



Sunday, August 24, 2025

Genesis 9:18-29

We are quickly coming to the conclusion of our summer series walk-through of Genesis 1-11. As I mentioned in earlier messages, this section of scripture is so important because it helps to frame the rest of scripture as it is here that we see the introduction of creation, humanity, and especially sin. Genesis 12 - Revelation 22 can basically be viewed as a response to the events that take place here in these 11 chapters.

Today, as we wrap up chapter 9 we're going to be introduced to perhaps one of the most bizarre and challenging stories where we are now given a glimpse into a completely different side of Noah.

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis 9:18-29. If you are able to, please stand for the reading of the word God.

Genesis 9:18-29

'18 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. 19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.

20 And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. 21 Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. 25 Then he said:

*"Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants
He shall be to his brethren."*

26 And he said:

*“Blessed be the Lord,
The God of Shem,
And may Canaan be his servant.*

*27 May God enlarge Japheth,
And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;
And may Canaan be his servant.”*

28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. 29 So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

This section gives us a snapshot of the next 350 years of Noah’s life. And within that timeframe, it’s important to recognize that all of humanity can be traced back to this very scene. Every tribe, every nation, every people group on earth ultimately comes from this family. That’s the weight of this moment.

Now, this naturally raises big questions about ethnicity and race that are difficult to answer - questions we’ll unpack more fully when we get to the Tower of Babel.

But for today, I want to focus on the text right in front of us - one of the most bizarre stories in Genesis, maybe even in the whole Bible. Here, we find Noah passed out drunk in his tent, naked. His sons discover him, two of them cover him up, and when Noah wakes, he pronounces a curse on his grandson - who doesn’t even seem to be part of the story.

Again, like most stories in the Bible, at first glance, this can seem completely nonsensical, but when we look deeper into the culture and context, we’re able to get a little more clarity.

But before we get into Noah’s odd behaviour, here’s what I want you to see first and foremost.

Noah sinned.

Whether it was in the state of his drunkenness or indecent exposure, somewhere in the story it becomes very clear that Noah sinned.

This is important because it shows us that Noah is still a sinful being. Yes, he offered a sacrifice to the Lord the moment he stepped off the boat, but now we find him stepping into sin, which is a stark reminder that even though God rid the world of evil and started off with a clean slate, sin was

still very much alive and hungry. The flood had the power to destroy the wickedness around Noah, but it could not erase the sin that lived within him - or within his family. The minute Noah and his family stepped off that giant floating barge to start life all over again, so too did their sin.

This is important because just a few chapters beforehand we read that God calls Noah righteous and now we see him lying naked and drunk in his tent.

Again this shows us that Noah's righteousness was never about his own perfection - it was about God's grace. Scripture is clear that Noah, 'found favour in the eyes of the Lord,' not because he was flawless, but because he walked in obedience and faith. And yet here, in his failure, we see that even the most faithful men and women of God are still capable of stumbling into sin.

That's why this story is so unsettling - not just because of Noah's condition, but because it reminds us of our own. The flood wiped out the wickedness of the world, but it didn't wipe sin out of the human heart. The problem of sin wasn't floating deceptively outside the ark - it was nestled right in the heart of it. And the same is true today. You and I are capable of worship and obedience one moment and failure the next. Which is why our hope can never rest in the righteousness of man, but only in the grace of God.

I'm sure that many of you have experienced this - and I've even found this to be true in my life. The minute I start trusting in my own strength and goodness is the minute I start creating gaps in my armour where the enemy can start to work his way back in.

What about you? What are some of those gaps in your lives that the enemy loves get in and pry open? It's a reminder to trust in the grace and goodness and power of God to strengthen us instead of our own abilities.

Which is likely the exact same lesson that Noah had to learn as well. He started off well - by stepping off the ark and offering a sacrifice to the Lord, then settling into his new life, planting a vineyard, and harvesting the crops. But somewhere during that 3-4 year period, Noah began to let his guard down. The same man who had walked faithfully with God through the storm slowly started drifting away when life returned to normal.

