

Week 8

A FRESH START DOESN'T GIVE A NEW HEART

Genesis 9:18-10:32

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*May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the
tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."*

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(Genesis 9:27, ESV)
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Introduction

Many people are plagued by the “grass-is-greener” syndrome. This unofficial malady is the mindset that assumes that if you could only change your circumstances things would be better. Unfortunately, those who suffer from this “disease” are never actually satisfied once a change is made. Once the surroundings change, they realize all sorts of problems and decide that yet another change is required. This cycle just keeps on going.

To some degree, all of us struggle with “grass-is-greener” syndrome. We all have moments where we “just need a change of scenery.” Some of this is valid. After all, as physical beings, our environment can have a profound impact on our well-being. However, the one constant that remains in every change of circumstance is this—sinners are still involved. Even those who devote themselves to a life of committed solitude as monks are still plagued by their sin and lack of regard for God. This is because circumstances, while important, cannot change the heart.

This passage describes what many of us long for—a fresh start. God has “re-created” and issues Noah commands similar to those he gave to Adam. But it isn’t long before the sinful tendencies of man, rooted so deeply in the fall, begin to flesh themselves out.

What then is our hope? If even a fresh start won’t give us the world we hope for, what will? The only hope for a changed humanity is a sinless Savior who gives new hearts and changes us from the inside out.

May this study cause you to rejoice in the Savior God has provided and live the new life of freedom and obedience he has created for you.

Implication

1. Sometimes people think that a change of scenery or circumstance is what they need to experience real change in their lives. Why is this not usually effective at bringing the kind of change people are seeking?
2. Noah's sin reminds us that even those who have profound moments of closeness to God can also have profound moments of sin. What are we to think when Christians (ourselves or others) have significant struggles with sin?
3. It seems that Ham delighted in his father's shame and embarrassment rather than seeking to help him. In what ways are Christians guilty of the same thing today?
4. If you were to apply one thing from this lesson, what would it be?

Other Issues

What was the big deal with Ham's sin? Why was it such a problem?

There are two reasons we can't understand the seriousness of Ham's sin. First, is the cultural reason. We live in a far more individualistic culture, in which honor and respect of parents is considerably less important than in more traditional cultures. The contrast between Ham's behavior and his brothers' shows that he gazed directly, and probably with amusement, on his father's exposure. Rather than being concerned to cover his father and limit the extent of his humiliation, he tells others about it. That was a major breach of the father-child relationship.

In our culture, it is easy to imagine a younger son seeing his father acting like a fool when he is drunk and laughing at it and egging him on and telling others, while the older children try to get their Dad to lie down and cover up. However, in a culture where the customs and mores put huge emphasis on respect for parents, Ham must have had a great deal of disdain and contempt for his father. Public nakedness and drunkenness was a far greater humiliation for this patriarch, and Ham's enjoyment of it bespeaks a much deeper spiritual problem. Did he resent his father's authority? Did he resent, even more, his father's faith and religion? Was he thinking: "Ha! And you think yourself so spiritual! And you are always telling *me* that *I* need to be more devoted to the Lord. Look at you now." Of course this is speculative, but something like this must be true to warrant the curse of Noah. The enjoyment of his father's humiliation must have been a sign of deeper flaws and fissures in the character of Ham's heart.

The second reason we can't quickly understand the seriousness of Ham's sin is that we tend to read Bible narratives as individual 'moral-of-the-story' fables, rather than as part of the whole Biblical story line. The flood and the ark was God's way to give the human race a new start — to "save" it from the sin that was about to completely destroy it. But Noah's drunkenness-and-nakedness surely is designed to show us that sin has *not* been eradicated by the flood. And just as the human race was divided within Adam and Eve's family (Cain vs. Abel and Seth), so now it is again being divided within Noah's own family. By Shem and Japheth showing honor to their father, they are also showing that they are basing their lives on the gospel faith of their father. They were going to keep the line of the faithful community "going". Ham did not show the same regard for that. So, then, this narrative about the drunkenness of Noah is here to point us to Christ! We will need a greater salvation than the ark!³⁶

³⁶ Keller, 81-82.

Sermon Notes