

## Grace In Genesis (iii)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Mr. Noah built an ark, the people thought it such a lark. Mr. Noah pleaded so, but into the ark they would not go. I remember singing these words in Sunday school, struggling as a very young child to know how many fingers to hold up to when it came to the last line and only eight were saved.

I'm sure we all know the story of Noah and the ark he built and the flood and the animals coming in two by two and so on. Would it surprise you to know that the story of Noah has precious little to do with Noah?

Or that the story of Abraham has precious little to do with Abraham? Or that my story has little to do with me and your story doesn't have an awful lot to do with you? All these stories are not so much about what Noah did, what Abraham did, what I do or what you do, that about what God does, about the grace of God in action in the lives of ordinary people.

There are demonstrations of the grace of God, that grace for which God made this world his theater, that grace he ultimately exhibited in the dying and rising and reigning of his son, Jesus Christ.

Some people mistakenly believe that the God of the Old Testament is not a God of grace, but a God of anger and wrath. I don't see it that way, because the Bible doesn't see it that way.

[ 1 : 30 ] There's grace on every page of the Old Testament, but especially here in the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis. We've already seen how from Genesis 1, God created a world of grace.

And then from Genesis 3, how through our sin, it's not so much that we have fallen from grace, as we have fallen into grace. And now in Genesis 6, in the story of the flood, we're going to see the grace of God in action.

That grace which knows, that grace which communicates, that grace which saves. These events took place many thousands of years ago. But through faith in Christ, we are the children of the same God who commanded Noah to build the ark and who sent the flood.

This is entirely relevant to us, because just as the story of Noah isn't about Noah, so our stories as Christians aren't so much about us, they're about the grace of God in Christ.

First of all then, the Lord keeps knowing. The Lord keeps knowing. Genesis 6 begins on a depressingly low note.

[ 2 : 49 ] Mankind is multiplying on the earth, just as God commanded back in Genesis 1 in the creation mandate. But then something strange happens. In verse 2 we read, The sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

Old Testament scholars have argued about the identity of the sons of God. Were they fallen angels? And the produce of their union with human females were the so-called Nephilim, the giants of verse 4.

Were they the sons of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, polluting their bloodline by marrying the daughters of Cain? I'm not here to pronounce on this topic.

If you want to know more, Professor John Murray writes magnificently on this subject. What I'm here to talk about is the grace of God. And the operative phrase I want us to dive into is that which we find in verse 5.

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

[ 4 : 03 ] The Lord saw. Over the course of human history, there have been various theories about how God relates to his world.

For the Greeks, the gods were impassably unconcerned about events taking place in the world. For the deists of the 17th, 18th centuries, like Benjamin Franklin, God was the blind watchmaker who, having set the world in motion, left it to get on with itself.

These are just two examples of various theories proposed by human beings as to how God relates to his world. Over against these man-made views is the consistent declaration of Scripture which says, the Lord saw.

God, though not being part of his creation, does not dwell unconcerned on Mount Olympus. He is no blind watchmaker. His eyes are open to his world.

Then we might say to ourselves, well, there's nothing new here. Surely in Genesis 1, the creation story, we repeatedly read the phrase, the Lord saw that it was good.

[ 5 : 19 ] Tell me something I didn't know. Of course the Lord sees. And you'll be absolutely correct. At every stage of his created process, we read, and God saw that it was good.

We know that from the very beginning, God's eyes have been open to his world. However, the difference between God's all-seeing activity in Genesis 1 and Genesis 6 consists in this.

Whereas in Genesis 1, we read the repeated chorus, and God saw that it was good. In Genesis 6, we read, the Lord saw how great the wickedness of man on the earth had become.

It is one thing to look on the magnificence of the created world. It is altogether another thing to look on the misery of a wicked humanity.

It is one thing to look at the strength and vitality of a world-class athlete. It is another thing altogether to see the weakness and vileness of a dying drug addict.

[ 6 : 31 ] But God sees them both. God did not hide his eyes or turn away his face from the world's wickedness.

But more even than that, as we learn from the text, God not only saw the actions of men, he saw that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

In other words, not only did God see the evil actions of mankind, he saw inside the heart of mankind, and he saw there only evil intent and thought.

There are times when something is so very dark and so very depressing that as somewhat of a self-protection mechanism, we might say to ourselves, I don't want to see anymore.

I just don't want to know about it. It's too much. It's too dark. But God sees both the light and the darkness. He does not fail to see the sin in our lives or the guilt in our hearts.

[ 7 : 38 ] He sees and he knows, but he does not turn away or become distantly remote like the gods of Olympus or the blind watchmaker. Genesis 6 begins with human gloom expressed in continual wickedness, but it also begins with divine grace expressed in continual watchfulness.

Let me remind you that Moses wrote Genesis to the Israelites as they wandered for 40 years through the desert. At times, because of the barrenness of the land, they lost heart and they gave in to unbelief.

