

# Genesis 9:18–29

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our Heavenly Father, now bless the words of my mouth, the meditation of my heart, that it would be acceptable in your sight and profitable for our church family.

In Christ's name, amen. Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address was delivered out of doors. Not in some field like we find ourselves today, but from the dais of our nation's partially finished Capitol building.

And his first inaugural was an important speech. He had inherited a divided country. Seven states had already seceded from the Union.

And so his closing words were carefully crafted and meant to rise in the open air in ways that would be heard from the Capitol building all the way through the southern states.

[ 1 : 01 ] They were meant to soar with rhetoric strong enough to stave off civil war. Here is how he closed, and I quote, We are not enemies, but friends.

We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it, must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature.

Those are some of the most famous words in our country's history. Lincoln's appeal rested with the better angels of our nature.

A fresh start could be had, must be had. And it would come as we looked within and summoned forth the more well-mannered aspects of our nature.

Power to solve our problems was available to us. Like ravens or doves that were already present within the ark.

[ 2 : 27 ] We only need released the winged creatures of human graciousness that are already resident within. It didn't work.

This appeal to the better nature given the angels within, at least not to the degree that Abraham Lincoln had hoped for, nor to the degree that our nation then needed as it needs it again today. It was only a month and two days after that speech that the battle at Fort Sumter broke out in civil war between the North and the South had begun.

And that truth is the same one that our text puts before us today.

In fact, it is America's post-Trump presidency mirroring the Union's antebellum divicity, which mirrors what you find in Genesis when Moses records truth for all time over our primeval history.

[ 3 : 52 ] Yes, I concede some change can and must come from an appeal to the better angels of our nature.

Yes, I not only concede, but we ought to work for alteration given the social ills that are prevailing. Yes, I concede and there ought to be everyone engaged in seeking changes along the lines that are required by political legislation, economic renewal, equitable endeavors.

Yet, yet, in all of this, mankind does not possess within himself or herself the moral capacity to transform ourselves.

And that, from this text, is the lesson before us. Hear me on this beautiful day on Chicago's South Side. May my words roll over this field to the far corners of our city.

[ 5 : 03 ] For many yet do believe, as Machen once put it, the cardinal doctrine of modern thought that the world's evil may be overcome with the world's good, that no help is thought to be needed from outside the world, end quote.

But our text shows you this, that when Noah stepped off the ark, sin marched off with him. Could the emphasis be any more clear?

God's deluge, universal deluge, did not completely drown out the lesser angels of our nature. The effects of the fall remain with us after the flood.

Our nature is divine and dust. It is sanctified, given breath by the Spirit, and it is depraved, given the own choices of our sinful action.

Whatever relief Noah gave the world, whatever righteousness Noah himself possessed, it did not reset the world.

[ 6 : 16 ] With this text, the words that resounded in the Garden of Eden are rising still over the open air of Noah's orchard, now in Armenia.

That's where his ark came to rest. Did you hear the words? Sin. Did you feel the effect in the text? Shame. Was the repetition put forward?

Nakedness. Blame. Death. Still. Reigns. Those words soar with presidential-like rhetoric, meant to convince us that for you and me, it is the same.

Verses 20 and 21, and I hope you have it in front of you, will show you Noah's social frailties.

His social frailties indicate a need of help from the outside. In 22 and 23, one of his own son's sexual indiscretions.

[ 7 : 23 ] No, no, greater than that, his sexual deprivations, his sexual perversities will reveal it. And in 24 to 27, the Noah's blessings and curses, which codify racial hostilities into law code in his day, they prove it.

Three ways to say one thing. We need help from outside ourselves after the flood, even though a righteous and blameless man started the whole thing all over again.

Look at 20 and 21. Noah's social fragility. Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.

He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Here we learn that the better angels of Noah's nature yet need outside assistance.

My sister knows a little bit about the making of wine from a vineyard. She planted her own vineyard. She tends it still. I called her yesterday to say, what must it have been like, given your own experience?

