Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am sure that we have all learned, probably the hard way, that to successfully put together a complex piece of furniture, or to install a filter of some sort, you must first read the instructions. If you do not, you will put it together wrong or install it the wrong way round. And similarly, if you do not follow the maker’s operating manual, it will blow up, break down, or fall off. And this usually ends in tears.

Well, we human beings are complex creatures, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And we are surrounded by other complex creatures in families and communities and societies that we need to navigate. And there is technology and ideology to figure out, and money to earn and manage. And there is right and wrong. And there is incredible complexity when you look down a microscope or up through a telescope. So, a pretty important question, in light of all this complexity, is: Who is the Maker of all this and where do we find the instructions? Well, the first words of the Bible are: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*.” And in the first chapter of the Bible, we see why we were created and how we are to live. So, the Bible is the ‘operating manual’ that God has given us. And we do not have to go far into the Bible to see what happens when we disobey God’s instructions. In chapter 3, Adam and his wife ate the forbidden fruit, and God came to them and explained that all creation was now under the curse of sin. And Genesis 4 is a technicolour picture of what a cursed creation looks like. And congregation, it aint pretty!

* It begins with Cain murdering his brother. And that episode ends with us being told that Cain “*went away from the presence of the Lord*.” So, as we read about Cain and his descendants, we are reading about a people who wanted to live life on their own terms, who wanted nothing to do with God and His ‘operating manual.’
* And the name for a society like this is secular. **Secular** means not having anything to do with God. And what we will see in this very first secular society is a spreading of sin. Yes, there are glimpses of beauty, but the dominant theme is a growing beastliness.

And congregation, I cannot stress enough how important chapter 4 is for understanding the Bible and human history. It is the background for every event in the Bible, including the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And New Zealand society today is increasingly secular. And all this highlights **how fundamentally important God’s ‘operating manual’ is**. For in every way, His way is the best way1 But far beyond its benefits for how we live today, God’s ‘operating manual’ points to a new heavens and new earth where sin’s curse will not be found. And Genesis 4 also hints at how we can enjoy the eternity of perfect creativity and blessedness.

And we will see this as we begin with a few words about **the** **creation background** to kind of set the scene, then I will explain the **creeping effect of sin** in this early, secular society, and connect it with society in New Zealand today, before we end with **the Creator’s warning**.

1. So, first of all, just a few words about **the creation background**.
   1. Back in chapter 1:26, we read what is called **the cultural mandate**. That is where God explains His purpose for human beings. He said, “*Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth*.” So, we were made to explore and invent and harness and maximise and grow and enjoy. And we were to do all this to the glory of God and for the benefit of others. And God designed this as an enterprise of perfect harmony. But then came the Fall. And the Fall brought the curse of sin into everything and everyone.
      1. And so, there would now be a **division in humanity**. There would be the seed of the woman, who are the children of God, who are believers, and there would be the seed of the serpent, who are enemies of God, who are unbelievers. And there would be a enmity or hostility between these two groups.
         1. It is the background of every episode in the Bible. It explains the many stories in the Old Testament about attempts to kill off the people of God and the line of Messiah. It is the story of Israel – will they be sacred and obey the law of God, or will they be secular and ignore the law of God?
         2. It is the background to the story of the cross, and it is still the background today – will people recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ, or reject Him and go their own way?
         3. And it is the curse that brought this division in humanity.
      2. But the curse also affects **everything and everyone** – relationships, our bodies, how we think, the elements and materials of creation, and our work. From that moment on, there would be abuse or misuse of people and things and animals, and even best efforts to do the right thing would be met with failure or mixed results or resistance. So, no longer would life just be joy and harmony and beauty; now there would be pain and frustration and friction and ugliness and disease and disability and dysfunction and death.
         1. Just think back over your week. Was there laughter and joy and harmony and beauty? Yes. But was there pain and frustration and failure and tiredness and ugliness? And it’s not just tiny little bits of the bad, is it; its constant and it effects everything! Am I right? This is how the curse affects the cultural mandate.
   2. And so, if you want to maximise beauty and joy and harmony, you must follow the Creator’s ‘operating manual.’ And if you don’t, sin and all its awful consequences will increase! And Genesis 4 shows us what that looks like.
2. It does this, first of all, with the account of Cain killing his brother, Abel. It is such a shocking account, so soon after the perfection of creation. But it shows us, dramatically, what sin can do in a person’s heart. But that account is fairly well known. We want to walk through the rest of chapter 4, which is where we see **the creeping effects of sin on human society**.
   1. And we will start with the beautiful. One of the doctrines of Scripture is the doctrine of **common grace**. It is that we human beings are not as wicked as we could be, all the time. So, believer and unbeliever alike are all capable of kindness and creativity. And God gives good gifts, like sunshine and art and family, to believer and unbeliever alike. So, there is beauty, as well as beastliness. And this is God’s common grace. And we see this in this early, secular society.
      1. For we see **marriage**. And marriage is a God-designed, beautiful thing.
         1. And here is as good a place as any to deal with the hoary old chestnut of **who it was that Cain married**. For this is a topic that creation deniers love to throw at Christians – you are stupid to take Genesis literally because there was no one for Cain to marry!!! Well, Cain would have married either his sister or perhaps a niece. For remember that people were living around 900 years back then. They were very strong and intelligent and fertile.
            1. One writer has estimated that if during the [nine] hundred years that Adam lived only half of the children that would normally be born grew up (and they probably all grew up) and if only half of those who grew up got married (and they probably all got married) and if only half who got married had children (and they probably all had children), that even at the half, half, half rate Adam would have lived to see more than one million of his own descendants. So not only did Cain have a wife, he would have had a choice that was as great as any have today.
            2. And although incest – marrying a family member – soon became forbidden, it was necessary at the dawn of human history. And the genetic concerns that make incest forbidden were not a concern back then because the effects of sin on DNA were not immediately as they are now.
            3. So, that is a very simple explanation for who it was that Cain married.
      2. And alongside marriage, we see **children** and grand-children and great-grand-children. So, this society enjoyed the God-given gift of **family**.
      3. And we see **the first city**, which offered protection from wild animals, and a place of society and industry and art and culture and technology.
      4. And these sorts of things are what we see in reference to the sons of Lamech:
         1. Jabal becomes the father of **those who dwell in tents and have livestock**. And what is in view here is travelling and commerce. Jabal didn’t just live at home and have enough animals for today’s meals; no, he had a tent so he could move around. And he had more animals than he needed, which he could trade for other things.
         2. Jubal was the father of **those who play the lyre and pipe**. And what is in view here is music and song. And everyone loves music and song. They too are a gift from God.
         3. Tubal-Cain was **the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron**. And these are implements that you need to build a city and everything inside it, and for gardening and surgery, and a whole host of other things.
         4. And we will look at the author and exactly what he said in a moment, but Lamech’s words to his wives are in the form of **a poem**. That is why they are laid out as they are in our Bibles. And poetry is beautiful.
      5. So, there was plenty that was beautiful in this early, secular society. And those things and more are a feature of life today, also. And I trust that you thank God for all His common grace blessings.