Moses needed them to know that the eyes of their God were always open to them for fear or for foul. In Exodus 3, verse 7, we learn that God's redemption of them from Egypt was prompted by his knowledge of their misery there.

I saw the misery of my people there. He saw how much they were suffering. So he saved them. But then in Exodus 32, verse 9, in the context of Israel's worship of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai, God says to Moses, I have seen these people and they are a stiff-necked people.

God sees people in their misery and he sees people in their sin. God sees people in their weakness and he sees them in their strength. He sees them in their helplessness and he sees us in our transgression.

[ 9 : 19 ] The God of all grace has his eyes wide open and he sees everything that comes to pass. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle recently went on a state visit to southern Africa.

You can imagine the scene on the day they were scheduled to visit an orphanage there. They arrived and the place was spotless. There was no dirt on the floor.

There were no excrement on the walls. There were no flies and there were no unhappy children. Everyone was smiling and singing.

It had been cleaned and everyone had been sternly warned, do not let your royal visitors see anything disgusting or upsetting. But the God of grace sees it all.

Not just the good but the bad. Not just the beautiful but the ugly. Not just the pleasure but the pain. He sees us today. Before him we stand as naked as the day we were born.

[10:25] And he sees right into our hearts just as surely as in Genesis 6 he saw the wickedness of people's hearts so he knows exactly what's going on in our lives today for fair or for foul.

And there's grace for us here. There really is. Because despite all the foul he sees he loves us still. Because of all our weakness he remains forever watchful and in view of his abundant grace that is forgiveness and strength for all of us in Jesus Christ.

The Lord he keeps knowing. Second the Lord communicates. The Lord communicates. Genesis 6 it is filled with much human gloom but also with much divine grace and not just because God's eyes are open to his world but because God's mouth is open to his world.

You know they say that the opposite of love is hate but it's not. The opposite of love is apathy. That apathy which could not care less.

But God does care. God is far from apathetic about the world he created and the people he loves. so he speaks. In the first instance he speaks by showing.

[12:02] He speaks by showing. In verse 6 we read that having seen the absolute wickedness of the human race the Lord regretted or was grieved that he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled.

God spoke by showing us his heart. The people he had made were living as though there were no God. they did not feel the weight of their abandonment of God.

God felt it deeply. He was troubled and his heart was filled with pain. Now I want to put discussions about divine passability to the side for the moment.

Rather I want us to let the beauty of God's grace wash over us. Here we have the creator of the universe. Here we have the almighty God who said light shine out of the darkness.

And he shows us his heart. And it's deeply troubled. And it's filled with pain. There's no self-defense mechanism here with God.

[13:07] Just vulnerability. He uses words we can understand to express his innermost feelings to us. John Calvin calls it baby talk.

That God is using words we can understand to explain what's going on in his heart. At other times in the Bible we look into God's heart and we see delight.

The delight he takes in his son Jesus Christ. Again there are times we read of him repenting or changing his mind. Words that he gives us to understand his mind and heart.

The gods of the Greeks didn't care about mortals. the god of the blind watchmaker doesn't want to be known at all. The god of the Bible wants us to know him heart, mind and soul.

One of the weapons that we use against each other is to be closed hearted. Not to let other people in. We sulk. We go in a boost.

[14:14] We don't want others to know the real me. so we never open up our hearts and show others how we feel. This is very far removed from who God really is.

A God who expresses his passion for us. Most notably in the life of his son Jesus Christ. A Jesus whose inner being was moved with compassion when he encountered suffering.

Was indignant when he was faced with unbelief. And was filled with love for his people. And this is real grace. This is not a theological construct. It is an expression of the heart of God.

That the God who made the sun and the stars he opens up his heart to us that we may know him.

He speaks by showing. But not only does God speak by showing he also speaks by speaking.

He speaks by speaking. When people fall out with each other their disagreement is often expressed by them. not talking to one another. Oh I'm not talking to that person because I disagree with them.

[15:23] They're not talking to me anymore. But God never sulks. God does not stop talking even if what he says is hard to swallow. The vast majority of this chapter is taken up by God speaking to Noah.

Beginning at verse 13 with the words so God spoke to Noah. God speaks. God talks and Noah listens. Just like the voice of God sounded over the primordial creation.

Let there be light. And his voice called out to a hiding Adam in the garden. Where are you? So his voice commands Noah saying make yourself an ark. In fact as you move through Genesis 6 through 8 it is as if God won't stop talking.

There's nothing wasted here. Every word every clause every sentence is important. And it's almost like we want to say listen to this Noah. Listen to all of it or listen to none of it.

There's no point having an ark if you're not listening to my instructions about how to pitch the ark or how to construct the doors of the ark.

[16:43] Every word is grace for Noah and his family. On account of its wickedness the human race did not deserve God to speak to it. It had shut its mouth to God but God refuses to stop speaking.

He refuses to stop offering salvation and peace with him. over 50 years the great American theologian pastor Francis Schaeffer whose works have influenced many of us wrote a book with the wonderful title He is There and He Is Not Silent.

