

Genesis 5:1-32

Introduction

There are a number of well-known stories in the Old Testament which, one way or another, many people are familiar with: David and Goliath, Daniel and the lions' den, and this one that we're going to be looking at together over the next few weeks: Noah and the flood.

Turn to any children's book of Bible stories and you'll find it there... many children learn about the flood from a young age. And it's even been turned into a film with Russell Crowe, the star of *Gladiator*, in the role of Noah...it's a story with box office appeal, apparently.

But it's more than just a story. It's here in our Bibles to teach us where to look to find hope in a fallen world.

Although verse 1 seems like the beginning we're actually coming in part way through the story. Up to this point, Genesis has given an account of creation, with Adam and Eve as the pinnacle of God's creative work. It's described how Adam and Eve came under God's curse because of their fall into sin. And it's told of the spread of sin through their son Cain, who murdered his brother Abel and then went out of the Lord's presence to live in the land of Nod. The descent into sin continued with Lamech, who killed a man and then boasted of his violence.

By the end of chapter 4 the outlook for the human race is pretty bleak. But then comes a ray of hope. We're told that God had given Adam and Eve another son, whom they had named Seth. And at that time, we're told, people had begun to call on the name of the Lord.

Here is a more godly line. And as we continue to follow the story in chapter 5, we leave the family line of Cain and the focus moves exclusively to the descendants of Seth.

That's because the Bible is not just telling us the story of the human race; it's telling us the story of salvation. And that story will unfold through Seth and through his descendant, Noah.

These verses that we're looking at this morning describe the reality of life in a fallen world, and they also point us to the source of hope.

The verses begin with a reminder of the dignity of human life. That's the first characteristic we find here of life in a fallen world. It's life that's filled with dignity, our first heading.

Dignity

Please look down at verses 1 and 2.

The is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them 'Mankind' when they were created.

These opening verses are taking us all the way back to the beginning - to chapter 1 - and to the account of creation.

We're told there that God created mankind in his own image. In order to do that he made us male and female - it takes both sexes to express the likeness of God.

It isn't easy to define exactly what it means to be made in the image of God. It means being relational beings who can speak with each other and enjoy each other's company. It means being creative beings who enjoy making things. It means being moral beings who have a sense of right and wrong. But, in particular, it means being in a position of authority and ruling over God's creation under him.

This is where the story of the Bible begins; with God making Adam and Eve in his own image to rule over the world as his vice-regents.

And Adam and Eve passed on that divine image to their children.

That, in part, is the significance of verse 3.

When Adam lived 130 years, he had a son in his likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

Adam was made in the likeness of God. And Seth is made in the likeness of his father, Adam.

Every child bears the likeness of their parents to some degree. As I grew through my teenage years, I found that my voice changed and, to my surprise at the time, it became increasingly like my Dad's. People commented on how alike we sounded. Even my Gran had trouble telling her son from her grandson when she spoke to us on the phone. We all take after our parents in a variety of ways: in looks, in mannerisms, in personality. Our parents pass on to us particular traits and characteristics. And, crucially, they also pass on the image of our Maker.

The divine image we bear is passed on from generation to generation. It's found in each one of us. It's what marks us out from all other creatures. We alone bear the image of our Maker. And that gives human life unique dignity and value.

That's reflected in the long list of names we find in chapter 5. It tells us that individual people are known by God and significant to him. Every single person who has lived bears his image...and he remembers them long after we've forgotten who they were.

And it's because we each bear the image of our Creator that we each deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

If we've understood the inherent dignity of human life, then we'll find no place for racism or sexism or any form of discrimination in our relationships with one another. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter tells believers to show proper respect to everyone (1 Peter 2:17). James forbids favouritism (James 2:1). All people are to be treated with dignity because we all bear the image of our Maker.

But verse 3 has further significance. Not only did Adam pass on the divine image to his children, he also passed on the corruption of his fallen nature. So the second characteristic of life in a fallen world, which we find in these verses, is corruption.

Corruption

Look at verse 3 again.

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

To be made in Adam's image is not altogether good news; since being in his image means sharing his fallen nature. Adam didn't only pass on the divine image to his children, he also passed on his corruption. Cain murdered his brother Abel...and Seth shares that same fallen nature. We all do. The divine image we bear is corrupted by sin in each one of us.

