Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

About a year and a half ago, a young woman with Downs Syndrome was enjoying her daily walk around nearby Mt Albert when she was assaulted and killed. And the question on everyone’s mind at the time was: How could anyone do this? And almost every day, we see new video of people ram raiding or robbing a jewellery store or just walking out of countdown with a shopping trolley of stuff, in broad daylight! And there are also videos of the most violent assaults at schools or on the streets. And everyone is asking: Why is this happening? Why are people like this?

Well, a common philosophy today is **secular humanism**. It holds that humans are neither good nor evil; we are just shaped by all that is around us. It says that we do not need God or religion to be good human beings; human reason and human ethics are enough to lead us to do good.

Well, we began to see the fruit of secular humanism in Genesis 4. Cain and his descendants wanted nothing to do with God and His laws. And that made them the very first secular society. And there was a spreading and increasing beastliness in that society. And then we looked at chapter 5, the line of promise – sacred society. And just to be clear, that is not to say that every person mentioned in that chapter is necessarily elect, but at least some of them called on the Lord. So, where did it end? Where did this early world of secular and sacred people end? Well, that is what chapter 6 is about. And it aint pretty. And we are going to see that something unrepeatable and unique happened at this time in world history, but chapter 6 reveals, very plainly, that all human beings are inherently wicked; that we are naturally inclined towards evil. And our only hope for change is God’s grace. And if what I am saying is news to you, then you really need to hear this. But we all need to hear this. Our theme then is that **every part of us has been ruined by sin and will remain that way apart from the grace of God** (repeat). But that doesn’t fully come through until we get to verse 8 and what it says about Noah. We must first look at some difficult and debated interpretation matters in verses 1-4, and then the distressing description of depravity in verses 5-7.

1. So, we begin with verses 1-4 and three **difficult and much debated matters**. And these are: Who are the ‘sons of God’ in verse 2? What does the 120 years of verse 3 refer to? And who were the Nephilim of verse 4? And we will take them one a time.
   1. First of all, then: **Who were the ‘sons of God’ referred to in verse 2**?
      1. Well, by way of **background**, this passage ends the generations of Adam section that began in 5:1. When we get to 6:9 we will begin the generation of Noah section. And we have seen in recent weeks that a key purpose of chapters 4-6 is to show us what a sin-cursed creation looks like. So, the enmity between the seed of the serpent line and the seed of the woman line is on display, as is how sin affects everything and everyone. And as we have said, repeatedly, it aint pretty. The only real glimpses of godliness in this section are the references to the time that people began to call upon the name of the Lord in 4:26, Enoch, who walked with the Lord, in 5:24, and Lamech, who longed for the promised Messiah and eternal rest from sin and its consequences, in 5:29. But at the end of chapter 5, it is around 1550 years after creation. We are at the tenth generation. Millions or billions of people have been born by now. But still the promised child has not come, and sin and wickedness are on the increase. And we need to feel the sense of despair that must surely have gripped those who believed in God at that time. Time was rolling by and creation was going to hell in a handbasket, as the saying goes. But as bad as things were, worse was yet to come. And that is what this first part of chapter 6 is about. Something took place that made the global flood of Noah’s day necessary.
      2. **Verse 1 tells us that there was** **population increase**. Man or mankind began to multiply. What is strange though is that just daughters are mentioned. For, obviously, there would have been sons being born as well. But the focus here is human daughters. And then we read that “*the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose*.” So, who were these sons of God? Well, there are two interpretations. And there are gifted Bible scholars on either side of the discussion. So, this is something where believers can agree to disagree. We actually considered this exact question in our recent 1 Peter sermon series, so I won’t restate every detail we considered then. I can get you a copy of that sermon if you would like me to.
         1. But one interpretation is that the “*sons of God*” refers to **the godly men in the line of Seth** and the “*daughters of man*” refers to the unbelieving women in the line of Cain. And they intermarried, leading to increased wickedness.
         2. The other interpretation is that the “*sons of God*” refers to **evil angels who came down and intermarried with human women**. And I believe that this interpretation is the best one.
            1. And that is because the term “*sons of God*” is **consistently used of angels**, both good and bad, in the Old Testament. Two examples are Job 1:6 and Job 38:4-7.
            2. And as I said a moment ago, the first part of verse 1 highlights the daughters that were born to their parents. So, a contrast is being made between the daughters of man and the sons of God, which doesn’t fit if it just godly human sons that are in view.
            3. In addition, the “*sons of God*” as fallen angels is also **the only interpretation that fits with the other passages of the Bible**, like 1 Peter 3, 2 Peter 2, and Jude, that speak about this episode.
            4. It is also the preferred interpretation of Jewish commentaries on this passage, and it is the earliest interpretation that we have in New Testament church history.
            5. So, this is evil angels intermarrying with human women.
         3. Now, one obvious objection to this interpretation that may arise in your mind is that Jesus said that **angels do not marry** in Matthew 22:30. But Jesus was speaking there about believers *in heaven*, who are like the good angels *in heaven*. Genesis 6 is speaking about something that occurred down on earth. And we know that angels walked and talked and ate food when they came down to earth. So, it is entirely conceivable, if you will pardon the pun, that wicked angels came down to commit this great wickedness at that time. And another possibility is that what is described took place by way of demon-possession. So, evil angels took possession of human males to marry women and produce a corrupt offspring. Whatever the case, evil angels intermarried with human women.
         4. And let’s remember that God had promised that a seed of the woman would one day come and crush the head of the serpent. So, don’t think about this as just some sort of twisted lust episode, think of it as a strategy of the devil to corrupt the female sex and/or intrude into the line of humanity, such that the promise might not come to fulfilment.
   2. But before we consider the result of this ungodly union further, **what does the 120 years of verse 3 refer to**? Some take it as the new length of life for human beings after the flood, as in no longer would they live to be 900 but 120. And lifespans did reduce after the flood. But even 500 years after the flood, Abraham lived to be 175 years old. So, that just doesn’t fit with what happened. What the 120 years is about is how long from this time of ungodly intermarriage until when God would send the flood. And we know that the flood came 1656 years after creation. And Noah was 600 years old when the flood came. So, it was 1536 years after creation, when Noah was 480 years old, that God told him that He was going to send the flood in 120 years. And we will say more about these dates in the flood chapters, but the key point here is that this is **another example of God’s amazing grace**. As we will see shortly, this was a time of unparalleled wickedness in human history. But rather than bring it to an instant end, which He would have been fully entitled to do, God allowed Noah to preach a message of repentance for 120 years! And we know this was the purpose of these 120 years because that exact point is made in 2 Peter 3. In Peter’s day, some in the church were starting to doubt that Christ would return because He had promised to return, soon, 30 years ago! But Peter described this ‘delay’ as evidence of God’s patience and grace, just like the 120 years that led up to the flood. And of course, it has now been over 2000 years since the Son of God was crucified by an unbelieving world. And if you were to pile up the sins of that 2000+ years, the pile would be astronomical! So, again, God would be entirely within His rights to just end it all. But as **2 Peter 3:9** says, God “*is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*.” So, let us praise God for His patience, and let us call on lost sinners to repent and believe.

