

Grace and glory

Part 1

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Duration	00:53:46
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jpa007/grace-and-glory

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[00:00:00] First of all, let me say that it is not my intention to speak to you about the flood.

At the side of that great story of the flood, laying so close by it that sometimes we can overlook it, there is what led up to it. And so, with some deliberation, and I hope not in a tedious manner, I would like to examine on a line by line process some of the verses that we've read.

Verse 1, came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth. Those of you who know your Bible, and in a land like this, how good it is that there [00:01:03] are so many who still do, we're confronted in the sixth chapter of the very first book with the fact that when the increase of the human race began to really take effect, there was then a full display of man. Let me illustrate, without venturing too far into technicalities of which I know little, when they're looking for a germ and think they've got it, the medico-scientist will put it into conditions in which it can be [00:02:08] cultured. The whole idea is to accelerate its development, to produce just what we have here, increase. And in view of the increase, which can be enormous as you know, in view of that increase, they can then form a much better opinion of the nature of the life form with which they're dealing. Whether it's good or sinister doesn't worry me at the moment. The illustration is of increase. And so in the very first verse of the sixth chapter, [00:03:04] we're confronted with the fact that when this human race of which we are, each one of us a responsible member, when God found that there was sin from the beginning, that he allowed those first five chapters to pass and confronts us with this, that it came to pass that when men began to multiply, there was increase. And God patiently waited through to the tenth generation, because if you go backwards, you will find that Noah, by direct descent, was the tenth man from Adam. Ten generations. I won't speculate here on the [00:04:07] meaning of the number ten, but it shows a long process in which increase had taken place.

Increase is the great word in this world, isn't it? Increase is a sign of something prospering, whether it's good or whether it's evil. And here in Genesis, the increase is shown to be a complete demonstration of fallen man. Little did Adam think as he vacated the Garden [00:05:03] of Eden, that his eldest son would be a murderer. Little did he comprehend the seriousness of the great avalanche of sin that was going to take place in this world in ten successive generations. But God knew, and God waited. Now this increase is worth looking at, because verse two, it says, The sons of God saw the daughters of men, and they were fair, and they took them wives. In the [00:06:02] plural. And that is one of the first marks of a departure from God's intention. The Lord Jesus Christ himself drew the reins on this when he spoke of marriage. He spoke of it not being polygamy, such as was practised. That was not God's intention. And therefore in verse two, we find that this great increase resulted in the ninth generation bigamy. Lamech, he was Noah's father. He took two wives.

You will find that substantiated in an earlier chapter in Genesis. Lamech took two wives. Again, [00:07:09] I'm not going to go deeply into this, only to say it's remarkable, isn't it? And perhaps an aid to memory to think that when he did that, the first one was called Ada, and the other was Zilla. And if that isn't A to Z, I'm not an Englishman. What it is in the original, I don't know. But here tonight, I'm going to tell you that Lamech broke the rule, as we've all broken the rules that were intended by God. You see, God does rule. He rules by law. In a country like England, especially in its present state, I think we ought to remind ourselves that God rules by law. He gave the sea [00:08:09] its decree. He set the sun on its track. He controlled the moon. He controlled nature.

One of the great writers we respect, who wrote in the last century, towards its end, makes this comment, we hear a lot about the laws of nature. There are no such things. There are laws in nature, but they are God's laws in nature. Nature must not be personified. Nature, as we call it, is the physical, and there are laws, but they are God's laws, and God rules by law, [00:09:08] whether we like it or not. And so, Lamech went from A to Z. And when the downward path, which is intensified by increase, once begins, a man goes a whole way. There are no halfway measures. Sin is an inclined plane, and it's downward. And that is the great story, isn't it? But look at verse 3. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man. In this verse, there's a law. There's a law of limitation. There is a law that God puts forward here that says, [00:10:11] though I haven't interfered until now, I will not always strive with men. My spirit, and the spirit of God, is that active person of the Godhead, which moves in power to accomplish Godhead counsel. My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh.

