it. Up to now, only one person has died in the story, and he was murdered. No one yet in the story on earth has died naturally of old age. But now, well, that fading and decay is starting as God said it would when we sinned. [11:55] So, okay, we might notice they lived up to 900 years, but like us at a certain point, their lives naturally came to an end. And that is a new thing. And while that, in a way, is normal for us, isn't it, it's also a strange thing. Some of you scientists in the room might be able to tell me more about the law of entropy. It's basically the idea, if I've got this right, that everything in the universe, stars and elements and living things all naturally have this tendency to wind down and wear out and unravel into disorder and chaos. We know in simple terms, don't we, that everything kind of suffers from normal wear and tear, including our bodies. But why is that? You know, why at a certain point do our bodies stop working? Do our organs shut down? Do our brains begin to deteriorate? Well, Genesis is reminding us that death and decay have come newly into God's order as a result of his curse on our sin. For us, that is a given. For them, it was a novelty. And I think we've kind of still kept that sense somehow in our humanity. [13:17] You know, we never ever get used to people getting sick and dying, do we? Our world tells us that death is just another part of life. But we know in our hearts that that is not true. Genesis is reminding us of that, and it's telling us not to forget why it's not true. Death is an intruder in human life, and yet it will be the drumbeat, the rhythm of our lives on earth until Christ comes to take it away. It's where it tells us the last enemy to be defeated will be death. Why? Because Christ first has to root out the cause of death, which is our sin. And yet, in such a deeply sin-scarred world, we find there is incredible hope. This is important thing number two. Because what is the thing that all these guys did before they died? They had lots of sons and daughters. And why is that significant for us? Well, because in each generation, how many of those sons and daughters is Genesis interested in? [14:32] It's only one, isn't it? One son of each generation who comes next in line. So if we were drawing, if Moses had drawn Adam's family tree, it would look a bit like this. I think I've got a slide. Fantastic. One line running straight down the middle, and other sons and daughters who are not named. Now, that's not a typical family tree, is it? What we'd expect is it to kind of branch out as it goes down, get bigger and wider as families branch out and multiply. But this family tree is just tracing one line. So what is important about that one line? Well, it's the line that carries God's promise to rescue. We saw last time in chapter 4, God gave Adam and Eve three sons. One son killed the other son. So for a time, they were left with no sons. But then a third son came along, Seth. Remember, Eve says about Seth, The Lord has given me a son in place of Abel, who Cain killed. [15:43] And that's super significant. We saw because God had promised to Eve that from her would come an offspring, a son who would crush the head of the serpent. Do away with the one who had brought sin into their lives. So one of Eve's sons would undo the curse to end their sin. And so for Adam and Eve, all their hope rested on this son, Seth, carrying that promise into the future. So imagine their great relief when he Cain. And just to pause on that for a minute, something that I was struck by as I thought about this in the week, that I'd not noticed before, is how long Adam lived before Seth came along. Adam was 130 years old. Now, we're not told how long that was after the whole thing with Cain and Abel. But 130 years is a long time, isn't it?

Adam could have been waiting a couple of years. He could have been waiting 100 years. But with the Lord, a thousand years is like a day. And a day is like a thousand years.

[17 : 02] And so however long Adam waited, and however many sleepless nights he had, regretting what he had done, or wondering, hoping beyond hope, whether he would walk with God again, wondering whether God would in fact deliver on his great promise to send a son to put things right, however long he waited, God did deliver.

And so friends, here's a reminder that even if it feels to us like God is not doing what he said he would do, he is always faithful to keep his promises, even if we have to wait a lifetime to see him do it.

And so just picking up the main thread of this passage again, Genesis is tracing this family line from Adam through Seth, the son of promise, and onwards.

So why are these sons? Well, because they are the heirs of that promise. This family, that line, is God's golden thread, running through the darkness of the world, with the promise that he would send a son to crush the serpent's head.

And so this genealogy is perhaps dull to us as it seems. It's telling a story of God's faithfulness to fall on humanity in keeping his promise to redeem them from sin and death.

[18 : 35] And we get a couple of teasers of what that promise fulfilled would look like. If you just have a look there at verses 21 to 24. And Enoch, when Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah.

After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

Enoch walked faithfully with God. Then he was no more because God took him away. Enoch died. Nearly everyone in this chapter, as we have noticed, dies.

But notice, we're not told that Enoch dies. That steady heartbeat of the chapter skips a beat. And now, if you had to guess, I wonder if we've spent enough time in Genesis.

If you had to guess with your Hebrew hat on, okay, which generation of humanity Enoch is, which generation would you guess?

[19 : 45] He is generation number seven. Seventh, the number of perfection. Seventh, remember, in Cain's family line was Lamech, at the low point in that branch of the family tree.

Sin hit rock bottom with him. But seventh, in Seth's family line, is Enoch. And what is perfected, if you like, with Enoch?

Well, it's the very opposite, isn't it? Not sin, but faith. Worship, obedience. He walked faithfully with God. Where have we heard that somebody walked with God before in this book?

Did God not walk in the cool of the day in the garden with Adam and Eve before they ever sinned? Genesis is whispering to us, this is where this line of promise is headed.

This is where it ends. This is the high point. Enoch tasted that eternal life again. He lived in God's presence, and he didn't die.

[20 : 56] Just told God took him away. I don't know what that involves. But he didn't die, as the others did. And so when God's promise is fulfilled, when the serpent crusher comes, that is what he will bring.

What he has brought is new life with God, freedom from the curse of death. And then a few generations later, another wee teaser, if you like, in verse 29.

When Lamech, that's a different Lamech from the bad one, had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.

Could this be the one? Asks the new dad. Will my son bring comfort from the curse? I just love this. He calls his son rest. Noah is the Hebrew word for rest. So what is this guy hoping and longing for his son to bring?

[22 : 13] Well, if we remember the great goal of creation, the eternal rest that God intended for his creatures to enjoy with him on the never-ending seventh day when he rested.

Will Noah bring that rest? Stay tuned for the family history of Noah. So I hope we can see, just from that brief survey, that chapter five is not filler in our Bibles.

This genealogy is here to confirm for us that in a sin-scarred world where death now reigns, God's promised rescue has not failed.

That he is still faithful to his word, however bleak and devastating sin and death may feel in our lives. And these things are devastating, aren't they?

That's why we need to hold on to God's promise that they are not the final word. Chapter six takes us further into those depths. And much more briefly than secondly, we see that in a God-governed world, human sin still grows.

[23 : 28] Now, chapter six continues Adam's family history. Notice there's no toll-a-dote, there's no break. So now as if we're kind of zooming back out from that one straight line to see what the rest of the family has been getting up to all this time.

And we see that it is not good at all. Just read with me again, please, from verse one in chapter six, when human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of human were beautiful and they married any of them they chose.

Then the Lord said, my spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal. Their days will be 120 years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterwards, when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them.

They were the heroes of old, the men of renown. Now, as I said, this is mysterious and strange and it's really on the edge of what God has given us to know about reality.

Because the most obvious reading of this and the view of most commentators is that the sons of God here are spiritual beings. Angels or demons.

[24 : 55] Now, it's not wise for us to build our theology around something that's so obscure as this. The pre-flood world was a weird place. This isn't how things normally operate.

But Genesis is clearly saying that in that time, marriages took place between these spirits and human girls and, verse four, that they produced children. So many questions and so few answers. We do know that marriages like this took place in the ancient world in the context of idol worship and fertility cults. So we're probably talking about really dark and occult stuff here.

So it's unwise for us to spend too much time trying to delve into it. In general, a good rule of thumb is that if God hasn't given us much to work with, okay, that's not an invitation to go home and spend hours trying to look it up on the internet.

Please don't go and do that. It's a waste of time. We do have a little toehold, though, to help us because these children are the Nephilim where, says Genesis, the heroes of old.

[26 : 10] A picture, if you like, figures from ancient stories like Achilles or Hercules or Prometheus or Perseus. That's the sort of thing that was going on before the flood.

But again, instead of spending pages and pages relating your epic poems and sagas about the heroic deeds of these Nephilim, well, Genesis only tells us what God thought about it all.

God's verdict on all of this is this cannot go on. What does God say when the spirits start marrying human daughters, verse 3?

My spirit will not contend with humans forever for they are mortal. Their days will be 120 years. So after just 10 generations of sinful humanity, God says, enough is enough.

Death has to happen sooner. 900 years is just too long for people to live with their sin in a shattered cosmos. for their own good.

[27 : 17] They need to return to the dust. What an indictment that is, brothers and sisters, on humanity. That if we live too long, we become a danger to ourselves and others.

Left too long, we start marrying demons. We are capable of the very, very worst, friends. If God does not, in his strange mercy, restrain our sin by bringing our lives to an end.

I found it interesting this week that the person who until recently was the oldest living person in the world, Kane Tanaka, died in April this year, aged 119 years and 107 days old.

And in modern history, she was second only to Jean Calmont, who died in 1997, aged 122 years and 164 days old.

Now, most of us won't make it nearly that long. But these long-lived people prove that 120 years is about right.

[28 : 33] That God has set a limit to how long we will live. And God says that is for our own good. In theory, could we make human life stretch longer than that?

Probably. But God warns us we might not be better for it. And yet, back then, God's verdict was still more devastating even than that.

You know, we thought we'd hit rock bottom with Lamech, but a few generations on, and the bottom has dropped out of the depths of our depravity. Verse 5 says, the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

Our sin had become unrelenting, total, every, only, only, all. Now, our minds boggle, don't they, at the depths of sin that we see in our world.