* 1. But the main interest of this passage is not the beauty but **the beastliness**. So, let’s see this as we note the creeping effects of sin in this early secular society.
     1. To start with, Cain had been banished because he murdered his brother. And Cain lived in fear that others would do to him what he had done to his brother. So, Cain was a restless, fearful, wanderer, who lived apart from his parents, and apart from His Creator.
        1. And what is the growing epidemic in the world today? **Loneliness**. And it is only going to get worse in our social media world of virtual friends, and a declining birth rate and growing population of healthy but abandoned and alone seniors.
        2. And when you do not fear the Lord, by which is meant awe and reverence at His glory and goodness, you will **fear anything and everything else**. And we see that in NZ society today as well – fear of crime and economic turmoil and climate change and death is through the roof!
     2. And to compensate for his lack of roots and his fear, Cain built a **community** of his own, first through marriage, and then with a city. But with the small amount of information about Cain and the people in this city, especially Lamech, and as those who live in a city, ourselves, with ram raids and meth addiction and road rage and rubbish and homicides and homelessness and greed and materialism, we can be sure that the city Cain built, like every other city, collected and multiplied sin and its consequences. So, for Cain, **there was community,** **but there was not closeness**.
        1. And this is what you hear about life in NZ every time you listen to the news. Social cohesion is disappearing. Racial division is increasing. Relationships are toxic. Parents and teachers and the police don’t know what to do with kids and youth.
     3. And in terms of **marriage**, we are told that Lamech was not content with one wife, so he married two. And as best as we can tell, Adah means ornament or pretty, Zillah means song voice, and Naamah, at the end of verse 22, means loveliness. The message? Women were just sexy. This was a sensual, sleazy society were men used and abused women. And this is what always happens when what God’s ‘operating manual’ says about male and female, created in His image, and marriage, and sexual purity is rejected; abuse and misuse increases, exactly as is happening in NZ society today.
     4. And in terms of **Lamech’s sons**, as we have seen, industry, art, and technology are good gifts of God. But you know what you get with industry – greed and envy and corruption. And with art you get exploitation and gambling and prostitution and filth. And what is probably the most common use for metal in human history? Swords and guns for crime and war. Does any of this sound familiar as you look at NZ society today?
     5. And the last characteristic of this early, secular society is **Lamech’s poem**. But what was his poem about? His pride and arrogance about having murdered someone! You see, back in verse 15, God told Cain that if anyone killed him, God would avenge him seven-fold. And Lamech clearly knew about this, as we see in verse 24. So, he was boasting that he didn’t need God; he could look after himself, and there is nothing God or anyone could do about it.
        1. And this is always the boast of secular society. You name the perversion, and it will be celebrated. And the cry of the secular person is, ‘My feelings and my desires are my god!’ I will be happy on *my* terms. And don’t you Christians dare tell me what God says about anything, or disagree with what I do or say. For then you are hating and judging. And I will ban you and eventually kill you if you do that.
  2. So, do you see, brothers and sisters, how there is nothing new under the sun? Genesis 4 is just the first version of what has existed ever since. And it aint pretty! And God Himself has provided us with commentary on this early, secular society and every secular society. We read it earlier in **Romans 1**. When people reject the Creator and worship creation and the creature, they “*become futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts are darkened*.” And God gives them up “*in the lusts of their heart to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves*.” And the evidence for this in NZ society today is overwhelming.
     1. The weird ones in society are the heterosexual ones who wait until they are married and who stay married. That’s binary and colonial and Victorian and oppressive. Everything else is normal and to celebrated.
     2. And we are not allowed to speak about paedophiles anymore; oh no! They are just minor-attracted persons. Have you heard that? It is just their identity. They can’t help it.
     3. And children, not old enough to vote or get a driving license, can be given puberty blockers and have surgery if they think they are in the wrong body, even without their parent’s knowledge or consent!
     4. And we all know who catches AIDS and monkey pox, but don’t you dare say it.
     5. And having listed the sins that characterize a secular society, the last verse says, “*Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them*.” Does our government and media and many in the general population, and, sadly, many so-called churches, give approval to those who practice the sorts of sins mentioned in Romans 1? Do they ever!

