GRIEVING THE HEART OF GOD
Genesis 5:28-6:14

Let's pray – Father God, creator of heaven of earth, would you come close to us today and illuminate the dark places of our hearts and lives so that we can find healing and hope in your presence. We ask that your Holy Spirit would touch us where we need your touch the most. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION -

When my brothers and I were children, we sometimes fought with each other. If our fighting was bad enough, my mother would do one of two things. She would either get up and leave the room, to remove herself from the unpleasantness. Or she would lift her hands in the air and bring them down as if making 2 exclamation points and exclaim loudly, "You are the world's worst children!"

Many years later I realized that fighting between siblings is quite common because sibling rivalry is a real thing. Most, if not all, families with children will experience some fights along the way as a result. But just because it is common or normal for siblings to fight doesn't make it pleasant to be around.

When I became a parent and saw my own children fighting, I realized that what my mother was expressing was deep grief that her children were not getting along. As I saw my own children fighting, I felt pain in my heart, and I wanted them to stop and just get along too. I loved them all and didn't want to see one of them hurting another one.

The capacity to feel grief over people exhibiting unloving behavior towards one another is one of the characteristics that reflects the fact we are made in God's image. The Bible tells us that God himself is grieved over the hurtful things human beings do to each other and our disregard for his commands to love God and love neighbor as we love ourself.

Let's look at Genesis 5:28 – 6:14 together now.

5 28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. 29 He named him Noah[c] and
said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground
the Lord has cursed." 30 After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other
sons and daughters. 31 Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.
32 After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

6 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were
born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and
they married any of them they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend

with[a] humans forever, for they are mortal[b]; their days will be a hundred and twenty years."
4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
5 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. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 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." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Noah and the Flood
9 This is the account of Noah and his family.
Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.
11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress[c] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.

Did you notice how God was grieved by the situation on the earth in Noah's day?

Genesis 6:5-6 said:

5 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. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

If you have ever learned more than 1 language you will know that it can be difficult to capture the meaning of a word exactly when translating from one language to another. A word in one language might translate several ways in a different language.

The Bible was originally written in 3 languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. So, when we read the Bible in English, we must be careful to consider what the original language was trying to convey.

When our English translators use the word, "regretted" here, we might think in English, "Oh, that means God made a mistake, he miscalculated, there was a design flaw. God is confessing that he wished he had never made human beings."

But the Hebrew word *nacham* [**5162 [e] 6 way·yin·nā·ḥem** (וַיִּנָּחֶם)] used here reflects a deep emotional sense of sorrow and grief over a situation. In this case, the anguish of a loving, Creator God, who is watching his children choose paths of self-destruction and violence. It's like breathing strongly, or sighing deeply, when one is grieving. So, *nacham*, which our translators have called, "regret" in English, is not meant to indicate a confession of error on God's part. Rather, it is meant to convey the sense of deep sorrow and grief God felt as he witnessed human sin.

Going back to my opening remarks about my mother - Although I can remember a handful of times when my mother loudly exclaimed, "You are the world's worst kids!" there was never a moment when my mother would have said she wished we hadn't been born. She had prayed for years to be able to have children. She saw us as a gift from God. That doesn't mean it didn't break her heart when she saw us fighting.

Life is rarely black and white, and we must often hold in tension seemingly contrasting ideas like this. My mother hated our behavior when we fought with each other, but my mother didn't hate us. That's what *nacham* is trying to convey… it doesn't mean God wished he didn't have human children anymore. Rather, it means God's heart broke when he saw the way his children were behaving.

Human beings had corrupted the gift of free will God had given them. They used it to do evil instead of the good God desired for them. They used it to hate instead of to love. And God who does not stand aloof from his children was broken hearted over what he saw.

That's why the sentence that begins with God regretting he had made human beings goes on to explain that God's heart was deeply troubled.

The word translated here as "deeply troubled" means to hurt, pain, grieve or sorrow [6087 [e] way·yiṯ·ʿaṣ·ṣêḇ]

For the linguists among us, the grammatical form which is used here adds a unique nuance to our understanding of what is going on. It is a hithpael verb stem which primarily denotes an intense reflexive action. That means someone does something intense to oneself.

If that all sounded like gibberish to you, it's fine. I'll give you a few examples – He hid himself, the people sanctified themselves, he completed the marathon himself. In this case, "God grieved himself," or "God made his own heart suffer."

The implication of this verb conjugation is that God didn't just passively experience the pain. He voluntarily chose to open his heart and allow intense emotional suffering, anguish, into his own heart in response to humanity's behavior.

The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8 & 16). To love is to open oneself up to the possibility of experiencing relational pain. If you keep your distance from others, or you harden your heart so you can't feel, you won't experience pain. But you won't experience love either.

God did not harden his heart to keep from feeling the pain. He was not detached, distant, or cold. God was not acting as a stoic observer, removed from all feeling.

God allowed himself to feel deeply and chose to open his heart to feel the sorrow and grief over what his creation was choosing to do, because He loved what he had created.