Israel's great king David, from whom we've received many of the Psalms, was keenly aware of his own sinfulness. In Psalm 51, he says, '**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**' (Psalm 51:3)

As he looks back over his life he can trace his sinfulness all the way back to the very beginning. He was sinful at birth. Even before he was born, from the moment he was conceived, he had a sinful nature.

It's a clear statement of the corruption we've all inherited from Adam. It doesn't mean that we're as evil as we could possibly be. But it does mean that by nature we each have a disposition to sin.

And that disposition to sin is evident from birth. If you've spent any time at all with children, then you'll have experienced it. Children don't have to be taught how to do wrong. It comes instinctively.

And, of course, we all experience that innate tendency to sin every day in ourselves. Even at our best our motives are laced with selfishness and pride.

Life in a fallen world is one that's marked by the corruption we've inherited from Adam...and we need to recognise that.

Though every individual person should be treated with dignity and respect, we also need to recognise that every person's thoughts and actions are corrupted, to a greater or lesser

degree, by sin. That means learning to treat one another with respect whilst not necessarily endorsing each other's beliefs or behaviour.

It means not pretending that we're perfect but admitting our sin. One of the most difficult things I've found about being a parent has been admitting to my children that I've spoken or behaved in a way that's been wrong, and saying I'm sorry.

It means not putting others on a pedestal...because they'll never live up to our impossible expectations if we do. People let us down, especially those we love and look up to...and that shouldn't surprise us.

We long for a world in which we don't hurt and disappoint each other - a world in which I don't hurt you and you don't hurt me - but it's beyond us. That's why forgiveness is so essential to any healthy relationship and especially within marriage.

We have the great dignity of bearing the image of God, but it's a corrupted image in each one of us, marred by sin and selfishness.

And that explains why death is in the world. Life in a fallen world is lived under God's curse - our next heading.

Curse

If you look through the genealogy in Genesis 5 a pattern emerges. Each person's life is described in the same way, according to a certain formula.

Look at verse 3 again.

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

And that formula gets repeated for each generation that follows.

Verse 6.

When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

Verse 9.

When Enosh lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. After he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

And so on.

A number of things jump out at us.

In each case, we're told that the person had a son and then other sons and daughters.

That in itself is a mark of God's grace.

When God created Adam and Eve, he had told them to be fruitful and increase in number. Their offspring were to fill the earth and subdue it. And despite their fall into sin, that's exactly what's happening. In his kindness to Adam and Eve, God allowed them to continue to fulfil the role that he had given them at the very beginning.

He had warned them that if they were to disobey his command they would die. And they had disobeyed his command. Yet death didn't follow immediately. It could have done. God could have ended human life there and then, the moment they had sinned. But he graciously allowed life to continue. And he graciously allowed Adam and Eve to fulfil the role he had given them.

Now, of course, child-bearing would be intensely painful...and every labour ward throughout the world testifies to that enduring truth. Providing for the family's needs would now be hard work. The first family ate only by the sweat of Adam's brow, setting the pattern for all the families that would follow.

But, nonetheless, life went on. Adam and Eve's offspring multiplied and grew, just as the human race continues to do today. It's pure grace. And for the thoughtful, it raises a question. Why would God be so gracious? For what purpose would he allow life to continue after the Fall? It's a question that gets answered as we read on.

And life doesn't just continue...Adam's descendants live long lives.

We're told that Seth lived for 912 years. Enosh for 905 years. Kenan for 910 years. Mahalalel for 895 years.

These are extremely long lives. How should we understand them?

Some regard them as merely legend. Others suggest they have been deliberately exaggerated. Still others have proposed that they were calculated using different units of time. But none of those solutions are satisfactory.

Others cultures have preserved the memory of a time when human life was significantly longer than it is now. And there's nothing in the Bible to suggest that we should do anything other than take these life-spans literally. The long lives recorded here are another mark of God's grace.

Yet nonetheless, even these long lives ended. Again and again we're told...**and then he died**. It's there at the end of verse 5...**and then he died**. And verse 8...**and then he died**. And verse 11...**and then he died**. And verse 14...**and then he died**. And it keeps going.