And isn't that often how it works? We've talked about this concept for a few weeks now and here it is again. Sometimes our greatest battles don't come in seasons of crisis, because those are seasons where we're literally clinging to the Lord with everything that we've got! They tend to come in

seasons of comfort, when life feels stable and we think we can stand on our own. That's when the enemy loves to slip in.

So - back to the bizarre scene of our text this morning. If you remember, Noah planted a vineyard. Drank of its wine, got drunk and uncovered himself in the tent. Ham saw his father's nakedness. Went to tell his brothers and his brothers came in backwards with a blanket and covered their father. Noah awoke and found out, he cursed Ham's son Canaan but blessed both Shem and Japheth.

So, the immediate sin of Noah is not so much in the nakedness part as much as it is in the drunkenness part. It is clearly stated all throughout the Bible that it is a sin to be drunk. Part of the reason for this is that when someone is drunk, they lose control of themselves and end up behaving in manners that are not consistent with their normal sober self. It is often in these drunken states where sexual proclivities can happen, unwise decisions are made, and the temptation to sin can easily be given into. So, because the Lord knows that we are our best selves when we are submitted to him and He has control by the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, it is important that we don't allow anything else to have the control that is supposed to be the Lords.

So, Noah, in his sinful state of drunkenness goes into his tent and uncovers himself so that he is naked. Now, we don't know the intent behind this next section, but for whatever reason Noah's son, Ham, ends up finding his way into the tent, and sees his father's nakedness and then goes to find his brothers who then go in backwards and cover their father up with a blanket.

Let's stop there and try to figure out what's going on here.

Generally, there are two schools of thought when it comes to Noah's nakedness here.

The first interpretation suggests that something sexual was involved. In this view, when the text says that Ham 'saw his father's nakedness,' it's not simply describing what his eyes took in, but it is using a specific phrase which points to an act of sexual sin. The connection comes from Leviticus, where God tells Moses:

Leviticus 18:6, 8

'None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the Lord...The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness.

Now, you have to keep in mind that at this stage of history it was only Noah's family that was popu-

lating the rest of the world. For a time, close family relationships were permitted in order for humanity to multiply, but later in Leviticus we clearly see God make it very clear that this is no longer permissible. What's interesting is that the same kind of language appears in both places. Genesis says Noah went into his tent and 'uncovered his nakedness.' Leviticus 18 explains, 'the nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness.' Based on that parallel, some scholars suggest that Ham's sin was not merely looking at his father, but something deeper - like sleeping with Noah's wife. In this view, Canaan would be the offspring of that union, which would explain why Noah's curse falls on Canaan (Ham's son) rather than directly on Ham, and why Shem and Japheth are praised for showing restraint and respect.

Part of the challenge with this interpretation is that it does require some reading into the text because it isn't explicitly clear. The phrase 'saw his father's nakedness' may not mean anything more than what it says. And the fact that Noah specifically places a curse on Canaan suggests that this was a son who was already alive at this point - which makes the timing difficult if this act is supposed to be about Canaan's conception. Still, this was a commonly held interpretation of this story and is still taught by some ancient Jewish historians and Hebrew Bible scholars to this day. There's even a teaching that Ham went in and castrated his father but that tends to be more of a fringe interpretation and not one that I feel we need to spend much time on. At any rate, this is option number one.

The second option is vastly different.

This interpretation takes the text at face value - that Ham simply, 'saw his father's nakedness.' The renowned Jewish historian - Josephus - tends to land here. In his explanation, Ham dishonoured his father by looking upon him in a shameful state and then broadcast Noah's shame to his brothers instead of covering him up. In ancient Near Eastern culture, honour and shame were massive values. To expose your mother or father's shame, rather than protect their dignity, was considered a deeply dishonourable act.