Many of us are familiar with the words of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Long before Jesus came into the world, it would be correct to say, "For God so loved the world, that God opened his heart and allowed it to be filled with pain, as he grieved over what he saw on earth."

God was deeply and personally affected by the weight of the wrongs his human children were doing.

When you think of God, is that the image you have of Him? Do you know God to be someone who loves you so much He would willingly open His heart to you and allow you to hurt him by the choices you make? Do you know God to be someone who grieves over your sin, when you choose to hate instead of to love?

After Eve sinned in the garden of Eden by eating the forbidden fruit, one of the consequences God gave her was God said he would greatly increase her pain in childbearing. The pain of bearing children doesn't just come for a few moments in the delivery process. It comes in form of issues like infertility, or complications like death that sometimes happen in giving birth.

And the pain of childbearing also happens all throughout your child's life. When you see your child get hurt or when you see your child make a bad choice, it grieves you too, because you love them. Eve would have felt this pain very deeply when her oldest son Cain murdered his younger brother Abel, sometime after she and Adam were evicted from the garden of Eden.

But what we discover in Genesis 6, is that God also feels the pain of child rearing and grieves deeply when his children go astray.

Genesis 6 sets up a direct contrast to what happened in creation.

Do you remember when we read Genesis 1 together? After God spoke each part of creation into existence we read the words, "And God saw that it was good."

For example, God said, “Let there be light and there was light. And God saw that it was good…And there was evening and morning the first day” (Gen 1:3-5).

At the beginning of the world, God spoke…creation obeyed…and God saw that it was good.

By the time Noah was alive in Genesis 6, things had turned completely upside down. Instead of God seeing that things were good, God now saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth. God saw corruption and violence. The good creation God had originally made, was ruined by human beings who rejected God’s values and didn’t obey his word. This is why God was grieved, because what God saw was no longer good.

Let’s read Genesis 6:1-6 again

6 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were
born to them, **2** the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and
they married any of them they chose. **3** Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend
with[a] humans forever, for they are mortal[b]; their days will be a hundred and twenty
years.”
4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of
God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes
of old, men of renown.
5 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. **6** The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart
was deeply troubled.

These are some of the most puzzling and bizarre verses in the whole Bible.

To begin to understand this passage, it helps to realize that in Hebrew, there is an almost identical linguistic and literary structure in the language of Genesis 6:2 and the language of Genesis 3:6. Both verses begin with an observation, where a person or people see something, evaluates for themselves that it is good or pleasing or desirable, and then they take it for themself. The implication is that in both cases the observer took what was forbidden or outside of the boundaries God had set.

Our English translations don’t capture this, but if we follow the wording and structure of the Hebrew when we translate into English, it becomes clear as this slide will show.

Genesis 3:6
6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

Genesis 6:2 - Hebrew

2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were good, and they took for themselves wives from all that they chose.

Genesis 6:2 - NIV
2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

What isn't clear from our English translations becomes clear from the Hebrew. The literary structure is the same and the words for saw, good and took are identical in both verses.

These 2 verses mirror each other, with an observer looking at something, using their own judgement to determine whether it was good or desirable or pleasing, and then taking it for themselves.

In Eve's case this was clearly done in a way that overstepped God's boundaries, as she looked at and took something God had clearly forbidden.

She used her physical eyes to determine what she thought was good and pleasing, instead of listening to the voice of God and what he had said was good and not good. Based on her own evaluation she then chose to cross a boundary God had set in order that she might try to attain something she believed would make her better or satisfy some desire that God had said no to.

Scholars have long asserted that Genesis 6:2 is an echo of what happened in Genesis 3:6. The parallel would imply that the Sons of God were doing what Eve had done back in the garden of Eden.

In the same way Eve's temptation involved looking and desiring something that appeared "good" to her but was outside the boundaries God had set, we are meant to understand that the Sons of God made the same mistake. They looked with their physical eyes and desired what they thought looked "good" and took it for themselves instead of trusting in God's wisdom and living within the boundaries he established.

And just as Eve's sin led to judgement and death, so too their sin led to God's judgement and death.

This leads us to the question of, who were the Sons of God and the daughters of men we read about here and what boundaries were crossed?

Bible scholars have long debated these issues.

There are 3 main views.

1. Is that the Sons of God were fallen angels who had sexual relations with human women.

2. Is that the Sons of God were a royal line of tyrant kings who abused their power and practiced polygamy to build their harems.
3. Is that the Sons of God were the godly descendants of Seth who compromised their relationship with God and intermarried with the daughters of Cain's descendants.

The first view is not widely held because it seems to contradict what Jesus said in Matthew 22:30:

> **30** At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

This suggests that angels do not engage in sexual relations, thereby ruling out this understanding. Some have argued however that the fallen angels (or demons) took on human form and mated with human women to produce a rare breed of giants or hybrids known as the Nephilim.

