



Catalog No. 1584

Genesis 5:25-32

22nd Message

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February 14, 2010

WEARY OF PAIN

SERIES: OUR STORY OF ORIGINS

On Friday evening the Winter Olympics opened in Vancouver amidst great pain. What should have been a joyous celebration was tinged with sorrow over the death earlier that day of an athlete in practice. The fact that he was engaged in a deadly sport on a deadly track did nothing to lessen the blow. As the team from Georgia entered the arena, hearts went out to them: the hearts of the athletes, the hearts of the spectators, and the hearts of the TV audience around the world. Over the next two weeks the Olympic athletes will put themselves through all sorts of pain. They suffer in the hope of glory. For some that glory will be winning a medal; for others merely finishing or even just competing will be sufficient glory. Many will suffer the agony of defeat, a pain far worse than the physical pain. But worse still is the pain of death.

This morning our hearts go out to the Poon family as they mourn the passing of their husband and father Robert. For the Christian death is a bitter-sweet time. The pain of losing a loved one is tempered by the assurance of his passage to glory. The pain of observing a dear one suffering in the closing years of life is replaced by relief that the days of suffering are over.

In our pain we search for comfort. At such times we cling to the Crucified. We cling in our grief, he gives relief; we cling in our pain, he will sustain.¹ That hymn, sung as our offertory, is from an old hymn book: *Lyra consolatoris, or Hymns for the Day of Sorrow and Weariness*, compiled by Horatius Bonar, “the prince of Scottish hymn writers,” who is best known for his hymn *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*. It’s hard to imagine a publisher today being willing to publish a collection of hymns for the day of sorrow and weariness. Which is a pity, because we all experience such days. Many Christians want their worship to be happy and clappy. But that’s not how we always feel. Now, thanks to Kevin Twit and the other musicians of Indelible Grace, old hymns such as this are brought back to life, and thanks to Google Books, old hymn books are once again accessible.

“The world is weary of its pain.”² We all experience pain: physical pain, and the far deeper wounds of emotional and psychological pain. Some claim that they have overcome their pain. Others say that if you don’t live in pain then you’re living in denial. Pain management is a big business: medications, counseling, 12-step programs, all designed to deliver us into a life where we manage the pain rather than pain managing us.

Looking through the ads in the paper the other day I noticed an ad for the Jesus Bracelet which promises to “end your pain!” Is it that simple? Put on a magnet-embedded copper bracelet inscribed with the word “Jesus” and your pain is ended!

Pain is nothing new. The world has been in pain for nearly its entire history. Jeremiah lamented his pain 2600 years ago. Two of the most remarkable services we’ve had here were the two lament services ten years ago when John was preaching through Jeremiah. These were shaped around two of Jeremiah’s laments: “Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable?” (Jer 15:18), and “Why was

I ever born?” (Jer 20:18). John didn’t skip over those verses in his preaching and we didn’t skip over them in our worship.

The first person to lament the world’s pain was long before Jeremiah. He is found in the genealogy of Genesis 5. We saw last week that this genealogy spans ten generations. There is a regular pattern to the way each generation is reported. But this pattern is broken in four places. The effect is to highlight two generations in particular: Enoch the seventh and Noah the tenth. Seven and ten are symbolic numbers, so Enoch and Noah are of special significance. Last week we focused on the seventh generation, Enoch. Today we turn to the tenth, Noah.

Methuselah

After Enoch the pattern resumes for the eighth generation:

When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died. (Gen 5:25-27 TNIV)

Methuselah is probably the most famous individual in this genealogy. With our fondness for Bible trivia we know that Methuselah is the longest-lived person in the Bible, at 969 years. His name has become proverbial. The cover story of this week’s *Time Magazine* is about “The Science of Living Longer.” The Methuselah Foundation sponsors the Mprize to encourage research into longevity. Social scientists use life expectancy as a measure of a nation’s development. During the 20th century life expectancy in the USA increased by more than three decades, but we are actually rather low on the table of Western nations. The quest for longevity is big business, as is the quest for youthfulness. The two are not the same thing.

In Greek mythology, Eos, goddess of the dawn, kidnapped Tithonus, son of the king of Troy, to be her lover. She asked Zeus to grant him eternal life, but neglected to ask for eternal youth—a terrible mistake, since she herself had eternal youth. As Tithonus got old and decrepit he begged for death. There are those today who are not so sure that longevity is necessarily a good thing.