Apart from the fact that man was made, this seems to be the first time that this word flesh [00:11:12] appears in the scripture in the context of what the Christian comes to recognise as flesh, as opposed to spirit. And the flesh in a man, because we are sinful, and because we've developed our sinfulness, and because we've gone from A to Z, it reveals this beyond all possible doubt, that God was dealing with a man, a human race in fact, and that human race was flesh. And in the scripture, from this word onwards, and especially more so developed in the New Testament, probably [00:12:10] mostly by the Apostle Paul himself, flesh is everything that has been spoiled by sin. Then the Lord, with capital letters, capital block letters, Jehovah, the unchanging one, the covenant keeping God, who said my spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh. Yet his days shall be 120 years. The simple meaning of that is a time limit. 120 [00:13:04] years. And there was going to take place a judgement that was calculated to mark history in this world forever. It ended an age. Now, in verse 4, it says there were giants in the earth in those days. What had started off so small in the law of increase had shown more greatly through the generations until it had gone A to Z, and then God declared his intention.

[00:14:04] He said to himself, man's days, 120 years, and after that there's going to be a change.

But in the meantime, look at verse 4, there were giants. I don't want to put in front of any one of our minds anything that sounds grand about a giant. I worked alongside a man who, at his lowest measurement that he could contrive, measured six feet, eight and a half inches. When he passed my room in the office, he used to tap on the fan light above [00:15:03] my door and say good morning. He couldn't get through an ordinary doorway without putting his hand on the lintel and ducking down. He was a giant, not as big as these men, but the discomfort, the misery to which that man confessed. What was it? It's abnormality. And that's one of the things that sin produces, abnormality. You see it. You see it in people. Perhaps we can all sigh that in some degree we have come under this bane of physical abnormality. Too tall, too small, deficient in eyesight, deficient in hearing, and not the person

that [00:16:07] the creator really designed. And this is the outcome of sin. When first it begins so small it spreads. And this gives us a view of the pre-flood world which is sometimes overlooked.

We can read these verses so quickly and not realise that the fact that there were giants. Oh, there's been all kinds of people, yes, but these were abnormalities that were never intended by God and were solely introduced by sin. But these abnormalities were used by men as though [00:17:05] they were virtues. And isn't that true? Isn't it true that wherever a person has found physical advantage in either strength or quick perception, above their fellow it has been used and it has been exploited. And wherever power has gone to a man it has always turned to violence. And this chapter comments on violence through the world. Of course these men became the great men of renown. It may be that some of the exploits that make interesting reading in Greek mythology have got [00:18:10] a vestige of truth in them when you read this verse. Men of renown. Men who were not of the pure stock. Men who were not formed according to God's intention. And it became so serious in ten generations that God set a determination to destroy. So verse 5, God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. [00:19:02] And God looked down. May we say God still looks down and he sees. He sees more clearly than you and me. He sees more clearly than anyone else because he looks deep into our hearts and knows our thoughts. And therefore we find two things in verse 5. God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that condemns man as a race in his actions. All men's actions, deeds were wicked and there's been no change because as the increase has gone on, so the increase has gone on [00:20:07] and in every dimension. But in this verse there is another little phrase, isn't there? And every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. This is a searching verse on which I linger for just a moment to say that here God speaks of actions and he speaks of thoughts and he attributes correctly the fact to man as unregenerate man that the actions are wicked and the thoughts or intentions are evil continually. And it says, and in verse 6, [00:21:12] and it repented Jehovah that he'd made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart. Is it possible that the heart of God knows grief? It's here recorded. What brought that grief? To see the labour of his hands. To see his great creature, man, so distressed in sin, apparently without remedy. And God thought again. Isn't that the simple meaning of the word repent? We are called [00:22:10] upon to repent. That's to think again. To repent has other meanings too. It is to confess our sin and to turn from it. Now that's second thoughts, isn't it? We have been sinning, we confess and forsake our sin. Do we? Then for such a person the scripture says, he that covereth his sin shall not prosper but he that confesses and forsakes his sin shall have mercy. And so repentance, though it can be a human experience, it would almost seem as if God himself experienced it first when he looked [00:23:10] on sin. If ever I could get a glance of myself as God sees me, I would repent. In fact, to repent has been called taking God's judgment against myself. And God's judgment is a righteous judgment. It's not just a verdict by majority. It's not just a verdict on evidence. It is absolute. And when God judges, as he did here, he, may I say in simple terms, was sorry that he'd gone into this [00:24:03] venture. And he said, in verse 7, I will destroy. What a change from creating. How easy to destroy, how difficult to create. But in the anguish of repentance, and repentance is accompanied by anguish, never let us forget that. If it isn't, there's something wrong, grieved in heart. The Lord God said, I will destroy. He meant it. He will destroy. This came out this afternoon, didn't it?