* 1. But coming back to the much debated and difficult matters in verses 1-4, the last one is the reference to ‘**the Nephilim**’ in verse 4. And the fact is that it is difficult to be sure about exactly what Nephilim means. That is why most modern translators do not translate it. The King James version has ‘giants,’ which is really a poor translation of this word. Many of you will know the story of Goliath, the giant who fought David. And there are several references in the Old Testament to the Anakim, who were giants or a tall race of people. And in Numbers 13, the faithless spies said in their report about Canaan that they had seen the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim, and we seemed like grasshoppers compared to them. But the problem is we do not know how much of their report was just made up to make things sound much worse than they really were. But it is the linking of the Nephilim and the sons of Anak there that gets read back into Genesis 6:4 to suggest giants. As best as we can tell, though, Nephilim means ‘fallen ones,’ or ‘those who fall upon others.’ So, keeping in mind what we said earlier about the strategy of the evil angels here, early Jewish commentary interpreted these beings as ‘fallen and causing the world to fall.’ And that seems to be what is chiefly in view in this passage. They are described at the end of verse 4 as being “*the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown*.”
     1. A new phenomenon of our day is people who want to be Instagram influencers. But this product… Try this diet… Well, whether the Nephilim were giants or not, they were god-like, powerful influencers, for evil.
     2. And just by way of an aside, if you have ever wondered where the stories of gods or god-humans, that you find in ancient cultures, like Greece, come from, well, it may be these ‘mighty men.’

