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Advent – The Need

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Genesis 6:5-8

Well, it just doesn't work to start in the middle of a story. You can't crack open a novel and begin reading in the middle and make any sense of what's happening. There'll be conversations that make no sense to you. There'll be things that people are choosing to do that confuse you completely. You can't walk into the middle of a movie and make sense out of what is happening. Some of you have tried, but it doesn't work.

You can't jump into the middle of a conversation and actually say things that are appropriate without knowing where that conversation has already been. You just can't begin in the middle of a story, and if you start in the Christmas season with the baby in Bethlehem, you're not starting at the beginning of the story; you're actually starting at the middle of the story, and there'll be things that don't make any sense. Why the celebratory songs of the angels? Why the fearful anticipation of the shepherds? Why the inquisitive journey of the kings? Why the political panic of Herod? Why, why, why?

You really have to begin in the roots of the story, and that's what I want to do with you over the next few Sundays. I want to say this one thing for you this morning and have you consider it. That that story of that baby in the manger is actually rooted in grief in the heart of God. And if you don't understand that grief in the heart of God, you won't understand the glory of the story of that baby in a manger. Turn, if you would again, to Genesis 6, page 5; I think most of us can count that high. And I'm going to read verses five through eight.

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. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. The Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, and I'm sorry that I've made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes Lord.

Look with me at verse six, "And the Lord was sorry that He made man on earth, and it grieved Him to His heart." Consider, for a moment, the deeply personal nature of these words: The Lord was grieved; the Lord was sorry. What is it that would bring such grief to the heart of God? Those words connote something that's personal, some kind of personal offense, some kind of personal affront, some kind of personal betrayal; what offense, what betrayal, what personal thing could be that significant that it would literally bring tears to the heart of God? What is it?

Look at the words of verse five, “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.” Could you get more graphic, more specific, more all-inclusive words here? God saw that the wickedness of man was great. Now, all over the inhabited earth were people, and constantly, they were doing things evil in the sight of God, and every intention of the thought of the heart of people was only evil continually. What powerful graphic words! Could there be a sadder passage in all of Scripture?

But I want you to think about this; you don't really understand the great horror of these words; you don't understand their tragedy; you don't understand this sad thing that would bring such grief to the heart of God if you don't first understand these words relationally. This passage is describing something that's deeply personal, and if you don't understand the deeply personal, the deeply relational aspect of what's being described here, you don't really understand the glory of the sending of that baby to Bethlehem. You say, “Paul, I'm not sure I understand what you mean.” Well, let me take you on a bit of a journey.

Human beings were created, were hardwired to love God. That love of God, that God-ward way of living, that God-consciousness, was to be the thing that would shape every thought and every motive, every choice, every decision, every word, and every action so fundamentally, that you could ask me in any situation why I'm doing what I'm doing, and I could give the answer – God.

I would recognize His existence; I could recognize His authority; I would recognize His grandeur; and as an act of deeply personal love, I would choose to serve Him with all of my time and all of my energy. That's what we were created to do. We were made for God. We were made to love God! I'm not describing first something spiritual; this is what all human beings were made to do – this is the calling of all humanity. Love God!

All of us here are lovers, sounds funny doesn't it? But you were wired to love, everything you would ever do in your life, wherever you do it, is always driven and motivated by love, and the love that was to motivate us was God-ward love. That's how we were meant to live. You see, it's so important to understand that obedience is not somehow some kind of technical submission to abstract rules—that's not what obedience is.

Obedience is rooted in the love of God, and because I love God the lawgiver, I find joy in staying inside His boundaries. I find joy in what He calls me to do. I find joy in serving Him. I find joy in pointing to His glory because I love Him. You know that is true in any relationship. When you love someone, you want to serve them; you desire to please them; you find joy in their joy. That's how every human being who was ever given life and breath was meant to live – that was the plan!

And now, it's very clear in Genesis 6:5, that something has happened because there must be some other love that has claimed the heart of human beings...because no longer do they delight to serve God; no longer do they find joy in His joy; no longer do they want

to stay inside of His boundaries, but they willingly, purposefully, continually do what is evil in His eyes. What would bring distress to His heart? How could it be any worse than that?

Think of Christ's summary of the law when Jesus is asked, "What's the greatest command?" He summarized the law and it begins with this, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself." What's the greatest command? What's the command of all commands? The root command – it's...love God! And that the love that initiates all the other commands, listen, if love for God is the ultimate command, then the greatest evil of evils is failure to love God, because when I don't love God, I will not stay inside of his boundaries; I will not live for His glory.

Now, as you're reading here, we need to understand this; when human beings no longer love God as they should, it doesn't mean that they don't love, because you always love; you were hardwired to be a lover. So, if you're not loving God, then you will give that love to somebody else. No one in this room is loveless. That's why I said earlier, "You're all lovers, and God owns your love at the deepest, most profound level or something else does."