The God of heaven though so grieved by our wickedness and deeply pained in heart keeps speaking. He refuses to be silenced by human disinterest or by human opposition and this is pure grace for on what account did the human race deserve the continued communication of God?

We shut our mouths to him and shut our hearts to him but far from closing himself off to us he expressed his love to us in this even when we weren't listening he kept speaking.

I'm so glad for that on a personal level. For 15 years God spoke to me through his word week by week in Gospo Free Church proclaiming to me my need of a saviour and how Jesus was the only saviour I needed.

[18:19] The only saviour who could forgive my sins and give me hope for the future. For 15 years through the preaching of the word and through faithful Sunday school teachers God spoke to me but I wasn't listening.

My ears were shut to him. My heart was closed to him and yet he kept speaking. He would not stop talking until finally in September 1987 I heard the gospel of Jesus Christ not just with my ears but also with my heart.

his grace toward me was such that he kept speaking even though I wasn't listening. He kept offering peace to the cross until finally finally I understood.

Grace in Genesis means God communicating with his people. Speaking to them by showing and speaking. He speaks and the world is created. He speaks and salvation is promised.

He speaks and an ark is constructed. He speaks and his heart is revealed. He speaks and he shows his passion for us. He speaks and shows love to those who deserve only wrath.

[19:43] There's grace for us all here. For though we might have grown cold in our Christian lives and we've stopped speaking to God He keeps on speaking to us through his word.

And his words for us overflow with his passionate invitation for the prodigal to return to his father and for the lost to come home. The Lord communicates.

And then thirdly and lastly from Genesis 6 the Lord saves. The Lord saves. we tend to think of Genesis 6 purely in terms of God's judgment of the earth on account of its criminal wickedness. The focus of the story is on the earth and it's thinking that Mr. Noah's building of the ark really was such a lark. Alternatively when we think of Genesis 6 we think purely in terms of the construction of the ark but you know neither is the focus what's front and center in Genesis chapter 6 is God's grace in salvation and promise.

Back in Genesis 3 as we saw last time we can both say that mankind fell from grace by our sin but mankind also fell into grace by the promise of a saviour that saviour according to Genesis 3 15 would be the seed of the woman a descendant of Eve and this seed would crush the head of the snake Satan and we saw that this promise of course is fulfilled in Jesus Christ the son of Eve who through his sacrifice on the cross triumphed over Satan death and our sin but the faithfulness of God's promise depended upon the continuance of the family line of Eve if in Genesis 6 God had destroyed the whole world and everyone in it the promise of Genesis 3 15 would have failed there would have been no Jesus born of Mary and

[22:03] Satan would never have been defeated and so Genesis chapter 6 is not so much about the salvation of Noah and his family as much as it is the preservation of Eve's family line so that in the fullness of time the promise of Genesis 3 15 could be fulfilled and Jesus the Messiah would crush the serpent's head if at any time that family line is broken God's promise fails and the serpent has become victorious that family line is going to pass through Noah and through Abraham through Isaac and Jacob and through David until finally it arrives at Mary the mother of our Lord the New Testament Eve at every stage Satan will try to destroy the direct family line between Eve and

Jesus in fact it may be fairly said of the whole Old Testament that it is the story of how God preserved the family line of Eve in readiness for the birth of Christ God miraculously preserved the family line of Eve his people from famine in Canaan through Joseph becoming governor of Egypt God miraculously preserved the family line of Eve from annihilation at the hands of the Egyptians at

the Red Sea God miraculously delivered David from the murderous intentions rather of King Saul and so on and so forth the whole Old Testament is the story of how God faithfully kept the promise he made in Genesis 3:15 and the proto evangelium the first gospel of Jesus as King and Lord and so this chapter becomes a story which finds its fulfillment in the cross and resurrection of Jesus it may well be the record of the salvation of Noah and his family by virtue of their construction of an ark but more importantly it records the salvation of God's people as God meticulously and miraculously provides for the preservation of the promise he made at the very beginning of time in other words if there was no Noah and there was no ark there would be no Jesus and no cross and no resurrection Satan would have the victory and mankind would cease to exist but because God saved Noah he saved us let me remind you of that once more no Noah no Jesus no ark no cross this is the grace of God in action right here a grace which finds its ultimate expression salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ Jesus sacrificial death on the cross and his victorious resurrection from the dead so when we're reading Genesis 6 the children's song we want to sing is not so much Mr.

Noah built an ark the people thought it's such a lark rather the children's song we want to sing is Jesus love is very wonderful Jesus love is very wonderful so high you can't get over it so low you can't get under it so wide you can't get round it oh wonderful love Genesis 6 is grace from beginning to end the grace of God that knows that communicates and that saves have you experienced that grace for yourself yet that grace which was ultimately demonstrated on the cross and is offered to you through faith in Jesus Christ perhaps it's time that opening your ears to the voice of God you do what the God of all grace commands you to do and put your faith in his crucified and risen son Jesus and in his and his and and the the