

New World, Same Old Sin

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! We're going to be in verses 18 to 29 this morning. Genesis 9, 18 to 29.

This is the Word of God. The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

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.

[1 : 07] And 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. 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 Canaan be his servant.

After the flood, Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died. May God bless the preaching and the hearing of his word.

Well, there are some stories that come and go, and there are some that become legend. Most families, as you know, have a handful of stories that they like to tell over and over again.

[2 : 37] One of those stories in my family is kind of a genre bender, if you will.

It's kind of like a horror and a comedy mixed together. Here's the situation. My dad was serving as a youth pastor and was at a pool party getting ready to share some announcements.

He had everybody's attention, and then at that moment, one of the youth group members came up from behind him, and yanked his shorts down in front of everybody.

This is where the horror kicked in. My dad immediately screamed, ah, in utter embarrassment, and dives into the water quickly into the pool to try to recover. There's no recovering from something like that.

Let's just be real. So we laugh about it now, but it was super embarrassing at the time. One of the reasons we can laugh so hard now is because the feeling of being embarrassed like that is just so relatable, isn't it?

[3 : 41] It's interesting to note the connection between nakedness and the feeling of shame. A common recurring nightmare I've had, maybe you have too, is walking around in a public place only to realize what?

You're naked, and you had no clue this whole time. It's a very common nightmare, and the nightmare really kind of points to the feelings of being out of control or fear being known intimately. When people describe the feeling of shame, oftentimes we associate it with words related to nakedness, things like feeling vulnerable or exposed. All of us have felt this vulnerability and discomfort.

And many of us struggle with the haunting feelings that come with shame. Things done to us or things done by us. We wonder what people would do if they really knew us intimately.

Or to use the language of nakedness, if all that we are was laid bare, what would people think? And maybe more importantly, most importantly, what would God think?

[5 : 00] So often it seems that it would be best to either hide or to shift the attention away from ourselves, but I believe the Lord gave us this text this morning so that we do not have to live in shame.

Instead, there is a path forward where all of our sin can be laid bare, and we can be completely vulnerable. And God himself will not cast us away, but bring us to himself.

So I believe the main point for us this morning is to simply put your trust in Christ, who covers our shame, lifts our curse, and blesses all who are united to him by faith.

Put your trust in Christ, who covers our shame, lifts our curse, and blesses all who are united to him by faith. We're going to break this into three sections.

Noah's sin, Noah's son, and Noah's speech. So we'll begin with Noah's sin with an emphasis on salvation and transformation.

[6 : 07] If you look in 9.18, we're introduced to Noah's sons. Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This story represents this kind of shift and focus away from Noah being kind of the centerpiece to his sons and the future generations that are going to come from him.

Remember, Noah is paralleling much of what we saw in the creation account. This is the recreation story. So this story is somewhat of kind of a segue from one man to the children who in turn have families that begin to populate the earth.

So we see a hint of what's coming with the author noting that Ham is the father of Canaan. The following story sets up a contrast between the honorable actions of Shem and Japheth and the moral degradation of the Hamites, in particular the Canaanites, who came from Ham's family line.

So now that the characters have been introduced, 9.20, verse 9.20, sets up the scene by showcasing Noah's newfound skill. It says that Noah began to be a man of the soil.

Noah is developing viniculture to produce wine, which, if you look throughout Scripture, it's actually viewed as a wonderful gift from God himself that points to joy and to prosperity.

[7 : 38] So Noah's vine-keeping is a good thing. This is, in a sense, a new technology in the world. But even with new technology, there is an old problem.

The wine is not inherently evil. Wine is a good gift when received rightly. The greatest problem is not wine.

The greatest problem is sin. The scene showcases here a good gift from God that is distorted by the human heart.

9, verse 21. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. What? This is supposed to be the obedient, righteous Noah.

And now he's drunk, passed out naked in his tent. So just a few short verses ago, he was referred to as righteous and blameless in his generation.

[8 : 45] So did he fall from grace? Did he backslide? Was he truly saved? Some commentators have even wondered if this is a different Noah.

How can this be God's man? Well, we can only go as far as Scripture allows us. In this text, you'll note, there's not any kind of explanation given.

The author doesn't moralize here on Noah's sin. However, this is what we do know. In the New Testament, Peter labeled Noah as a herald or a preacher of righteousness.

Noah is commended in Hebrews 11, the one we just read a little bit ago, as an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. So in spite of this drunken episode, he's remembered as a man of faith.

So what are we to make of this? Man of faith. God saved Noah by faith, which was expressed in obedience.