[00:25:04] That God is a God of judgment. But thank God, the Bible shows that it is his last work, his strange work, a work that he defers. I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth. And that brings us along to the seventh point that I want to make, which appears in verse 8.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Grace is a New Testament word. It's found for [00:26:10]

the first time in the sixth chapter of Genesis. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Really, let me say, what I want to put before you tonight are two enormous circles as I see them, of grace and glory. Up to today, this has been something that has had little connection. I have seen quite clearly that it was my duty to speak of grace, and may we do so in a moment or two, [00:27:06] that leads to glory. And I found an inhibition that I couldn't explain, that there's something which comes between grace and glory. I put it to you like this, that grace is only apprehended by faith. Now, the New Testament tells me in words certain that Noah was a faithful man. Hebrews puts him in the list of the faithful, in the gallery of faithful men, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and it speaks of him as a man before his time. Now, that's something that is true about [00:28:12] grace and faith, because grace and faith are so interconnected. It says in the seventh verse of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, by faith, Noah being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and listened, and became the heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Most people will tell you that Abram was the father of the faithful. I agree. But if you count your list, [00:29:06] you'll find that if Noah was ten generations down the scale from Adam, that another eleven generations came along to reach Abram, the man of faith. And he was a man who antedated by faith, the righteousness which is by faith. There's a beautiful comment made on Noah. I don't know how I've stumbled over it and not seen it until a little while ago, it says, verse 9. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a just man. Now, if you look at that word, just, it means righteous, doesn't it? It is hard for the scholar to put a knife between the meaning of the two [00:30:05] words. It is harder still for him to get it across to a numbskull like me in any language. Noah was a just man. Where did his justness come from? Was he a goody-goody? No. He was a man who had faith in God, and had just lived by faith. And that isn't just something that comes up later in the Bible. It is a principle that is absolute through it all. If God rules by law, he always saves by grace. In this day of grace that we speak of, God rules by law, but he saves by grace, unmerited [00:31:02] favour. And in the day of which we're reading, the day of conscience, in the day when the Mosaic law operated in its area, God ruled by law, but he saved by grace. And grace is ineffective unless it draws from you saving faith. Paul says, by grace you are saved through faith. And that not of yourselves, even the faith is a gift of God. And in this man, tenth in the line from Adam, when the world had gone corrupt, morally, when it had degenerated physically with abnormalities, when every action, every thought, weighed before God was found to be faulty, there was a man of [00:32:11] faith. A man, what does it say of him? In verse 9, Nor was a just man perfect in his generations. That word perfect has the aspect of completeness. It has the aspect of obedience. It has the aspect of being acceptable before God. And I was going to say, if it's not out of place, that God was even surprised to find such a man on the earth, a man of simple faith. And he searches the world tonight to find faith in men and women like you and me. And look at that verse 9 again. The third, [00:33:10] or is it the fourth thing he said about Nor? Nor walked with God. God walked with Adam in the garden, in the cool of the evening. Those days had gone. But if they'd gone, it didn't preclude a man like Nor walking with God. What a remarkable man. What a remarkable man. He wasn't the first. I'm encouraged to believe that at every time and every age, through all the ages, there have been men and women who've walked with God. And what are their credentials? They're men of faith. And it's that very simple faith that draws down the grace of God. Because grace is the expression of God in a sin-sick [00:34:15] world. And God said to Nor, the end of all flesh has come, but make an ark. And in that last verse of that chapter, we're told that Nor did exactly what God had told him. Thus did Nor, according to all that God commanded him, so did he. That's a very small verse to account for 120 years hard work. He preached for 120 years and he gets a monologue, doesn't he, in the scripture. Thus did [00:35:02] Nor, according to all that God commanded him, so did he. I envy Nor having such an epitaph. So did he. Isn't it something that you and I, in our practical lives, ought to strive for? Nor was saved, he was saved because he found grace in the eyes of God. Have you noticed, as an aside, what a beautiful