[ 8 : 49 ] She said, well, first of all, Noah wasn't carrying seed with him on the ark, as though he would have planted these. There's obviously a sign in the scriptures that when the flood receded, God himself was kind enough to have vines already replenishing the earth.

But she said, for me, I had to plant seeds. She said, the process is this. After the planting of seeds, there is a couple of years where you spend simply training the vine.

Where the grapes which are emerging are immediately plucked off and discarded so that the two arms of the vine will find ways to mature.

All the energy for a couple of years goes into the training of the vine. And then, and only then, by the third year of such activity, would you begin the severe pruning of the branches, because it was growing profusely.

And it was limiting where all the energy and food source needed to go to secure the best grapes.

And so there is a year of pruning, a tangled mess to force life to the eventual fruit.

[ 10 : 23 ] She wasn't quite sure how Noah would keep the birds off at the end of year three or four, when the elements of the grape themselves, the ratio of water to alcohol and sugar began to act in and of itself.

For she had to cover everything with a net. And only after the end of three or four years, would you take the harvest, place it into a wine press, and in Noah's day, it would have been trodden on by foot.

And the fruit emerging into bowls, which would then go through the process of fermentation. Others here know more about it than me.

Until it would age properly, he wouldn't have kept it year by year, she said. He would have drunk freely from all that he had made after some three to five years of labor.

Such is the making of the vine. Such is the truth behind verse 20.

[ 11 : 35 ] Noah began to be a man of the soil and planted a vineyard. And then came the day of celebration. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.

I'm calling this Noah's social frailty. The two downside effects are listed in the text.

The drinking became drunkenness, and the drunkenness resulted in being uncovered in nakedness. The drinking became drunkenness.

It was the drunkenness which was the sin. For now Noah, God's representative on the earth, was no longer in control of himself.

The one who was to rule was ruled. The fragility of human nature is what's present here more than the denouncement of his sin.

[ 12 : 45 ] Let me talk for a moment, may I, of your last year. Let me talk about what's happening in our country on the planting of the vineyard, on the isolating effects of COVID.

The significant spike in alcohol sales is now just a matter of academic study. Only midway through, nationally, the sales were increasing by up to 54%.

When you begin to stretch it out in regard to the social fabric and fraying that we've all been feeling, up over 262% from the year before.

More nationally in the last year, more women than ever are susceptible to increased drinking, more frequent drinking.

Indeed, as a country, we've all seen this behind our own doors. And we will now begin to deal with the social fragility and the ills of mental health, the causes of anxiety, the need based in addiction, the abuse that will come forth to others as a consequence.

[ 13 : 58 ] When drinking becomes drunkenness, there is a signpost on our city that should read, welcome to an age of social fragility.

We simply can't summon some angelic supply from within to help one another. We simply can't look at our brother or sister or neighbor or mother and call upon them to harness the resources within.

We can't expect that they'll be able to loosen or release a dove from their inner being that will have the power to set down all the ravens of our lesser nature.

This is a matter of historical record. 1953 and the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12-step program already begin to acknowledge the first thing.

There must be some higher power and over time, a lack of concern even in regard to what you want to call that higher power but an indication within our social fabric that we do not possess within ourselves the ability to overcome the frailties that are present within ourselves.

[ 15 : 33 ] This drinking became drunkenness and we must walk with one another in many facets that are now going to emerge. I thank God for this church.

I thank God for Dan Wigman. I thank God for his testimony. I thank God for his recovery, his addiction recovery group on Friday nights. I thank God that we recognize with one another a need to walk with one another, to overcome both this sin and our shame, and to step out and no longer blame and provide help that is both social and spiritual.

The drunkenness also resulted in laying uncovered in nakedness. You can see that in the text and the text is very ambiguous at this point.

There's much left unsaid. I guess I would argue rightly so. We do know that when the author uses this kind of phrase uncovered in nakedness that something sexual is in play, that something illicit is underneath, that Noah reflexively has done something unto himself.

Noah is undone and it's all of his own doing. It's a sad scene and it's the final picture that Genesis provides of righteous Noah who was blameless in his day.

[ 17 : 20 ] It brings emotion from my inner man for his aged fragility.

