

## THE WORST EVER HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

Genesis 6:1–8:19

I want to talk today about the worst ever humanitarian disaster. That's the way the United Nations has described the aftermath of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day. Without wanting in any way to diminish the seriousness of that situation or call in question the integrity of the United Nations I have to say that it was not, in fact, the worst ever humanitarian disaster. That description belongs to an event which took place much earlier in human history, the event which we have just read about.

Genesis begins at a fairly slow pace. Chapter 1 describes the creation of the universe and compresses that vast undertaking into a single week, in fact less – just six days and then a day of rest. There's little information about time in chapter 3, which describes the entrance of sin into the world, but we get the impression that it all happened fairly quickly. God looked for Adam and Eve in the cool of the day (verse 8). The story of Cain and Abel occupies a frighteningly short space of time, from anger to murder, and it all happened so quickly.

As we get to Genesis chapter 5 suddenly the pace quickens. From the end of chapter 4 to the end of chapter 5 we race through about 1600 years of history. This is to show the connection between the fall and the next major event in human history, the flood. 'God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways' (Genesis 6:12).

Sin can seem so trivial. Eating that forbidden fruit. Sulking over a rejected offering. But sin has big consequences and we see those consequences in summary in Genesis chapters 3 to 6.

### **Sin cripples the individual.**

It destroys our relationship with God. Before sin came in there was fellowship with God. After Adam and Eve gave in to temptation and disobeyed they became guilty. They became afraid. They hid from God. And God banished them from the garden of Eden.

Sin not only destroys our relationship with God; it spoils our relationships with one another. When God asked Adam if he had eaten the forbidden fruit he said, 'The woman you put here with me —she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it' (3:12). Do you see what's happening here? 'It wasn't me. It was her.' Can you imagine the atmosphere between Adam and Eve after that? 'And what's more,' Adam says to God, 'You put her here with me.'

And then there was Cain. It wasn't long before Cain became so angry with his brother that he resorted to violence and killed him.

He couldn't live with God; he couldn't live with his brother; and finally he couldn't live with himself. 'My punishment is more than I can bear,' he said (Genesis 4:13).

That's still the situation in the world today. We can't live with God; we can't live with each other; and we can't live with ourselves. We're full of neuroses and complexes and stress.

### **Sin wrecks the family.**

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Lamech and his wives. The evidence of family breakdown is all there. The family unit, which God intended to be for our benefit and our enjoyment, became a torture. When sin gets in it wrecks the family. Do I need to spell that out? Marriage is despised. Divorce is common even when people do get married. Children don't know who their father is or which boyfriend is going to be

at home next. Children are resented. They are unwanted, unloved and out of control. And so a vicious circle evolves where the next generation has no standards, no stability and the whole sorry tragedy starts all over again.

### **Sin poisons society.**

Verses 1 to 4 of chapter 6 have puzzled some people.

‘When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal ; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days —and also afterward —when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.’

Some have interpreted this as a reference to angels coming down to intermarry with humans and producing a kind of super-human race. But that would clearly contradict the words of Jesus who told us that the angels in heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30). There is a simpler explanation.

Chapter 4 describes the civilisation which developed from Cain – inventive but lawless, creative but godless. At the end of chapter 4 (verse 26) we read, ‘At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.’ Chapter 5 goes on to describe a different line, the civilisation that developed from Seth, the line that produced Enoch and Noah. Two sons of Adam: Cain and Seth, two civilisations, one godly the other ungodly.

Two things happen in chapter 6. First, there is compromise among the godly line that descended from Seth, the sons of God. They married any of the women they chose. They married on the basis of beauty not godliness. They married for physical reasons not spiritual reasons.

This compromise on the part of the godly went hand in hand with a total moral meltdown on the part of the ungodly, verse 5. ‘The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.’

The worst elements of society just got worse and worse but even the best in society deteriorated and degenerated. This moral meltdown is traced to ‘every inclination of the thoughts of his heart’. The basic problem of sin is not ‘out there’; it’s ‘in here’. It’s in the heart.

Sin crippled the individual. Sin wrecked the family. Sin poisoned society. Sin ruined the world. And the outcome was Genesis 6:6. ‘The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.’ If you envisage God as some kind of heartless deity coldly doling out punishment you couldn’t be more wrong. God’s first recorded reaction is not anger. It’s grief, pain, heartache.

God had to take action, and the story of the flood is the story of that action. God acted in two ways: judgment and salvation. He wiped out the wickedness of the world with a great flood. He literally washed away the filth that had robbed a perfect world of moral health and welfare. Sin was like an open sewer and God washed it away. But alongside that judgment God offered salvation. Verse 8: ‘But Noah found favour – found grace – in the eyes of the LORD.’

Next week we’re going to look a little more closely at that salvation but meantime I want to share just a few thoughts about the other side of God’s action – judgment. The Bible indicates certain facets of God’s judgment.

### **1. It is always righteous judgment.**

God is a just God. He doesn't show favouritism. He isn't open to bribery or corruption. It's summed up in Abraham's words in Genesis 18:25. 'Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

### **2. God's judgment is always evident at new beginnings.**

We see this following the first sin in Genesis chapter 3 and following the first murder in Genesis chapter 4. Other great starting points when God laid down a marker through judgment were following the flood, following the Exodus, and in the New Testament, the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira following Pentecost. At the very end of the Bible the vision of new heavens and a new earth is linked with the judgment of the Lake of Fire.

### **3. God's judgment always follows sin.**

Or, to put it another way, sin is always followed by judgment. God cannot overlook sin. He cannot minimise it or ignore it. God always punishes sin. The amazing thing about the cross of Christ is that God found a way to punish sin and yet forgive the sinner. Christ took the punishment for our sins. God's righteous judgment fell on him.

### **4. God's judgment is always preceded by warning.**

Noah is described in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:5) as a 'preacher of righteousness'. If you read Genesis 6 carefully you will find that it is not just a record of judgment but a record of warning. It's there in verse 3, then again in verse 7 and again in verse 13. God didn't just blot out the wicked. He gave notice. Peter reminds us in his second letter (3:9), that God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

### **5. God's judgment is always accompanied by mercy.**

Paul summed it up nicely in 1 Corinthians 10:13. 'No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.' There is always a way of escape.

The worst ever humanitarian disaster was one that could have been avoided. It was the result of sin and a refusal to heed God's warnings. Following the tragic events of September 2001 when the World Trade Center was destroyed by terrorists people were asking, 'Where was God on 9/11?' A number of Christian writers responded. They catalogued the history preceding that event in the United States where God had been systematically excluded from public life, prayers in schools, in Senate, in the teaching of science, and so on. Where was God? The answer was basically: where you put him: rejected, excluded, dispensed with.

Where is God in your life? Where will he be when you need him?