For all our interest in Methuselah, the narrator focuses no attention on him. For all his longevity even Methuselah had to die. Even he did not make it to the age of a thousand.

Lamech

With the ninth generation the pattern is again broken:

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labor 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. (5:28-31)

The pattern is broken to explain the naming of Lamech's son. This is the only name in the genealogy that is explained, though Seth's name was explained at the end of chapter 4. The name Lamech gives his son, Noah, means "rest." His explanation employs the similarity in sound between the verbs "rest" (*nuah*) and "comfort" (*naham*). The name is not drawn directly from this verb, though a modern Jewish name is: Menahem (as in Begin, the former Israeli prime minister, and Pressler, the pianist).

Lamech laments not only his own condition but that of all humanity: "the labor and pain of our hands." He attributes this pain to the ground (*adamah*) which the Lord had cursed. Back in chapter 3 the Lord had inflicted pain upon both the man and woman when he passed judgment upon them.

On the woman he had inflicted pain in childbearing:

**"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you." (3:16)**

On the man he had inflicted pain in his work:

**"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." (3:17b-19)**

The Lord had put the man in the garden to work it and to keep it. This work involved no pain or toil, for God himself provided everything for the man. All he had to do for food was to reach out and pick the fruit of the trees that the Lord had planted. But after expulsion from the garden life would not be so easy. God cursed the ground so that it would not cooperate with humanity. Only through pain and the sweat of his brow would the man be able to wrest his food from the ground.

Nine generations later, Lamech was weary of this work and pain. Pain was having its intended effect, provoking him to cry out for comfort. As C. S. Lewis famously said, pain is God's megaphone to a deaf world. Pain was speaking loudly to Lamech. What was it that made Lamech cry out for comfort, rather than one of his predecessors? We're not told, though careful readers point out that in the interval between his own birth and the birth of his firstborn Lamech had seen both the death of Adam and the passage of Enoch. Of course, from the point of view of the genealogy the reason that it is Lamech who feels this pain is because he is the one to father Noah who will have a role in assuaging it.

Weary of his pain, and speaking also on behalf of a world weary of its pain, Lamech looked to his newborn son. On this son he placed all his hopes and the hopes of the world: "This one will comfort us." That's a heavy burden for Noah to carry. Right from birth he carried the hopes of the world upon his shoulders. Many fathers are guilty of placing onto their sons the weight of all their hopes and dreams, their unfulfilled expectations, their longings for relief from pain. But

never was such a weight placed as that which Lamech placed upon Noah.

With this weight of expectation upon Noah, we turn to his record to see how he will fulfill his father's hopes, how he will comfort the world in its pain.

Noah

After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth. (5:32)

Here in the tenth generation, that of Noah, we find three departures from the pattern. Firstly, at 500 years Noah is very much older at the birth of his sons. Prior to this the oldest had been Methuselah who was 187 when he fathered Lamech.

Secondly, instead of just one son, three sons are named. We've seen this before in the line of Cain where three named sons were given for Lamech: Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain (4:19-22). We'll see it again in the genealogy of Shem's line where three named sons are given for Terah: Abram, Nahor and Haran (11:26). In all three genealogies this listing of three named sons indicates that a terminus is reached.

Thirdly, the genealogical record for Noah is broken off after just one verse. The record ends abruptly, with no mention of his subsequent life or of his death. Does Noah escape death? The record actually isn't terminated entirely, merely delayed. We find the rest of the record four chapters later:

After the flood Noah lived 350 years. Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died. (9:28-29)

Noah's seeming escape from death was only temporary. In the end he, too, had to die. But here we have another difference to the pattern. Noah's subsequent years are counted not from his fathering of his firstborn, but from the Flood. The Flood marks a new reference point in the counting of time, a new year zero.

We had expected to hear of how Noah would comfort the world of its pain. But there's no mention of it here in the genealogical record. Some think that Noah does comfort the world in its pain after the Flood by planting a vineyard and drinking its wine (9:20-21). If only life were so simple: pour a glass of wine and feel your pain ebbing away. Many do just this, but it's not the answer. The narrator does take the time to tell us that Noah planted a vineyard and drank its wine, but I don't think we're to see that as the fulfillment of Lamech's hope. There's something else going on.