And so, when you're reading here about this evil and wickedness that brought grief to the heart of God, you should ask the question, "What love is so seductive and so powerful and so deceptive that it has the possibility in sin to replace the love that I was meant to have for God? What an important question.

Paul, dear apostle Paul, as he is making just a brief comment on the reason for the incarnation of Jesus Christ in II Corinthians 5:15, He says this, oh hear these words, "Jesus came; that baby was born so that those who live would no longer (you can finish this) live for themselves."

The thing that always replaces love for God, the thing that leads to this endless catalog of evil is love of self; somehow, some way, we all insert ourselves into the center of our world. Somehow, someday, all of us ascend to His throne. And we don't find delight in serving Him. We're obsessed with our will and our way. We want to be sovereign over our own lives. We want to set our own rules. We're obsessed with our own comfort and our own pleasure and our own happiness.

And when you live for yourself, you will step over God's boundaries again and again and again, because your heart isn't motivated by love of Him. It doesn't take a whole lot; just look around, and you see massive empirical evidence of this dominating, controlling, enslaving, life-shaping self-love.

What is it that makes a marriage so hard? You're looking at me like you don't know what I'm talking about. It's selfishness; it's self-love. I marry you because I love you and have a wonderful plan for your life. And why is it that I find it so hard to serve, so hard to let

a discussion go without it becoming an argument, so hard not to say, “I told you so.” So easy to feed myself, and I am not really concerned about feeding you. So wanting to have, so much of a struggle with giving, is it not this, this thing this love of self that so quickly replaces love for God?

What is it that makes parenting so hard? You've given birth to self-sovereigns. They want to write their own law. They want to set their own rules. I never had one of my children say to me, “Dad, if you could just give me more rules, if you could exercise more authority in my life, I would feel so secure.”

I've told this story many times and maybe here in the evening, but it fits so well right here. We were heading out on a family road trip. If you want to experience the depravity of the selfishness of sin, go on a long family road trip. You'll not only experience your children's, but yours.

Our son, Ethan, had some polyps in his nose, and he would wheeze when he would breathe. It was a bit distracting. He is sitting in the back seat next to his sister, and she, somewhere on the trip, says, “Dad, Ethan is bothering me.”

I said, “What is he doing?”

She answered, “He's breathing.”—Oh I'm not done yet.

I said, “What do you want me to do?”

She told me, “Tell him to stop.” My brother is respirating; if he could stop that, my life would be so much better.

Now we laugh, but think about this, every act of murder and violence is rooted in self-love; every moment of greed is rooted in self-love; every kind of gossip is rooted in self-love; every bit of disobedience to parents is rooted in self-love; every moment of adultery is rooted in self-love--the evil of the world has happened because we no longer love God as we should.

It's a tragedy; it's a horror, because the world was designed to have at its center, love of God and when that's not there, things that should work, don't work; things explode into evil and chaos, and we experience that every day – watch the news. What a tragedy! How sad!

Listen, you know God loves the creatures that He made by the fact that His heart is broken because, if you love someone, and they turn their back on you, they betray that love, and they set their love on someone else – if your heart isn't broken, you have no love in you. God proves Himself, not just to be sovereign, and not just to be Creator, and not just to be Almighty, but to be a God of marvelous love as He weeps at the betrayal

because human life was meant, in its fundamental form, to be a beautiful love relationship between God and man.

How sad, when you read this passage, you should let your mind's eye go to see tears in the eyes of God. You should let the imagination of your ears go to hear weeping from the voice of God. God's grieved. Because not only has that love been taken from Him, that love has been stolen for us. It's the ultimate of human betrayals.

Well, if you get that far in the passage, you have to be asking this question, "What in the world is God going to do?" How will God respond to this ultimate betrayal? Because you see, God understands this...that every sin is vertical – you have never, ever sinned a purely horizontal sin in your life. Every sin is forgetting Him; every sin is refusing to love Him; every sin is a rejection of His presence and His glory and His authority—every sin is vertical.

That's why David, in confessing his sin of murder and adultery, is saying, "Against You and You only have I done this thing." What David is saying, listen, "My failure wasn't first that I didn't love Bathsheba and Uriah as I should, God, my failure was...I didn't love You as I should. And when I didn't love You as I should, I was able to do these horrendous things. This is against You!" How would you respond in the face of such a betrayal?

Well, look at verses seven and eight. So the Lord God said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Verse seven sounds like a sad and horrible end to the story. Don't you hate it when you watch one of those movies, and you're hoping for a great ending, and it ends in disaster? And you say, "I gave 90 minutes of my life for that?" It sounds like this is it. That God, not in an act of ugly vengeance, but God in holy, righteous justice says, "Enough! I made you. I owned you. I provided every good thing you could ever want, a life of beauty that you could've never ever made for yourself, and this is what you do, you turn your back on me. I will wipe you out! I will wipe the earth clean." God has every right to do that. And it's not unrighteous anger; it is holy and righteous justice that sends the waters of the flood to wipe the earth clean.