1. And congregation, this is where secular society *always* goes, because God will not be mocked by His creatures. And so, that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to **the Creator’s warning**.
   1. Would you please turn with me to **Romans 2:6-11**? The Bible is the instructions or the ‘operating manual’ of the Creator. He has given us His law – how we should live. And He wants us to know the result of obeying or rejecting His law. And here it is: “*He [God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality*.”
      1. So, God is not blind to what goes on down here. He sees and records everything. And we will all have to give an account. And the seed of the serpent, the Cains and Lamechs, the seculars or God-deniers, of this world, will know His wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for them.
      2. We see a similar warning in **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**: “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God*.”
      3. So, let no one accuse God of being unclear or ambiguous or devious – reject Him and live like this, and you will be condemned to eternal hell.
   2. Now, as you carry on into Romans, God makes it very clear that **no one keeps His law, perfectly, or even close**. We cannot because of the sinful nature that we inherit from Adam. We are all guilty sinners who deserve condemnation. And that is where **the gospel** comes in. God sent His Son to die on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. And whoever believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that He died and rose again for the forgiveness of their sins, and commits themselves to living under the lordship of Jesus, shall receive eternal life or inherit the kingdom of God. And that doesn’t make them perfect. Perfection only comes when we are with Christ in glory. But it is only those who have received Christ as Saviour and Lord who want to live according to God’s ‘operating manual.’
   3. And this is what is hinted at at **the end of Genesis 4**. For following the twisted darkness that is this early, secular society, a small, pinprick of light bursts onto the scene. For we read that another son, Seth, was born to Adam and Eve. And “*to Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD*.” So, this is the seed of the woman line. This is the sacred people. This is those who recognize God as their Creator and Father.
      1. And the language of calling on the name of the Lord is found also in **Romans**: “*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*” What does that mean? It means to “*confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead*.”
      2. And when do people call on the name of the Lord? In response to the preaching of the gospel. They hear about sin and hell and salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and they believe! And then they begin to change. They now want every part of their lives to bring honour and glory to God. They want to be more and more like Jesus who loved to obey His Father’s will. They want to obey everything that God has commanded. So, they love God’s ‘operating manual,’ because they know it describes the best life now and the even bestest life that is to come!

So, two questions as we draw to a close:

First, **have you called on the name of the Lord**? Friend, if you die tomorrow, and all you have to offer God is your attempts to be good, He will not be impressed. And you will be condemned to hell. You will only be welcomed into eternal life if you have called upon the name of the Lord – received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. And then you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Him. You must live for Him. For it is only these who will inherit the kingdom.

And second, **what must we do** if we are troubled by our secular society and would really like things to change? Answer – preach the gospel. And that might mean the ordained gospel ministry for you men, or it might mean you sharing the gospel with your neighbours or school friends or workmates or family members. But sin always leads to misery and ruin and poverty and death. So, love lost people enough preach the gospel to them. Tell them that there is true joy and hope and healing when you live in relationship with Jesus.

May God be merciful to New Zealand and grant us reformation and revival. Amen?

Let us pray: