

“Favor with the Lord,” Genesis 6:1-9 (Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost, November 5, 2017)

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” ⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

⁹These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.

PRAY

We are continuing our study in the book of Genesis, and today we are in Genesis 6. The first four verses are some of the toughest verses to interpret in all the Bible containing apparently one of the most fantastic stories of the Bible. One commentary I read last week said that almost every word of these verses is disputed by various scholars. Here we read about the sons of God taking the daughters of men. We read about the Nephilim.

When I come to passages like this my gut preference is to skip them and go on to something less contested. But then I had people coming up to me asking, “Are you going to preach on the Nephilim?” The only thing I like less than preaching difficult passages is being known as a preacher who skips over difficult passages, so I felt like I had to cover it.

But as I studied this text, I remembered something I learned the first time I preached through Genesis almost a decade ago: nobody really knows for certain who the Nephilim are. And you might think that’s a problem, but not for me because if no one agrees, then as a preacher you can go any way you want with the text and no one can tell you you’re wrong!

Seriously, I’m not going to go any way I want. There have historically been two main ways to understand who the sons of God are. The first says that the sons of God are humans: either kings of some kind, or men from the line of Seth. Seth was the third son of Adam and Eve and his descendants formed the righteous line, from whom the patriarchs, King David, and Jesus came. The daughters of men would then have been the descendants of Cain, or the ungodly line.

The advantage to this interpretation is it's easy to understand – the sons of the good guys and the daughters of the bad guys shouldn't have gotten together. Whatever is going on in Genesis 6, God doesn't like it – that's clear from verses 5-7. See? Neat, clean, clear, and simple. Righteous shouldn't mingle with the unrighteous. A big advantage to this understanding of the passage.

The disadvantage with that interpretation of the text is the text itself. It's really hard to make “sons of God” and “daughters of men” mean that. The normal meaning of “sons of God” in the Bible is “angels,” and nothing thus far in Genesis would prepare us to understand “daughters of men” as referring only to descendants of Cain.

And then you still have to deal with the Nephilim. Who are they? *What are they?* The word “Nephilim” is a transliteration straight out of the Hebrew Bible. That word meant something in Hebrew, we don't know exactly what it meant, so the people who edited the ESV just assigned English letters to the Hebrew characters and put in the Bible. The old King James Bible, however, famously translated the word as “giants.” Why? Numbers 13:31-34 helps us here. We read there Joshua sent twelve men to scout out the Promised Land as the people of Israel were leaving Egypt. Ten of the spies sent back this report: “‘We are not able to go up against the people [who live in the Promised Land], for they are stronger than we are.’” So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.’”

More than likely, the “sons of God” are supernatural beings, probably better understood to be demonic in nature, and they married and had children by the daughters of men. Together they produced a race of people literally larger than life: giants. I will be the first to admit that this sounds fantastic, nearly unbelievable to modern ears. But I submit it's no more improbable than Satan speaking through the mouth of a serpent, which we've already studied in this series. Why would demons want to unite with men? Well, we see elsewhere in the Bible, in the New Testament, where demons craved physical bodies. They wanted to possess them. Maybe that's a parallel to what was going on in Genesis 6.

But why would the women, the daughters of men, wish to be united to these demons? There's no evidence at all for an argument that these women were kidnapped or forced into these relationships. Rather, everything in the text suggests these women entered willingly into these marriages, and, in that culture, it must have meant that their fathers would have had to approve or even push these arrangements. That helps explain why Moses would use the unusual phrase “daughters of men.”

Why? Why would daddy's pawn their daughters off on demons? Turn back to Genesis 3:4-5. Remember that in the Garden of Eden there were two trees: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life, from which one could take and eat the fruit and live forever. Here's verses 4-5: “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will

not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will **be like God**, knowing good and evil.” Man was cast out of the Garden of Eden, he was forbidden to take from the tree of eternal life, yet he still wants to be like God. And friends *the sin of the Garden still rests in the hearts of men*. When you understand the text this way, you can almost see the wheels turning in the minds of those fathers: “I may not be able to get back to the tree of life in the Garden, but if I can get my daughters to mate with supernatural beings, I may be like God yet. I may have power and glory on my own yet.”

In Genesis 6 we see mankind devolve to its worst. Fathers selling off their daughters to demons. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5. That’s bad. There were no exceptions to the wickedness!

Which leads to Genesis 6:6-7: “And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land [the NIV says, “I will wipe man ... from the face of the earth”], man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Usually when I give a sermon I use three points or two points but I won’t this morning. Instead, I’ll only talk about judgment, because **Genesis 6 is about God’s determination to judge the world for its sins**. Dozens of times in the Bible we read how God will sit in judgment over the world. In Hebrews 10:26-27 we read this: “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

Nothing makes people in our society stumble over the idea of being a Christian like hearing that our God is one who judges. They say, “I don’t believe in a God who judges. I believe in a God of love and peace. The God I believe in would never send a ‘fury of fire’ in judgment.” The other day I heard someone say that he could not reconcile the terms “loving father” with “everlasting punishment.”

If you think that, it’s understandable. It makes perfect sense to me that it’s hard for someone to reconcile the idea of a loving God with a judging God. In fact I have to constantly work to do so myself. I’ll explain why I think that is in a minute. But I am absolutely convinced of this: no matter how much we might struggle with it, deep down, when we really think about it, *we desperately want there to be a God who judges*.

Why do I say that? *Because we all know that anyone in a position of authority and power who refuses to judge wrongdoing is not a loving person*. I have four children who are wonderful. But occasionally two of them get into a disagreement, just like any siblings would. Most of the time, my wife and I let them work out their disagreements on their own and not get involved. We don’t want to encourage tattle-telling, we know that

ninety-five percent of the time they'll get over it in five minutes and if we jump in we'll just make it worse.

But on occasion one of my children really does wrong another one. It's obvious. Say that happens, the child comes to us in pain, and then we say, "Sweetheart, we are loving parents. We are not judgmental parents. We believe in love and peace, so we are not going to do anything about what happened to you." Say that happens. Would that wronged child feel loved? Of course not. That child would feel utterly abandoned by the parents.

If someone goes to the owner of the company at work and says, "I have for three years been sexually harassed by my supervisor," and the owner replies, "I don't believe in judging others. I am a boss of love and peace," no one would say that person was being a good employer.

Friends, Genesis 6 is just one place among dozens in the Bible where it says God refuses to make that mistake. There will come a day when God's perfect, holy, righteous judgment will come down on all wrongdoing and no one, *no one*, will get away with anything. God will punish all evil. "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops." Luke 12:2-3.

In fact, life on earth would be unbearable without a judging God. In this life you will face innumerable injustices. They may all be small ones, like being mistreated by a sibling. They may be far worse, and there will be times when everything in you cries out, "I cannot let this person get away with it! I must pay them back!"

Now, obviously, if you are mistreated, or if you know someone is being mistreated, you need to do something. If you see something, say something. But what we are not called to do is take revenge. What we are not called to do is take it upon ourselves to judge the people who have done us wrong.

Do you know what we are called to do instead? "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." Matthew 5:43-44.

That may sound impossible at first. But if you really believe with every fiber of your being there is a God in heaven who will perfectly judge all wrongdoing, and you can't helpfully add to his fiery judgment one bit with anything you could possibly do by way of revenge, then you can at least try. You can aspire to love your enemies, because you firmly believe God is going to punish the evil.

If you really believe in a God of judgment, you'll take a lot of comfort in Romans 12:19-21: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' "To the contrary, 'if your enemy is

hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ ”Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian who saw some of the atrocities that took place in his country and in Bosnia back in the nineties, and he wrote this: “If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship ... The only means of prohibiting all recourse to [vengeance] by ourselves is to insist that [vengeance] is legitimate only when it comes from God ... my thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many ... [But] it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human non-violence [results from the belief in] God’s refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die ... [with] other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.”

Knowing that God will judge evil and hold those who do it accountable makes life on earth bearable, and forgiveness of and love for enemies possible. So when you really think about, we all want a God like that. If that’s the case, then, why do we reflexively hate the idea of a judgmental God? *I think it’s because we’ve experienced judgmental people, and we can’t stand them, so we think God must be the same way.*

We hate being judged by other people, and we should. Because when you’re being judged, it means some other person is saying, “I’m better than you.” Maybe they didn’t say it out loud, but we’ve felt it. They might have thought it because they had more money than we did, or had a better education, or come from a more prominent family, or were better looking or more popular. But we’ve all felt it, and we’ve hated it.

And, of course, one of the things people have used in a judgmental way over the centuries is religion, including the Christian religion. We’ve known the people who claimed to follow God but despised certain groups of people – certainly people of other religious faiths, but also because of their race or their politics or sexuality. We’ve encountered people faithful in the church who could be so polite to your face and then shred you to pieces behind your back, who looked at all the “sinners” out there in the world and said to themselves if not out loud, “Humph – I’m better than *them*.” So it’s understandable that “judgment” has become a dirty word. It’s understandable that John 3:16 is no longer the most famous Bible verse in the U.S. It’s Matthew 7:1, where Jesus says, “Judge not, lest ye be judged.”

Now if God’s judgment was like that, we’d be right to recoil at the idea of a God who judges. But it’s not. Friends, God doesn’t like that kind of judging either. This is what got Jesus so angry at the Pharisees about. The Pharisees weren’t outwardly immoral people. They did a lot of good deeds, but their big problem was that they thought their works and knowledge of the law made them better than everyone else, and Jesus hated it. In Matthew 9 we read that Jesus had a meal with some of the disreputable people of his day, the outcasts. “And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and *sinners*?’ [Do you hear the judgment?] ”But

when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ‘Go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’” Matthew 9:11-13.

The Pharisees thought they were better than everyone else, so Jesus rebuked them. But, here’s what I want you to know: we’ve all done it. We are no different than the Pharisees. We sinfully judge others. If you object and say, “I would never look down on anyone else. In fact, I hate it when people do that. I can’t stand judgmental people,” do you realize what you’re saying? ***You’re admitting that you judge people who judge people.*** Which means you’re one of those judgmental people! We can’t get away from it, no matter what we do.

And you know what’s at the foundation of all the evil judging we do? Deep down, we want to be like God. When we go around passing judgment on people *that means we think we are fundamentally better than the other humans around us.* Where else can that attitude come from except a latent belief inside us that we are in fact gods? It’s the same sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden – “you shall be as gods” the serpent said. It’s the same sin as those fathers passing their daughters off in marriage to demons – my offspring will be as gods. When we judge others, *we sit in God’s chair* – we are acting like God!

It is wrong for us to judge other people, it’s sinful, because we don’t have all the facts. We don’t know what they’ve been through, what’s happened to them over the years to make them the way they are. So we aren’t qualified to judge what they deserve. But God is. He can see all. He alone can lay bare the thoughts of everyone’s hearts and know what people have really done and who they really are.

You may say, “J.D., did God have to wipe mankind off the face of the earth with a flood to judge them? That’s not how I would have done it.” Maybe not, but you’re not qualified to deal with a problem on an order of that magnitude – the wickedness of all humanity. God is, and to us, God says, “When you judge, you’re in my chair, *and you need to get out.*”

We all, every one of us, are judgmental sinners. So what can we do about it? This is where the account of Noah gets particularly instructive. The big question when we read Genesis 6 is not “who are the Nephilim?” but “why was Noah spared?” We read in verse 9 that he was a righteous and blameless man. Does that mean that Noah’s goodness saved him? Was Noah the only man on the planet who didn’t judge others so God let him live?

No – because before we read verse 9 there is verse 8: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” In other words, **God showed Noah grace.** That’s why Noah was spared. Not because of anything Noah did, but because God had mercy on Noah, *and Noah trusted him.* Verse 5 says, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” It doesn’t say, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great – except for Noah.

Noah had no sin. He was perfect. He never judged anyone.” It doesn’t say that, does it? Noah was a sinner. But Noah, when confronted with the truth that the world was wicked and that as a part of the world he was wicked too, *listened when God told him how he to be saved*. Noah responded in faith to the call of God to build an ark, and it was through Noah’s faith in God that he was saved from the wrath and judgment to come.

“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Hebrews 11:7.

Noah listened and believed, so he was saved. God gave Noah a way out from his judgment and friends *God is giving you a way out, too*. Are you listening? “...every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” That didn’t just apply in Noah’s day – it applies to us now, too! Thousands of years after Noah, the apostle Paul writes: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Romans 3:10-12. We’ve all sinned, so we all should expect to be judged by God.

Are you listening? Do you believe that it applies to you? Do you understand that the sickness that has plagued the world is in you too? Do you understand that you are not the exception, just as Noah was not the exception? If that’s you, then when we serve the Lord’s Supper in a few moments, *take the bread and take the cup*. Do you know who the bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper is for? Sinners. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, he did not come for those who are well. He’s got nothing to say to them. He came for the sick, he came for those who know they are sinners.

And all you need to do is admit you are sick with sin, that you can’t fix it, you hate it and when you take the bread and the cup you are saying, “Only Jesus can make me well. He came for the sick, and that includes me.”

Jesus Christ came to earth and unlike us, every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only *love* continually. He never sinfully judged anyone. And because Jesus was like that, he did not stand condemned before God. He had no judgment to face. So when he died on the cross he was able to take our place. He died as our substitute for our sins.

Genesis 6:9 says Noah was blameless. Again, that doesn’t mean that he was the exception or that he was personally without sin. It means, instead, **that in God’s sight Noah was blameless**. Blameless in the Bible does not mean a perfect moral record. It means admitting your sin, admitting you deserve judgment, *but trusting that God judged Jesus in your place*. You’re blameless because Jesus took the blame. Will you see yourself for what you really are – a sinner – and will you listen to the gospel that tells you how you can in Jesus be saved?

The hardest part of becoming a Christian is admitting how bad off you really are. But once you really see that about yourself then it’s easy. If you’ve heard and believed, then

come to the Lord's table now – take the bread and cup and remember the complete satisfaction of sins that Jesus Christ made so that we could be reconciled to God. PRAY

To help us understand what we're doing in the Lord's Supper, I want us to read a question and answer from the Heidelberg Catechism, which is 16th century Christian document – “How does the Lord's Supper remind you and assure you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all his gifts?”

“In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup. With this command he gave this promise: first, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross.

“Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.”

If you're here today and you are unable to take the Lord's Supper because you have not yet decided to follow Jesus, then we have some prayers on the second inside page of the bulletin you might read and decide to make your own. But for all who have trusted in Jesus Christ, come, and welcome, to the Lord's Supper. Take the bread and take the cup in full assurance that in Jesus Christ you are reconciled to God.

Please place your cups in trash cans in the lobby when finished (not in buckets). Ushers, if you'd come down, they will pass out bread and the cups, then we'll take the Lord's Supper together.