Kent Hughes put it this way. People in their prime, even in their own age, can be overtaken by sensualities that they had before avoided.

I have known this because it had been said to me for years, but now, Hughes writes, I can feel it, the tendency to allow myself indulgences that I avoided when younger.

Be they visual or mental or physical. With the dismissive line, I'm too old for things to harm me. This tendency to ease up when the conflict lessens.

When all the world was against Noah, he faced scorn and violence straight up. but in his own vineyard, among his own, who needed no proof of his virtue, he relaxed.

[ 18 : 35 ] Hughes goes on. We can become so careless in our home life that we forgo spiritual disciplines around those we trust. all too often, the walls of our homes witness irritabilities and anger and slanderous words and laziness and sensualities that if the walls could speak would take our gray hairs down to Sheol.

Sheol. It's a sad scene. The frailty of Noah's human condition when left only to the power of his better angels.

And believe me, it is true for you and for me. Our health must come from outside ourselves.

Let me say it again. If you get home and they say, what was the sermon about? Our health must come from outside ourselves.

There must be a supernatural that arrives to out-duel our nature. Noah's human frailty show it. [ 20 : 05 ] Ham's sexual perversions as you see in verse 22 and 23 reveal it. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward and they did not see their father's nakedness.

A lot is unsaid here, too. It's an intentionally modest retelling. It's almost as though the writer is embarrassed to say more.

The ambiguity is by design. What you do know is that when this phrase to uncover the nakedness of someone appears, it's always negative, always in sinful terms.

Leviticus 18 uses it no fewer than 24 times in reference to the sin of homosexuality, the sin of incest, the sin of adultery, the sin of bestiality.

[ 21 : 16 ] It's a covering term for the uncoveredness of our sexual handling of our bodies. Whatever Ham did, it was wrong.

If it was as simple as him laughing and pulling the garment out of the tent as some kind of sick joke to something much worse, it was wicked.

It was not right. In fact, it is the action of his two brothers that have positive effect. Look at their action. Their action does two things.

First, it is a public rebuke to their brother. And it is the rightful response given Noah's need. Notice this.

They cover the one who is abused by the sin of their brother for the social and the sexual fragility of his own behavior.

[ 22 : 20 ] And in doing so, they call out their brother as a perpetrator of his evil. Let me say something today. Can I again? There's a sick irony here when it comes to the depravity of our culture.

For too long, those in power in culture, men in particular, have covered over the sins of the abuser, covered over the sins of the abuser and left the abused without cover.

We function in contrast to the brothers in our text. And so, you need to know that the Me Too movement is rising rightfully to address a sin of immorality.

At our best, we must publicly rebuke abusers and hold them accountable. And in doing so, we must also provide cover to the one who has been abused by this horrific sin.

There is a betrayal taking place in our social trust when justice doesn't uncover sin for what it is.

[ 23 : 38 ] There is a rending of our human contract that in its debaseness is keeping us from health.

Let me put it this way. Not only do Noah's social fragilities indicate that he needs help from the outside, so too Ham's sexual indiscretions indicate that an external righteousness, an alien righteousness must win the day.

Not only that, third, codified racial hostilities. They're all here, aren't they? In verses 24 to 27.

There's ample supply in these verses to speak about the ongoing racial hostilities of our world.

When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants, shall he be to his brothers. He also said, blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.

May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem and let Cain be his servant. Notice how Genesis now adds vassalage, the enslaving of one brother to another to the world that already had seen the sin of fratricide, which was the murdering of one's own brother.

[ 25 : 12 ] The first act of slavery here was brother against brother before it became nation against nation. The curses and the blessings are here, but don't lose the repetition of the word servitude.

A servant of servants shall he be. Let Canaan be his servant. Let Canaan be his servant. These are the first signs in human history of what will become slavery, of what you and I speak of when we talk about racial hostility, and it is encoded right here, codified into law code.

These verses were also used at the time of Lincoln's first inaugural in the Antebellum South to justify slavery.