In this view, Ham's sin wasn't sexual but moral: instead of showing respect, he mocked Noah's weakness and tried to involve his brothers in the shame. Shem and Japheth, however, refused to participate - they walked backwards with a covering, carefully protecting their father's dignity. That's why Noah blesses them: they demonstrated honour where Ham did not.

But why does Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham?

If you take interpretation #1 - that Ham slept with Noah's wife - then it's easy to explain why Canaan was cursed because he would have been the offspring of their union. But as I said earlier, I'm not convinced that's the case. Another option is that in Hebrew thought, a curse could fall not just on the individual but on their descendants. It wasn't simply personal; it was generational. In other words, Ham's dishonour didn't just affect him - it shaped his line. The way he lived and acted became the pattern his children would pick up and carry forward. It's the 'monkey see, monkey do' principle. That can be used for good, but as we see here, it can also be devastating. Ham's dishonour set a trajectory for his family. And if you fast forward a few generations, you'll see that this actually came to fruition as Canaan became the father of the Canaanites - one of the most corrupt and wicked peoples in Scripture.

So, as bizarre and perhaps even unsettling as this story is, there's one more thing I want you to see here that helps to bring our perspective home:

The last thing that I want you to see here is that this whole story is a mirror picture of God's grace. I know, it might not be crystal clear at first glance, but it's there. And if you look back at the beginning of Genesis when both Adam and Eve fell into their sin, the same verbiage is used to describe their shame. It said that they were now aware of their nakedness, meaning their shame. God, in His grace and mercy, covered their shame by clothing their nakedness with garments of skin from the first sacrifice.

In the same way, Noah, in his shame, was exposed further by Ham, but Shem and Japheth chose to cover his shame. Just like Adam and Eve needed God to cover them, and Noah needed his sons to cover him, you and I need Christ to cover us. On the cross, Jesus took our shame and clothed us in His righteousness.

So, ultimately, what does this mean for us? Like seriously, how can we actually apply this bizarre story to our lives?

I can think of three things:

Don't get drunk. The Bible is very clear on this topic, but it extends far beyond just alcohol. Drunkenness in the 10 Commandments actually refers to control. Anything that we give control to - whether it's alcohol, drugs, lust, anger, greed, even our phones or our work - becomes the thing that masters us. And Scripture reminds us that as followers of Jesus, we are to be filled with the Spirit, not mastered by anything or anyone else. Because whatever controls you, ultimately shapes you.

God's grace always covers our sin and shame. But his grace isn't an excuse to continue to live in that sin and shame. Grace is the expression of His great love, and it should move us toward holiness - to put off the very things that keep pulling us back down. So, just as both Adam and Eve and Noah all needed the grace of God to cover them, so too do we. On the cross, Jesus Christ took our shame and clothed us in His righteousness. That means you don't have to stay defined by your failure. In Him, your shame is covered, and your identity is secure. So when the enemy tries to remind you of your past, you can remind him of the cross. Your story is no longer marked by sin, but by grace. Sometimes we take pleasure in someone else's struggles, sins, or trials. This is what Ham did. Ham saw his father's shame and chose to broadcast and exploit it to his brothers. But Shem and Japheth chose love, walking in carefully to cover their father with dignity and respect. The church needs more of this - less gossip, less delighting in each other's failure, and more restoration, more compassion, more covering in love. More grace.

This is the church that I see. I'll be honest with you, I love that this is something that is woven deeply into the fabric of our very congregation. Yes it's true. We all have sin in our lives. The Bible reminds us of that by saying that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But it doesn't stop there. It reminds us that God's grace is His response to our sin and shame. So may we rest in that. May it bring peace to our souls and may it continually encourage us to turn from our sin as we look upon His face.

Blessing

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you
May He cause His face to Shine upon you
May He be gracious towards you
Lifting up His countenance before you
And may He give you peace
In Jesus name, Amen.

Pastor Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

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