thing this word grace is? I believe it is 38 times in the Old Testament it is said of a person that they found grace in the eyes of. A king, his master, prospective bridegroom, whatever, [00:36:12] found grace in the eyes of. There is a saying that beauty is in the eye of a beholder. I said grace is in the eye of God. It wasn't in Nor. Nor had no rights to it at all. It was simple faith, simple obedience that brought the grace of God so close that if it hadn't been so and God had said I will destroy, which he will, you and I wouldn't have been here tonight. We owe our life to Nor, to his faithfulness and to God's grace. Now, I've spoken of seven points, there's a great [00:37:14] eighth. In the eighth chapter, after the flood, and this is why I couldn't find out until this afternoon when we heard of the sufferings of the Christ why I had no freedom to talk about the flood itself, after the flood, God remembered Nor. In verse 4 of the eighth chapter it says, and the ark rested on Ararat. Have you ever taken the trouble to find what the meaning of that word is? It means holy ground. Remarkable thing, Mount Ararat, holy ground. Let me throw something else [00:38:14] at you that came to me by accident only a day or two ago. Nor, as you may well remember, released two birds from his ark. Oh yes, this is Sunday school level, is it? He sent out a raven and said of the writer that I was following, the raven speaks of the flesh and it lived amongst the carnage. But he sent out a dove and in the New Testament, a dove is a picture of the Holy Spirit. And there are these three things that are almost obscured that when God remembered Nor, after the [00:39:12] enormous destruction and judgment, what was there? There was resurrection ground, holy ground. There was a spirit. There was the olive tree that the spirit, that the dove brought back before it found its freedom in a new world. Figurative but instructive. Now hurriedly, because we're on ground you know, and in our closing moments I want to go through very quickly seven points in the [00:40:02] first chapter of John's Gospel. These take us from an earthly scene into the counsels of God. John chapter 1 verse 1. In the beginning was a word, the logos. The person that we know as the Son of God in the beginning. Verse 2 says of him, and incidentally the second thing said of him, he was God. Deity, not divine, not derived from God, but himself deity. He was God. Verse 3, the creator by whose word he framed the whole of the worlds, the heaven and the earth. Nothing made [00:41:08] without him. And verse 4, in him was life. Essential in him, there at all times. In him, life was. It always was. And in verse 4, in him was life and the life was the light of men. Life and light. What a person. What a wonderful quick index into the very Godhead that we may ponder [00:42:04] and ponder. And then as we go along, verse 6. I'm sorry, the sixth point is not in verse 6. Verse 14. The word was made flesh. One could speak all night on that, I won't. But I will be simple and say that there came into my hands by a strange coincidence that I'm sure the Lord had something to do with, an enormously thick Bible that had been the study Bible of a man that I knew when I was a boy. He died years ago. It's been in recess for years and years and years, but I remember [00:43:08] seeing this Bible this thick when I was a little chap. It is the most marked Bible I've ever come across without being mutilated. And against this verse, in beautiful handwriting, he's written something that I don't think I'll ever forget in view of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is described as a word of God. And it says, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And if you turn this Bible sideways and put a glass on it, beautifully written in a mapping pen, it says, the letter in the envelope. The letter in the envelope. And some folk only see the envelope, [00:44:03] the flesh, in which our Lord came. God held it against men that they were only flesh. And the Son of God, God's word, the one by whom he came and spoke to this world, he became flesh. But in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. What a remarkable little comment, the letter in the envelope. You might like to think about that a little further, but we then come to this wonderful verse 14, and do you notice that at the seventh point here, it brings in grace. [00:45:04] It brings in grace, doesn't it? The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And when the world had gone wrong, the seventh thing that is said in the sixth of Genesis is, nor found grace. And the seventh thing that's said of our Lord Jesus Christ here, in my count, is that he came into the world, the letter in the envelope, full of grace and truth. He delivered the letter. He brought it right to you and to me. And