1. So, verses 1-4 record the time in human history when evil angels wickedly intruded in an effort to frustrate God’s plans to send Messiah. And we see the result of this wickedness described in verses 5-7, which is our next section. And it truly is **a Distressing Description of Depravity**.
   1. If you hang around a Reformed church for any length of time, sooner or later you will hear reference to the acronym **TULIP**. It is an acronym that describes the doctrines of grace. Can one of you boys and girls tell us what the T stands for? Total depravity. It is the teaching of the Bible that man sins in everything he does and in every part of his being, so that, apart from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for him to please God. And just to be clear, this is not total as in *absolute*. This is not saying that man is *as* wicked as he could be *all* of the time. Other language the Bible uses is “*dead in trespasses and sins*,” or “*enslaved to sin*,” or “*hostile to God*.” But one of the clearest and most comprehensive demonstrations of total depravity in the Bible is verse 5: “*The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*.”
      1. Now, granted, it involved the added influence of the evil angels and the Nephilim. But the key point here is that *all* people, apart from Noah, whom we will consider in a moment, were entirely given over to unbelief and wickedness.
      2. Just take another look at the first three words of verse 5: “***The Lord saw***…” What do they remind you of? Hopefully they remind you of Genesis 1: “*And God saw … and it was (very) good*.” But now all that the Lord saw was that people were very wicked and evil continually.
   2. And this is the natural condition of fallen man, by which is meant man in a state of unbelief. **Jeremiah 17:9** says, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” **Psalm 14:2-3** says, “*The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one*.” And in the Lord Jesus’ sermons, He spoke about an evil and corrupt generation, and about how murder and adultery and lying proceed from a corrupt heart. He said, “*There is no one good except God*.” And in John 1-3 He used terms such as darkness and flesh and blind and needing to be born again. And all this adds up to the fact that we are, in and of ourselves, totally depraved.
      1. And I hope you are honest enough to see this in yourself. Murder, stealing, and rape – those things I trust we all agree are wicked and sinful. But so are lustful or covetous thoughts. And so are what one author calls ‘Respectable sins,’ like unthankfulness, frustration, discontentment, pride, selfishness, impatience, irritability, judgmentalism, gossip, a lack of self-control, envy, jealousy, and worldliness. And they are all in here (heart), in each one of us! And they cause so much hurt and damage, and, more importantly, they all offend God.
      2. You have heard me liken sin to **poison** before. And I know that none of you would drink a big cup of water if it just had one tiny drop of poison put in it. Why? Because poison contaminates everything. And that is how it is with sin. Sin means that every part of us has been ruined/contaminated/affected – what our minds think on, what our hearts love, what our will chooses, by nature, and apart from God’s grace, is tainted with sin. And what makes it worse is that we love it! And we inherit this nature from our first parents – Adam and Eve.
2. But as Martin Luther once said, “This knowledge of our sin is the beginning of salvation.” For only now will we seek a Saviour and salvation, outside of ourselves, that gives God all the glory! And this is hinted at in verse 8, where we read, “*Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord*.” For this verse introduces the **Delightful Description of Deliverance** that will unfold in the next few chapters. And this is our third and final point.
   1. And the commentary of other Scriptures on what it means that Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord is helpful here. For example, in the very next verse we read that “*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God*.” So, Noah’s godly behaviour, in contrast to the ungodly behaviour of everyone else, is the emphasis there. **Hebrews 11:7** says, “*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household*.” So, there it is Noah’s obedient building of the ark that is in view. And in **2 Peter 2:5**, Noah is called “*a herald (or preacher) of righteousness*.” And what is in view there is that right up until the flood came, Noah called on people to repent and believe. So, Noah’s behaviour, Noah’s obedience, and Noah’s preaching pleased the Lord. And this is a consistent teaching of Scripture – as believers, we can please the Lord by what we think or say or do. Do you understand that?
      1. **Colossians 1:9-10**, for example, calls on us to “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him*.” And in **1 Timothy 2:1-3** we are commanded to pray for all people and to “*lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour*.” And other passages speak about caring for our families and sharing what we have with others as “*pleasing to God*.” So, whenever you resolve in your heart to do what is right, for Christ’s sake, know that what you do pleases your Father in heaven.
   2. BUT none of this saves you! None of this makes you deserving of salvation. And none of what you do makes you deserving of your Father’s pleasure. And the same was true for Noah. He was not saved and he did not deserve His Father’s good pleasure because of what he did. **Isaiah 64:6** says, “*We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags*.” Even the very best that Noah did and that we do is tainted with sin’s corruption. So, the favour that God showed Noah was undeserved. And having criticized the King James version earlier for translating Nephilim as giants, here I will praise it because it helpfully translates one word in this phrase differently and correctly. It says, “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*.” And grace is undeserved favour, which is what is in view here. And congregation, this is the first time we come across the word ‘grace’ in the Bible. It is going to be the dominant theme in all that the Bible taches about salvation and Christian living. Noah and we only deserve death and condemnation because of our sin. “*But God*,” as **Ephesians 2:4-5** puts it, “*being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved*.” So, Noah believed in God, and Noah accepted God’s righteous judgment on this world and placed His hope in the promised Saviour. But this was God’s gift to undeserving Noah. And if you are one who believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, this is God’s gift to undeserving you. And if you know this, it will lead you to strive to live in a way that is pleasing to God, just as it did in Noah.

So, as we draw near to the table, looking to Christ, let each of us acknowledge that we are guilty sinners who deserve condemnation, who are saved by grace alone! Amen.