Ham etymologically means blackened or burnt. The argument that many clergy made in the 1860s was that here we find God commanding by way of curse the subjugation of Africans to the Anglo descendants which would have been derived from Japheth or even Shem and its Jewish constituency.

What a horrific handling of the scripture that from here people argued a prophetic word on slavery. That from this text they argued a biblical justification for the subjugation of a people.

[ 26 : 51 ] And they did it by more than rationalization but they said that from here there is a call for it complete with divine approval.

And they did it in the face of good exegesis for as early as 1808 exegetical arguments concerning this had been undone by one named Barrow.

They did it in the face of realizing that it's the Canaanites in particular here not all the descendants of Ham. They did it in the sense that it's Cush who goes down to Egypt and Ham who becomes or Canaan who becomes on his own from a different place.

They did it even though Moses himself marries a Cushite a black woman with his own Semitic background.

They did it in the face of all of this. They handled this text even though the cursing was an impetus rooted in sexual sin not racial anything.

[ 28 : 02 ] But all the while it went unheeded as clergy ran headlong into a use of the Bible to suit their own sins. Let me just say it as simply as I can.

We need help from the outside. It was what's happening in our present world is mirroring our nation's antebellum divisiveness and it is rooted in the primeval telling of Genesis.

Our social fragility indicates that while we're involved in things social we must have something spiritual. Our sexual predilections and inclinations reveal that something is stronger within us and we need help from outside us.

The racial hostilities that continue to divide us tell us that some righteousness must arrive from outside of ourselves.

every social ill facing us every racial issue dividing us every lewd behavior oppressing us cannot be solved simply by an appeal to the better angels dwelling within us.

[ 29 : 26 ] I will grant you as I have that some progress can be made but social problems require spiritual solutions. Racial issues demand religious answers.

Sexual lewdness must be confronted by Christian virtue for our race problem is a sin problem. Our Me Too movement is responding to an immorality problem.

Our disease of drunkenness is related to the internal war between the better and worse angels within us which is our problem. Simply put getting home from here is going to require more than we can bring to the table.

That's what the text wants to say. In simple terms, Noah's final act in Genesis demonstrates that the external righteousness of Christ alone can hit the reset button that our nature needs.

Only Jesus can rebirth a heart of flesh from stone. The outdoor sermon that was preached in Genesis about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and then later about Noah and his sons from their orchard in Armenia are not dealt with completely until Jesus provides a solution from the outside.

[ 30 : 51 ] It is his external righteousness in his alone. It is his plummeting from heaven's gate into our ungodly ground of wickedness. It is Jesus that speaks to us yet today from the Mount of Olives and his own Garden of Gethsemane from the cross of Calvary that here is the solution to the human condition.

And the church has an important role to play in the days ahead for Woodlawn, for Chicago Southside, for our city, and for our country. We live in a divided age, one where human frailty, sexual perversity, racial hostilities still rule and are still unwinding.

For how do you know that the Civil War has ended? Could we not be on the front end of what will one day be known as our own Fort Sumter?

President Biden, and I'm closing, in his inaugural address, rightly employed Lincoln's same language in his effort to restart the present age of discontent.

He appealed, quote, to our better angels who have always prevailed. I share his hope. As a Christian, I speak with a sense of my own conviction on reality.

[ 32 : 31 ] as in Lincoln's day, as in Noah's day, as in Adam's day, as in our day, we would be wise to guard how much we can accomplish by looking from within.

human history has proven time and time again that while some gains can be gotten, losses will continue to mount up.

In the church, Christ church, Christ church, Chicago, must proclaim the death of Christ, our Lord, is that which covers a multitude of sins.

That Jesus, my Savior, can help you handle some of your frailties. That his coming judgment will enable you to endure present derision.

That his breaking down of the wall of hostility with his own blood will be enough for you to see your neighbor as your brother, your sister, your father, your mother.

[ 34 : 08 ] family. Noah may be receding from the pages of our series of Genesis, but the truths gleaned here should inform us of the work that is yet before us.

Our health comes from the outside, for he alone can transform us and make us new.  
to the other that you to see