The answer is found in an elaborate wordplay involving multiple words that spans the Flood Narrative. It is very evident in Hebrew but impossible to translate into English. Lamech names his son Noah (rest) because he hopes that he will comfort the world from its work and pain which arise from the ground which God has cursed. Lamech was feeling pain but he was not the only one. In the next chapter we find that there is someone else who is feeling pain and in need of comfort.

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." (6:5-7)

We might translate verse 6, “The LORD regretted that he had made man (*adam*) on the earth, and he was pained to his heart.” The Lord was pained because of human wickedness. Verse 5 is very emphatic about the extent of human evil. This is not what he had created humanity for. He “regretted” (TNIV, HCSB) that he had made humanity. Other translations read that he “was sorry” (NASB, ESV), or that he “was grieved” (NIV). Elsewhere this verb is translated as “change one’s mind” or “take pity.” We have great trouble with saying that God changed his mind. When we return to Genesis in the summer I intend to devote a whole sermon to this very topic. However we translate it, the verb is used twice here in chapter 6, in verses 6 and 7. It is actually a form of the same verb as Lamech’s hope for comfort (5:29). Lamech felt sorry for himself in his pain. The Lord felt sorry, not for himself, but for what someone else had become, which caused him pain. Both saw a problem and a solution. But they saw very differently. The problem Lamech saw was not the problem God saw, and therefore the solution Lamech saw was not the solution God saw.

Lamech had too small a view of the problem. He had an earth-bound view of the problem and therefore he had an earth-bound view of the solution. He thought the problem of pain could be resolved by a man. Quite what he expected Noah to do we don’t know, but he saw Noah as the solution. What Lamech didn’t see is that man himself was the problem.

Throughout these early chapters of Genesis there is a repeated wordplay between the words man (*adam*) and ground (*adamah*).

1. Genesis 2 opened in the days when there was no *man* to work the *ground* (2:5). This was a good thing because the Lord did not intend man to work the ground.
2. The Lord formed *man* as dust from the *ground* (2:7), but then placed him in the garden. The ground was his origin but not his destiny.
3. After man’s disobedience, the Lord pronounced the *ground* cursed because of *man* (3:17); the result was pain for man (3:19).
4. At the end of man’s life he will return to the *ground* from which he was taken (3:19). His destiny is now the same as his origin.
5. The Lord banished *man* from the garden to work the *ground* (3:23).
6. The Lord cursed Cain, who was a worker of the *ground*, from the *ground* (4:11); though he work the *ground* it would not yield at all to his efforts. Cain viewed himself as driven from the *ground* (4:14).
7. Lamech was looking to a man to provide comfort from the pain resulting from a cursed *ground* (5:29)
8. Chapter 6 opens with *man* multiplying upon the *ground* (6:1) but this resulted in a multiplication of *man*’s evil (6:5)
9. Now, out of a pain-filled heart the Lord determined that he would blot out *man* from the *ground* (6:6-7). This would bring comfort to his regret at creating man.

This is a profound analysis of the human condition. Man is made from the ground but created for so much greater a destiny: God’s own sanctuary there to enjoy God’s presence. Through his disobedience and sin man forfeited this destiny. Banished from the garden to a life of pain in the ground, then banished from the ground to wander outside the Lord’s presence, East of Eden, and now wiped off

the face of the ground. How costly is human sin! How it estranges us from God.

The Lord’s pain was deep for he had created man. Parents whose children have wandered into destructive lifestyles can only begin to imagine God’s pain over what mankind had become. Human evil was the problem and so God wiped humanity away. The Flood came in the year 1656, counting from creation. Noah was 600. His father Lamech had died five years previously. He didn’t live to see how Noah might bring comfort. All Lamech would have seen was multiplying evil and his son building a strange boat. Methuselah died in the year of the Flood. But God graciously preserved Noah and seven members of his family. Through the waters of the Flood God simultaneously worked judgment and salvation.

Did the Flood solve the problem? Yes and no. After the Flood was over, Noah and his family and all the animals exited the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.” (8:20-21)

The Flood didn’t solve the problem of human sin. Before the Flood “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (6:5). After the Flood “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood” (8:21). The Lord was under no illusion that humanity had gotten its act together, that humanity had learned from the Flood and would be better the next time around.