[10 : 00] You remember, Noah walked with God. His heart belonged to God. At this point, Noah has had hundreds of years of a general pattern of walking in faith, leaning on dependence on his God.

But his salvation is not perfection. Like us, his salvation leads to ongoing transformation.

People of faith still fall into sin. I don't want anybody to be shocked in here. People of faith still fall into sin. So how could someone whose sins be considered righteous?

Did Christ only die for your sins before coming to trust in him? Is the expectation perfection now?

If that was the case, how could a Christian ever draw comfort from the promise, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?

[11 : 07] Is that just a promise up until the moment that we sin? Does he say there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus until you sin again? And then comes the condemnation.

How would that be a comfort to anybody? That would be contingent on our performance. Also, why would Jesus himself teach his disciples, his believers, to pray each day, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors?

There will be sin, even in the believer's life. Now, if we stop there, the Muslims would be right about Christians.

I remember when my wife and I used to live in North Africa, our Muslim friends would say that believing in the sacrifice of Jesus only gives license to sin.

Rather than restraining sin, Christianity actually amplifies sin and says, do whatever you want, go ahead, it's forgiven anyways. But here's the difference.

[12 : 22] True faith will not lead to a settledness with sin in the believer's life. If you go on living in sin, that is, if sin is your pattern of life and you do not make war on your sin, but instead you make peace with your sin, you have no assurance to believe that you are in Christ.

So is there a battle in your heart? Do you have a growing hatred for the things God hates and a love for the things that God loves?

Do you want to change? Do you want to confess? Do you want to find help? Noah is not remembered as Noah the drunkard any more than Moses is the murderer, David is the adulterer, Peter is the traitor, Paul is the persecutor.

All of these experience consequences of their sin, as we're about to see very clearly with Noah. However, sin no longer defines them.

It no longer defines his children. Salvation leads to transformation. Belonging to God leads to a lifestyle of repentance and a posture of dependence upon God.

[13 : 48] We do the confessing, the receiving, and the depending. God does the forgiving, the providing, and the covering. And he will do that for you too. You don't have to stay where you are.

He delights to transform those he saves. The more you depend on him, the more you see that he can be trusted. And over time, seeing his kindness, it diminishes all lesser loves where we sinfully go for satisfaction.

And one day, we, by God's grace, will be fully freed from sin to see our Savior with clarity. Praise the Lord. I look forward to that day. But while we move toward that day, we turn our attention back to the story of Noah to see what God would have for us here and now.

Second point, Noah's sons, shame and honor. Noah is lying exposed as a result of his sinful overindulgence.

And now we see the response of Noah's sons. First on the scene is Ham, verse 22. And again, it's reiterated that he is the father of Canaan.

[15 : 12] Given the emphasis on the family lines, this connection is going to be important considering the event that is about to take place. So what does Ham do? It says that he saw saw the nakedness of his father.

Now we know nakedness in itself is not a bad thing. As you remember, Adam and Eve were both naked and unashamed as they lived out their rightful design with God and with one another. But nakedness came to be associated with shame in the context of sin. As you remember, the first thing Adam and Eve do as a result of sin is to seek out a way to cover their nakedness.

And then they hide from God. Sin brings shame and a disconnection from God and from one another. Isaiah 47, 3 says, Your nakedness shall be uncovered and your disgrace shall be seen. In a similar way, Noah's nakedness is an exposure of his sin and his shame. So when Ham saw his father's nakedness, this is not like accidentally walking in on someone on an unlocked bathroom stall.

[16 : 30] That's not what's going on here. Noah was in his own tent. So this would have been like a prolonged meditation on his father's shameful state.

based on the other brother's reactions and the speech to follow, it's clear that Ham was indulging and delighting in something that was shameful.

That's what's at work here. Not only does he revel in his father's shame, he doesn't do anything to fix it. Instead, he goes outside the tent to tell his two brothers.

He exploits the shame. Ham glories in the shame of his father's failure and then he attempts to draw others into it.

Our world loves to glory and shame. There's this come and look attitude. It seems to me there are at least two general ways that the world teaches us to glory and shame.

[17 : 43] Celebration and cancellation. The world takes something that is broken and shameful and holds it up in celebration. Says, come and look at this!

Perhaps the most blatant, obviously, is the new sexual revolution. Now, we believe, as Christians, that God has a purposeful and a wonderful design for human sexuality.

to bring intimacy between a husband and a wife, to create life, to glorify God as biologically assigned males and females.

However, when God is forced off the throne of sexuality, people assume the throne and warp sexuality to their own end.

and now our feelings reign supreme. So we have parents helping their children transition externally from one gender to another and receiving praise for it.