God had warned Adam that if he ate from the one tree that had been placed off-limits of all the trees in the garden of Eden, then he would surely die. And this is the result of his disobedience. The apostle Paul writes: **by the trespass of the one man, death reigned...**(Romans 5:17). Since the days of Adam, death has reigned over the entire human race. Life has a limit. It ends.

And we all share a sense of loss as we're faced with that truth.

Celebrities die. We didn't know them personally but we still feel a sense of loss when they go, because they've been part of our lives somehow, many of them for a long time- people like Sean Connery, who starred in some of the classic Bond films; Barbara Windsor, who gave us so many laughs in the Carry On films; and from a younger generation, Chadwick Boseman, who played Black Panther in the Marvel films. Pop stars die, who many of us can remember listening to as we grew up - depending on how old you are, you might think of people like Vera Lynn, or David Bowie or, for some, the guitarist Eddie Van Halen. We didn't know them personally but we feel the loss of their passing nonetheless.

Every day, the government reports the number of deaths that have resulted from the coronavirus pandemic. The numbers are staggering. In this country alone, nearly 80,000 to date, globally almost 2 million. And although we couldn't possibly have known all those people, we feel the loss. The sheer scale of it weighs down on us.

And of course, it all comes close to home when friends and loved ones die and the loss is intensely painful.

The repetition of those three words - then he died - reminds us that life in a fallen world is lived under God's curse because of Adam's sin.

But praise God that there is an exception that jumps out at us in these verses. There is one person of whom those three words are *not* said. And it's through considering him that we find hope - our final heading.

Hope

Please look down at verse 21. It says this.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Those are wonderful verses that raise the possibility that physical death may not be the end - it may not have the final word. There may be life beyond this life.

Whereas others lived, Enoch walked faithfully with God. That phrase suggests a special closeness and intimacy in his relationship with God. For Enoch, his faith was his life. He habitually walked with God. And as a result, he didn't taste death.

It's no great surprise that he's included among the great heroes in Hebrews 11, which says this: **By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: 'He could not be found, because God had taken him away.'** For before he was taken, he was **commended as one who pleased God.** (Hebrews 11:5)

There is a way through death for those who have the same relationship with God as Enoch, who, like Enoch, God will take to himself.

That hope of the faithful believer is expressed clearly in the Psalms.

Psalms 49 puts it like this: **But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.** (Psalm 49:15)

Psalms 73 says likewise: **You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory.** (Psalm 73:24)

We live under the curse of death. But there is a way through. There is hope.

And the passage ends by pointing us to this hope in a second way, through a man named Noah.

Please look down with me at verse 28.

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, 'He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.' After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

Lamech is conscious that he's living in a world that's under God's curse. Life is marked by hard labour and painful toil caused by the Lord's curse on the land in Genesis 3. And he longs for relief. He's looking for someone to bring comfort. He hopes for a better life. And that gives us hope, that there is a life to be preferred to this one...a better life, freed from the curse of the Fall.

Lamech pins those hopes on Noah. But it's not going to be Noah who brings relief from the curse of the Fall. That hope would only be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, many centuries later.

Jesus said, **'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'** (John 10:10).

We might think of life to the full in terms of possessions: having a big house, with a flat-screen TV on every wall, wardrobes full of smart clothes and perhaps even a tennis court or

a swimming pool in the garden. Or we might think of it in terms of experiences: travelling the world, watching films, going to concerts, completing our bucket list.

Jesus defined life to the full as eternal life. It's a life of closeness and intimacy with our Creator. He said, **'Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'** (John 17:3)

To have eternal life is to have the greatest of possessions and the most satisfying of experiences. It's to have God himself.

And it's life that death cannot end, that will continue for all eternity.

Our hope is found in the one who came to confront death and defeat it at the cross.

He died for us so that we can be restored to fellowship with God through the forgiveness of our sins.

He rose again so that we can face death without fear, in the confident knowledge that one day we will live with him in a renewed creation in which there will be no more mourning or crying or pain.

As we journey through this account of the flood over the coming weeks, this is where our search for hope will keep leading us; to the one person in whom we find true comfort in a fallen world.

Let's pray.