But there was one very big change. The phrase “pleasing aroma” is actually “aroma that puts at rest.” It’s the same verb that lies behind Noah’s name. God’s heart was put at rest, not by the Flood with which he wiped man from the earth, but by the aroma arising from Noah’s burnt offering, the first such sacrificial offering in the Bible. This was an act of tremendous grace on God’s part. He allowed himself to be put at rest. The theological term for this is propitiation. It wasn’t because humanity had changed and suddenly become obedient and faithful. It was an act of pure grace. Humanity after the Flood is no better than humanity before the Flood. But something in God has changed; of course here I have to speak anthropomorphically, using human language to describe what is otherwise indescribable.

The Lord said, “Never again will I curse the ground (*adamah*) because of man (*adam*),” despite human beings being no better than before. Noah did bring comfort to the world but not at all in the way Lamech was expecting. Noah brought comfort to the pained world by bringing comfort to the pained heart of God, if we can put it like that. Of course, putting it this way is rather crass. It was God who was driving this all. He allowed himself to be put at rest by Noah’s sacrificial offering. But this still leaves the fundamental problem unresolved: sinful man is still on the ground, *adam* on the *adamah*. Only now God has forsworn his earlier remedy: he will never again curse the ground, and he will never again blot all humanity off of the ground. So how will God ultimately deal with the problem of pain and evil in humanity?

Ultimately God resolves both the pain and the sin of the world by taking it upon himself. The prophet Isaiah wrote of the Suffering Servant who was familiar with pain: familiar with it because of his own pain, and familiar with it because he took upon himself the pain of others.

He was despised and rejected by others,
 a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
 Like one from whom people hide their faces
 he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
 Surely he took up our pain
 and bore our suffering,
 yet we considered him punished by God,
 stricken by him, and afflicted. (Isa 53:4)

It's not until the New Testament that we understand to whom this refers. The Father asked his Son to voluntarily take upon himself the humiliation of becoming man: not man in all his glory, but man in his sinfulness. And he did so, as Jesus Christ,

Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to
 his own advantage;
 rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 And being found in appearance as a human being,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross! (Phil 2:6-8)

In religious art, there are several standard motifs for how Jesus is portrayed. One of these is as the Man of Sorrows, a term used for the Suffering Servant (Isa 53:3). Sometimes this motif is known by the Greek phrase, *akra tapeinosis*, meaning “utmost humiliation.” *Tapeinosis*, humiliation, was another characteristic of the Suffering Servant (Isa 53:8 LXX; Acts 8:33), and the verb is used in Philippians 2:8. Artists have used this motif to paint some very harrowing pictures of Jesus. The one with which I'm most familiar is hidden away in the monastery on the island of Patmos; it's by El Greco. These paintings remind us of how extensive was the humiliation of Christ, the degree to which God asked him to take upon himself the pain of the world. The Son emptied himself (NASB, HCSB), made himself nothing (ESV, NIV), made himself of no reputation (KJV), in order to enter this pain-filled world and become *adam*.

Lamech was looking for comfort from his pain. The Lord was also looking for comfort from his pain. Lamech hoped that his son might provide such rest. The Lord knew that no mortal human could deal with the world's pain: man is the source of the problem not the solution to the problem. And so he sent his Son as the man from heaven to take upon himself the pain and sin of man, that he might set us free.

And so in our pain we cling to the Crucified. In our grief he gives relief; in our pain he will sustain. Cling to the Crucified: cling to his side, in him abide; hope shall arise, joy light thine eyes.

Thanks be to God.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who took upon himself our pain and sin; the love of God, who allowed himself to be put at rest by the sacrificial death of his Son in our place; and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who is sent to be our Comforter, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

1. Anon., “Clinging,” in Horatius Bonar, ed., *Lyra consolatonis, or Hymns for the Day of Sorrow and Weariness* (1866), and “Cling to the Crucified,” in Horatius Bonar, *Bible Hymn-Book* (1860). Combined by Kevin Twit, “Cling to the Crucified,” on *Wake Thy Slumbering Children: Indelible Grace* 5 (2007).

2. John Masterman, *Almighty Father, Who Dost Give* (1922).

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