Lots of us have wondered very recently, for example, how could somebody go into a school and kill 19 children? What drove a person to do that?

[29 : 54] God? Friends, Genesis would remind us that there is no evil that the human heart cannot conceive. There is no depravity or atrocity that is really beyond us.

And the fact that we in our world at large is not so far gone as the pre-flood world is a measure in God's mercy in restraining us from the worst that we are capable of.

Now, next week, we're going to see God's full-blown response to this extent of human sin. But for now, Genesis is simply asking us to come face-to-face with how devastating sin is.

The sight of our sin made the Lord regret, verse 6, that he had made human beings on the earth. Regret, verse 7, that he had made life on the earth.

I think these verses in the Bible are possibly the saddest. The God who we met in Genesis 1 can say only five chapters later that he regrets ever having done it.

[31 : 21] You know, I wonder if we realize how devastating our sin is to God, that we can say truly that it breaks his heart.

Now, it's true that God does not regret in the same way that we do. he never gets things wrong, and he knows the end from the beginning. So Genesis isn't saying that God wished he could go back and do it differently.

He doesn't regret in that way. Rather, it's simply confronting us in a way that we can understand as human beings. It's confronting us with God's unspeakable sadness and grief over what his world had become and over what his image bearers had done to his image.

So these words, I think, help us to lament before God when we see how terrible sin is in our world. They invite us, don't they, to come and pour our hearts out to a God who cares more deeply about the evil in our world than we do.

He does. And these words also help us to grieve over our own sin. They help us see our sin through God's eyes and to deeply regret that we sin and to turn to him who grieves over our sins still more deeply and who is still more committed than we are to seeing it gone.

[33 : 02] It's often said in history when times of revival had come. It's times of unusual spiritual renewal and growth in the church that God's people have wept over their sins.

Now that's not normal, but I do wonder, brothers and sisters, whether we might have gone too far the other way and whether we would ever do that, whether perhaps we have forgotten how to do that.

perhaps we have lost the sense of what our sin means to God and what it has cost him to put it right. So sin still grows in God's world, in our hearts, and it grieves him.

But because he is faithful as we close, we see that in our judgment-bound world, God still redeems.

There's a one-line glimmer of hope at the end of this section, because from the depths of God's grief over a world of sin, we find that there is one in whom he still delighted, verse 8.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Now it's only a teaser, but it leaves us with the hope that God's rightful anger against sin and his punishment of it that he promised won't be the end.

[34 : 24] that this man whose name is rest, who carries God's promise of a world free of sin, stands out blameless in his generation.

And so Noah's dad in a sense was right that he will bring a degree of relief from the curse, but for the full redemption and for the end of sin and the curse, they would have to wait longer because it would not be Noah who would crush the serpent's head.

This is why we read that long list of names earlier in our service because in fact when the serpent crusher came, the redeemer promised by God, it was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of Noah, of Enoch, of Seth, of Adam, of God, the yes to all of God's promises.

This family had waited a long, long time, but when the time was right, God sent his son to be born into this line of promise so that in a world under the curse and bound for judgment, we would have hope that God will still rescue and redeem.

He has not given up our world to sin and death and hell forever because there is one who has found favor in his eyes, one who has clean hands and a pure heart.

[35 : 56] And when we come to God in and through him, his perfect life, his saving death, his glorious resurrection, we can be spared his wrath against our sin and be forgiven and saved.

God does promise to judge the world justly for its sin, sin. But we rejoice as we close that for those who are in Christ Jesus, the promised son, there is now no condemnation because he secured righteousness for us through his perfect life.

He paid for our sins and his death on the cross. He rose again to put us right with our creator and our God. He frees us from death, from sin.

He gives us this promised eternal rest with God that our hearts cry out for. And he is the one who this family tree promises.

And he is the one, brothers and sisters, who we worship and trust and cling to this evening. Let's praise him together as we pray.

[37 : 09] Let's pray together. God, our Father, we praise you that you are faithful.

We thank you that in the fullness of time you sent forth your son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might be adopted into your family.

Father, we thank you for Jesus, that he is indeed our great hope. And how we pray, Father, that as we grieve over our sin and we lament over the sin that we see in our world, that you give us Jesus to cling to.

We thank you for his sinless life, for his death on the cross, for his rising again, for his everlasting life, and for the promise that he will come again.

God, we long for that day, when the one in whom you delight, who found favour in your eyes, will come and take away sin forever.

[38 : 21] We thank you that as we heard in our morning service, that the devil is done away with. We thank you, our Father, that the penalty for our sin has been taken, but still we pray, come Lord Jesus, and take away sin and death forever.

Help us, we pray, to trust you, even when it doesn't feel like it will ever end. We thank you, our Father, for the Lord Jesus, in his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.