[18 : 44] We have boys dressed as girls competing in high school sports and being celebrated by how brave they are. we have kids identifying and acting as animals.

Our culture celebrates these things as acceptable and then normalizes them. These things have been on the front burner in recent debates, obviously. However, we have to recognize that we've been impacted more than we'd care to admit.

We must not miss the shame of the booming pornography industry that also exploits God's design for sexuality.

It's powered by the same feelings driven self-serving godlessness that animates the trans agenda. It's hidden away in your pocket but the invitation is the same.

Come look at this. We must not become blind to the deceptive celebration of what is shameful people. Philippians 3 19 says their end is destruction, their god is their belly, their feelings, and they glory in their shame with mindset on earthly things.

[20 : 09] Not only is there a celebration of shame that says come and see, but there's also a cancellation of shame that says come and see.

The latest gossip draws us in like sharks to chum in the water. There's this constant invitation to come and see the failure of someone else so that you can join in on the judgment.

What is that? Is that impulse motivated by godliness? when the phrase have you heard about so and so comes up, do you lean in for more or do you lean away?

Do you really need to comment on that post or circulate it or even read it? Is your involvement something that brings healing or is it only exploiting the shame?

Instead of honoring his father, Ham dishonors him. Instead of responding to his father's failure with care and gentleness and respect, Ham accentuates and even exposes his father's shame.

[21 : 30] As Ham dishonors his father, he shows the position of his heart towards God in the process. The same contempt he has for his father on earth is shown towards his father's God too.

We must be a people who refuse to follow Ham's invitation to come and see. By God's grace, we must refuse to glory and shame.

In 923, Shem and Japheth are contrasted with Ham. They 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. Notice that they didn't stand passively by. They are proactive to remedy the shame.

They get a blanket and take steps to reverse the shame. shame. And as they engaged, they walked backward. They turned their faces backward so that they don't see their father's nakedness.

[22 : 46] This stands in contrast with Ham who gawked at the shame. Shem and Japheth refused to indulge in the shame. Their goal in moving towards the source of shame was not to revel but to recover.

cover. It says that they covered his nakedness. They acted in order to bring a covering over the shame.

This was not to excuse what happened. By the end, everyone, everyone involved was aware of what had happened and the source of that shame.

The covering was not an act to kind of hide things away and pretend that nothing had ever happened. Rather, this was a knowledgeable response to sin in order to restore honor and dignity.

Unlike the world, my friends, God provides a path towards forgiveness, restoration, towards redemption. Noah was lying naked, ashamed, exposed because of his sin, and unable to do anything about it.

[23 : 57] One response was to exploit and celebrate the shame. The other response was to graciously recover the honor that was forfeited.

The response of Shem and Japheth was the fruit of their trusting in God. Their desire was to honor their father, to cover his shame, and so honor God in the process.

Theirs are the actions of those who have embraced the Lord and his covenant from their heart. Is this our posture towards one another in this church?

Is this the flavor of your home? Does this reflect in your marriages? Do we walk towards shame in order to bring undeserved restoration?

It reflects our God. So what will Noah do now? Is the question. Point number three, Noah's speech, curse and blessings.

[25 : 11] in all of the story of Noah's life up until this point, there have been no words recorded from Noah.

What's recorded here are his first and his last words in scripture. And the speech that he gives pronounces curses and blessings over the future generations that are to come from his sons. Now over the centuries this speech in particular has been twisted and misapplied in some very devastating ways. This text was widely cited to put God's stamp of approval on the slave trade. How did they get there? Well, this is how the narrative theologically went. Ham had sinned against righteous Noah so God cursed his son Canaan and his descendants by destining them to perpetual servitude.

The Hebrew meaning of Ham's name is closely related to the word for dark or black, pointing to the mark on the cursed, dark-skinned peoples of Africa.

[26 : 32] They were destined as a people group to continual subjugation, which they say is evident throughout history.

Maybe you've come across this teaching, I know I did as a kid, in different ways, in different contexts. In light of such an interpretation, it became commonplace for leaders to justify the institution of slavery.

For instance, one president of a very well-known denomination once wrote, The point of bringing this up is not to sling mud, but I want to do two things here.

First, it's to say that we unequivocally condemn slavery. We do not hold to this interpretation, and we believe it presents a warped view of the Bible, God, and human beings made in His image.

Second, I want to address a fear that may enter your mind, though. Are we destined to constantly use the Bible to justify our own, sometimes even sinful, agendas?

[28 : 04] How do we know we're not doing the same thing right now to the LGBTQ plus community, or even in other areas? How do we know that? If they could be so wrong, what confidence can we have in reading it now?