It would seem like this is the end of the story. You would say, "No, no, no! Is this love story going to end this way?" Well, it's not because Genesis 6 has a verse eight, and it says this, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." By an act of sovereign Grace, God placed His favor on Noah and his family. You know the story; they were chosen by God's grace to survive the waters of the flood with some animals there in the ark.

And it's very important to note what happens after the waters of the flood recede and the earth dries. God makes a covenant with Noah, and God says, "Noah, I'm going to bless you and not only bless you, but I'm going to bless your descendants." If you read

through the genealogy that follows, you'll read a lot of names you probably never read much before, but you'll come to a very familiar name –the name Abraham. Because Abraham was one of those descendants, and God made a covenant with Abraham, and He said to Abraham, “Not only will your descendants be blessed, but through your seed, all the nations of earth will be blessed.” The apostle Paul alerts us to the fact that the seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ. You see, the only way this horrible brokenness of relationship could be rectified is for God to send His Son.

Now, look at Genesis 6 again. I want to explain to you why it says, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.” Now listen to what it says, “...and every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Listen, our big problem is not first a behavior problem. If all our problem was that occasionally we behave in wrong ways, you could probably reform yourself and get better.

But your problem is deeper than that. Your problem is a heart problem. In the Bible, the heart is the control center of the human being. The heart is the directional system of the human being. The heart is your causal core, and whatever controls my heart will then control my words and behavior. The one thing I am not able to do is escape my heart.

And so, I need to be rescued. Someone needs to do for me what I can't do for myself if I'm ever going to be one of those people that loves God in the way that He was meant to be loved. I need rescue! And so, God sends His Son, the Lord Jesus, to be exposed to all the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, but to live in the midst of all of that brokenness and all of that temptation an utterly perfect life, that life flowed out of His love for God, His love for the Father. He said, “I came to do Your will, O Father.”

And in every thought and in every desire and in every word and in every action, He perfectly obeyed. He did what we are unable to do. And He died a satisfactory death. He took our sin upon Himself and paid the penalty for our sin with His death so that there would be hope for us, that finally love of self would be defeated, and it would be replaced by the love of God. So that someday, we would stand before Him, and every cell of our hearts would fully love Him so that every word and every thought and every action would be pleasing in his sight. That's the hope of redemption.

Now, that work of the Messiah is an event and a process. By His work on the cross, the power of sin has been broken. He's made a public spectacle of the enemy, triumphing over him by the cross. And so, I need not live under the slavery of sin any longer, but you know this, the presence of sin still remains and is being progressively eradicated by His sanctifying grace.

Listen, there are times when your thoughts and my thoughts are shaped by love of God, but not always; there are times when the things we desire flow out of love for God, but not always. There are times when the words you speak are formed, the content of those words are formed by love for God, but not always. There are times when you act in ways

that you wouldn't act if you didn't first love God, but not always. You gave empirical evidence this week that that war of love still goes on in your heart. And that brought evil and chaos into the place where you live. Maybe that struggle was even this morning; even as you're preparing to go to a service of worship, outbreaks of self-love create anger and division and conflict. How ironic!

And so, everyone in this room still needs to embrace the sad reality of this betrayal and the glorious celebration of the hope that is ours represented by that baby in a manger who has come on this mission of rescue and deliverance. And because He came, there will be a day when there'll be a company of people whose every cell of their hearts will be controlled by love of God, and they will live inside of God's boundaries and live for His glory forever and ever and ever.

Maybe this is a story that is very familiar to you. Maybe you've placed your trust in this Jesus, but you would say this morning, "Paul, you're right. I still see that war, and I still need the resources of grace that can only be found in the Lord Jesus." Maybe you're here this morning, and for the first time, you have insight to say, "I don't think I've ever lived for anybody but me."

I would plead with you, confess that to the Savior, Lord Jesus, this morning; seek His forgiveness; seek His grace. We see that moment of judgment of the flood wasn't the end of the story because this God of glory and power and sovereignty is a God of glorious grace. And He sent the Son of His love to, by grace, return to us our capacity to love Him in the way that we were designed to love.

Let's Pray: Lord, may our hearts be stirred with the horror of Genesis 6:5 through 8, so that they may be gripped by the celebration of the coming of Jesus to earth who would live and die in our place so that we would have hope of a complete restoration of that love for You as it was meant to be the single, most powerful force of motivation in our hearts. We would say that we love you, but we must say we are so thankful that we've been loved by You. Thank you for your redeeming, forgiving, delivering love. In Jesus name, Amen.