The second view is that the Sons of God referred to a line of tyrant kings. These powerful warlords or tyrant kings took multiple wives and their children, the Nephilim, grew up to also be powerful and legendary "men of renown". This view is supported by the idea that in the Ancient Near East, kings were often viewed as divine or semi-divine representatives of God.

This is further supported by the fact that later in the Old Testament God called several kings his sons. This idea is that of an adopted relationship rather than a literal physical descent.

For example, in Psalm 2:6- 7 the title "son of God" is given to an unnamed king.

> **6** "I have installed my king
> on Zion, my holy mountain."
> **7** I will proclaim the Lord's decree:
> He said to me, "You are my son;
> today I have become your father.

Later, this title would be given to King David. We read in Psalm 89:20, 26, 27

> **20** I have found David my servant;
> with my sacred oil I have anointed him.

> **26** He will call out to me, 'You are my Father,
> my God, the Rock my Savior.'
> **27** And I will appoint him to be my firstborn,
> the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

David is also told later that one of his children would be God's son (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 17:13)

So, it is plausible that the "Sons of God" mentioned here were of royal descent. In which case their taking of whichever human daughters they chose would be an abuse of power.

With that said, the most widely held view is the third view that the Sons of God referred to the godly descendants of Seth who compromised their value system and relationship with God by intermarrying with the daughters of men who are understood to be the ungodly descendants of Cain. Their children, the Nephilim would not be mythological giants or demonic half-breeds, but rather powerful men and heroes in their day.

If these were indeed the descendants of Cain, then the violence and value system of Cain's line were now intermingled with the godly line of divine promise.

We read in Genesis 6:11 – 12:
11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. **12** God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

We saw violence erupt for the first time when Cain rose up and killed his brother Abel. We saw how after that Cain moved out from the presence of the Lord and built a city that he named after his son. We discussed in an earlier message how Cain's descendants continued in the patterns of disregard for God's ways – we saw a different Lamech, not the Lamech who was Seth's descendent and Noah's father, but an earlier Lamech, who was one of Cain's descendants – that earlier Lamech married 2 wives and killed a man and then boasted about it.

It would therefore appear that by the time Noah was born, the culture and values of Cain's family had spread and infected the whole earth. So, this third view is a very plausible explanation.

So, which interpretation is correct? What actually happened in Genesis 6? Was this Spiritual Rebellion, Abuse or the Compromising of God's values?

We don't have to know exactly what was happening in order for us to understand the end result was not good. None of these possibilities is good. Whatever was going on, we know that God called it wicked and evil and the result was increased violence and corruption on earth.

The point is clear – God's beloved children were going deeper and deeper into sin and were moving farther and farther away from God.

CONCLUSION

Our world today doesn't seem much different, does it?

There is still much corruption, violence and evil, isn't there?

Many people still evaluate for themselves what they think is good and they try to take it, even if it is not pleasing to God.

Many Christians compromise their value system. We are called to be in the world but not of the world and yet many of us behave as if we are of the world.

This grieved the heart of God back in Noah's day and it still grieves the heart of God today.

Next week we will talk about how to escape the corruption in the world, as Noah did, when he found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

But for today, it is enough for us to know that our sin grieves the heart of God. When we choose to disobey his commands, it hurts his heart.

Jesus summed up the whole of God's commands in 2 sentences.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

1 Corinthians 13 tells us what love is.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

That's a big list, isn't it. But if we fail in any one point, we have failed to do what God has asked of us.

God is love. That means God is all those things. God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, God does not boast. God is not proud. God is not rude. God is not self-seeking. God is not easily angered. God keeps no record of wrongs… if we confess our sins to him. He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins if we acknowledge that what we have done is wrong.

Our sin grieved the heart of God so much that he came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ so that he could take the punishment for our sins and offer us His life in exchange.

It was not an easy path for him.

The gospel of John records Jesus' prayer for us, as he was preparing to go to his death on the cross. He said:

27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27)

And knowing that he had come to die in our place, he prayed in similar anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion: "My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death." (Matthew 26:38)

"And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (In Luke 22:44)

It distressed God in Noah's day to see the wickedness and the evil so much that he opened his heart and came himself to die for our sins. The agony that he felt when he took our sins upon himself when he died on the cross was immense.

The grief of the creator had now turned to the distress of the savior.

While God the creator had grieved over human choices in Noah's day, God the savior now agonized over the penalty he was choosing to pay as a human being for the sins of his children.

In both cases, we see a God who refused to be distant or indifferent, but who cared intimately and allowed Himself to hurt because of His love for us.

I want to give us a moment of silence as we prepare to go to the Lord's table. What I'm going to do is just invite you to listen and let the Lord speak.

Is there an area in your life that he is asking you to look at? That he wants you to face? Facing our sin is difficult. It's not fun or easy, but it wasn't easy for Jesus to go to the cross either. So, I'm just going to give us a minute of silence to do business with God.

Let's Pray: Lord, would you speak to our hearts. Search us and show us if there is anything that grieves your heart. Help us to see if there is something we need to deal with. Would you bring that thought or image to mind so that we know what you want us to address today. In Jesus' name, Amen.