Well, to these questions, I would like to say that we are not destined to manipulate the Bible for our own potentially sinful agendas. There are guardrails that can help us rightly interpret and apply the Bible.

So I want to take a moment to use this text as a case study for how to read and interpret the Bible in a way to keep us from veering into some wrong and harmful interpretations.

Here are three principles I hope will serve you going forward. The Bible must be interpreted as an unfolding story embedded in history. Secondly, the Bible must be interpreted with attention to other scripture.

Third, the Bible must be interpreted in light of Jesus Christ. So first, the Bible must be interpreted as an unfolding story embedded in history. This means that we must identify where we are in the storyline in relation to what we are reading and we have to ask if it has been fulfilled already and in what way.

[29 : 29] Hebrews 1, 1 and 2 says, long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom he also created the world. There is a progression.

There is a storyline. And we have to take note of where we are. Be careful not to flatten the timeline and pluck things out to apply to our contemporary moment without reference to the fact that the Bible is an unfolding story and it is moving towards Jesus Christ.

Second, the Bible must be interpreted with attention to other scriptures. This means that we need to take into account other parts of scripture that clarify what we are reading as the story unfolds.

For instance, we cannot interpret this curse in this text as a validation for slavery because the Bible also says in the Old Testament, whoever steals a man and sells him and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death.

[30 : 40] What about that one? Additionally, we see in the New Testament, Timothy condemning slavery as contrary to sound doctrine. And we see Paul advocating for Onesimus, a runaway slave to be received by his former master as a brother in Christ.

So it doesn't hold up. Third, the Bible must be interpreted in light, most importantly, of Jesus Christ. He is not simply just a piece of the story.

He is the centerpiece of the whole story to whom all things point. Luke 24, 25, and 27 says, very importantly, from the words of Jesus, he said to his disciples, oh foolish ones, myself included, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So we must ask when we come to the curse and the blessings here, how does this passage come to bear on the people of God in the light of the work of Jesus Christ?

[32 : 03] Anything less than that is not Christian. It is sub-Christian. So let's consider Noah's speech in light of these three principles.

Nine verse 25 says, Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants, shall he be to his brothers. Right away we have a curveball.

Ham isn't even the one that was cursed. Why curse the son, Canaan, for the sins of his father, Ham.

Chapter 10, verse 6, if you were to look forward, reveals that Canaan is the youngest of Ham's four sons. Cush, Egypt, Put, and then Canaan, baby Canaan.

It's not exactly clear from our text why the curse goes to Canaan, but being the fourth son, it's possible that he was already old enough for Noah to note the same kind of moral depravity he saw in the life of Ham.

[33 : 14] This apple does not fall far from the tree. As the son of a man who has contempt for God and for his own father, Canaan will be his father's son.

The Canaanites, this lineage coming from him, were to suffer the curse and the bondage, not because of the sins of Ham, but because they themselves acted like Ham, because of their own transgressions.

If we think of where people are in relation to the timeline of history, the curse pronounced on Canaan would have been very relevant for the original readers as they wandered around for 40 years in the desert.

Leviticus 18 describes the shameful practices of the Canaanites with all kinds of euphemisms. Just in one chapter alone, they used the word nakedness 24 times to describe their sexual depravity.

God was calling the people of Israel, Shem's descendants, to drive out the Canaanites in order to enter the promised land. It was a form of contrasting those who follow God and those who are opposed to God.

[34 : 33] That's the contrast. Leviticus 18 makes it clear. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing to you.

Note both sons of Ham. You shall not walk in their statutes. Do not make for yourselves unclean. Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things.

For by all these nations I am driving out before you have become unclean. And the land became unclean so that I punished its iniquity.

Not its ethnicity, its iniquity. And the land vomited out its inhabitants. So it's vital to see the problem with Canaan is not that they are Canaanites, but that they are godless.

Their future ultimately hinges on their faith, not their ethnicity. How do we know this? Well, we have to think about two of those principles of biblical interpretation, the unfolding story and other scripture.

[35 : 49] It won't be long in the storyline before the Israelites enter into the promised land. Who is it that made that possible? God, obviously, but what human did he use to make the entrance possible?

A descendant of Ham, a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab. Rahab, the Canaanite, was incorporated into the people of God, not based on biology, but based on faith in the living God. The Canaanite woman ends up in Jesus' family tree. You can see it in Luke. So what are we witnessing in the actions of Ham and Canaan?

It is the fruit, the rotten fruit, of godlessness. They glory in what is shameful because they reject the Lord.