what a glorious thing it is. But right in the [00:46:09] middle of that verse, there's in brackets, doesn't there, John says, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. A glory, yes, a glory about which I'd love to speak. A glory that I would turn your eyes to. In the second chapter, at that story of the wedding in Cana, where he turned the water into wine, you've noticed he was amongst the servants. He wasn't making an offer to the governor of the feast. He was amongst the servant boys and girls and saying, fill the water pots, draw out, take it in. And they did. They did just as Noah [00:47:02] did. He did what God said unto him. And this is faith. This is faith in action. And the wonderful blessing, the wonderful blessing was this, that at Cana of Galilee, in someone's back kitchen, he manifested forth his glory. That's where John saw it first. Wasn't it that that brought Nicodemus to him, saying, Master, no man can do these things unless God's with him. Oh, the conviction of the power. May I say, grace is a spin-off of God's glory. What a wonderful person he is. Glory speaks of distinction above all others. Yes. Whatever its grading in men, God exceeds. There's life, [00:48:09] there's light, there's power, and there's love, and there's limit. Because God's spirit will not always strive with men. But it's grace. Someone said, God's a remarkable ace. Something that will cover all, can deal with every circumstance. Grace deals with our guilt. Only grace could deal with guilt. Grace leads us to a saviour who died for us. Grace saves. Grace keeps. When I was a boy, [00:49:01] on my bedroom wall, there was a text which said, Jesus, mighty to save, able to keep. There came a time, as I grew up, when I remember looking at it and saying, yes, it's come to life. Jesus, mighty to save. He saved me. But the second part took a year or two to come through. Able to keep. This is a test, isn't it? And there came a day, some years later, when I looked at that text again on my father's wall and said, yes, not only able to save, but able to keep. And grace leads to glory. It led Noah onto holy ground, Ararat, [00:50:07] through the sufferings of the Christ that were so exquisitely spoken of this afternoon. It leads you and me into glory, a glory that is promised. Grace has given us this hope of glory, a knowledge now that we are accepted in the beloved. Ephesians would teach us that, that grace has brought us to glory. We're accepted in the beloved. I would turn your thoughts, as I close, [00:51:05] with very few words, to the 17th chapter of John, again mentioned this afternoon, where the Lord said, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. That's the kind of person he is. And lastly, in verse 24, I will that those that hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world. And as we look at the wonderful person of [00:52:07] the Lord Jesus Christ, what did John see? We beheld his glory, the glory as of an only begotten of the Father, and lower down speaks of the Father and the Son. What a wonderful privilege you and I have been brought into, and the world around us, we can identify it as we've looked in Genesis. And what are we now? We've got grace which saves and keeps and rolls us onward and upward and forward to a glory that is yet to come, that is beyond my power to describe, but you'll meet it [00:53:03] in the scripture and challenge yourself. What do you mean when you speak of glory, of light, of all the distinctive elegance and excellences of Godhead? Yes, of all that he has planned, and it was all in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the one who came from highest glory to be the word of God manifested in flesh, indeed God's letter in the envelope. It's addressed to you. Read it.