This stands in contrast with the blessings of Noah's speech. It was a curveball to see the curse of Canaan. Now we see what might potentially be another curveball.

[37 : 02] Look at it. Verse 26. Blessed be Shem. Is that what it says? Shockingly, it says, blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.

Here we have some very surprising wording. The God of Shem is the one that's blessed rather than Shem directly. Interestingly, the word for God and the blessing of Shem is the covenant name Yahweh.

Shem acted the way he did because Yahweh is Shem's God. Shem's relationship with God led him into loving action towards his father's sin.

His name is tied to God because his heart belonged to God. He was bearing the fruit of belonging. So by blessing the God of the man, the man himself is blessed.

And then you see lastly in 927, may God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem. The covenant name Yahweh is used with Shem.

[38 : 12] Shem's line would continue on to be the one through which the Messiah would ultimately come, but the generic name for God is used for Japheth. Indicating that God would generally bless Japheth's lineage with prosperity and fruitfulness.

Interestingly, Japheth is pictured prospering in the tents of Shem. Why is that? Shem and Japheth perform their godly service to Noah in his tent.

The speech pictures Japheth entering into the blessing of dwelling within the tents of Shem. He's the recipient of the covenant blessings. So here's the summation of the three sons if you didn't get it.

Canaan is cursed and is associated with the godless Canaanites. Yahweh is blessed and Shem's line is associated with the covenant God ultimately leading to the Messiah.

And Japheth is blessed with general fruitfulness and is associated with the Gentiles. Those are the three. So how are we to understand this in light of our principles of biblical interpretation?

[39 : 27] Well in our hallway at home we have a series of family pictures that show the relationship of our children to their parents and grandparents and great grandparents. You can see who looks like who on that wall and it helps us to answer that question whose family do you belong to?

Well these brothers here that we see serve as two family pictures in the unfolding story. We see the ongoing contrast between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

Ham's behavior reflected Satan who acted to expose shameful nakedness. Shem and Japheth reflected God who acted to cover shameful nakedness.

So the question before us is this whose family do you belong to? The reality is that Ham is not alone. We all have dishonored our heavenly father by insisting to live apart from him.

We have all gloried in shame. If we were brought under the perfect just holy standard of God and we had all the things that we've ever said or done or thought and they were projected on this screen for this whole room to see with all eyes watching including God's we would writhe in our seats with shame.

[40 : 53] If our shame were laid bare before a holy God and we were called to give an account we would feel the crushing weight of condemnation just condemnation. We would be like Noah exposed in our sin with no power to cover our shame.

But the good news is this. While we dishonored our father we have an older brother in Jesus who honored the father perfectly.

And even though we rightfully deserve the curse of Canaan to be godless servants of sin for all of our days, Jesus took the curse upon himself becoming a servant as Philippians 2 says and submitting himself as a servant even to the point of death on a cross.

He was stripped naked and beaten suffering the public humiliation that should have been ours. He took all of our shame and covered it with his blood.

The curse of God fell on him so that it might be lifted from us. Galatians 3.13 wonderfully says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

[42 : 11] For it is written, curse is everyone who is hanged on a tree. So for all who place their hope in Jesus Christ, the faithful son of Shem, you no longer have to walk as an enemy of God.

Like the sons of Japheth, you can enter into the covenant family of God, the household of God. Ephesians 2 makes it clear that all who were far off, like Japheth, and all who were near, like the sons of Shem, are now brought near by the blood of Christ into the same tent, the same household, the same family.

He has made one new household from every tribe, tongue, and language. Praise the Lord. This is not fatalistic doom based on race. It is glorious hope based on grace.

Praise the Lord. If you're not a Christian, I want to invite you to receive the covering offered to you in Jesus Christ. If you want to talk more, I'd be happy to talk with you more after the service about what that looks like.

And if you are a Christian, let us rejoice in this great news. It's for all people and it's for us to share, liberally. Every child of Shem, Ham, and Japheth is welcomed into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

[43 : 27] His sacrificial love covers us. And let's love one another in the same way. 1 Peter 4 8 says, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Let's live like that, with one another and with those around us. So put your trust in Jesus Christ who covers our shame, lifts our curse, and blesses all who are united to him by faith.

May God help us. Let's pray. Oh Lord, we cast ourselves to you and thank you that you've made a way for all people, those who were cursed and gone astray, those who were far away but leaning in, those who were near but separated by their religiosity.

You've made a way through Jesus Christ to make us sons of the living God. So we praise you when we couldn't save ourselves, you did something to save us and to cover our shame through Jesus Christ in whose name we pray and we live.

Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com Trinity Grace