

3. We cannot live for ever

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Date: 10 June 2009

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[0 : 0 0] Now if you turn in the Bibles please to page 4, it's a short passage we're reading today, chapter 5 verses 1 to 5. We mistakenly put last week's passage here, but it's chapter 5 verses 1 to 5. We already looked at the first murder and last week we looked at how sin increased in the world, but also how culture and civilisation increased in the world.

And now we're going to look at chapter 5 verses 1 to 5. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them, and named them man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died. May God bless to us that reading from his word.

And he died. And the top of the subject today is we cannot live forever. On the east coast of Scotland, in a small village, there's an ancient graveyard. It's very interesting to go around that graveyard and see the graves going back throughout the centuries, but on one of those graves there is this very interesting phrase. It recounts the death of a merchant of the 18th century and his family. And then underneath it is written the words, O Adam, what have you done?

O Adam, what have you done? O Adam, what have you done?

names in public. This is not the chapter to volunteer to read. There are said to be 75 names in this chapter. I haven't counted them, but those who do this kind of thing assure me there are. And let me just give you one piece of advice. If you ever have to read this chapter, read the names confidently. No one else knows how they're pronounced either.

[2 : 5 0] So, enormously long lives. And yet, as Moses writes this for us, there is another piece of writing that comes from the pen of Moses, and I refer to at the beginning of my prayer, Psalm 90, where in that psalm, Moses the man of God says, the days of our life are 70 years, or if we are strong, 80 years. Now, you see the enormous contrast there. These lifespans going on for centuries, and yet, the average lifespan, 70 years or 80 years. Now, Moses also says in that psalm, a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. Look at verse 27 in this chapter. Thus, all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died. Not even the longest human life even made it to a day in the life of God. See the point that's being made. However long we live, however many years, or in this case centuries may pass, we cannot make it on our own, and we cannot live forever. And surely that's the point of this chapter, that human life comes to an end. Oh, Adam, what have you done? Humans are cut down to size. Now, there's many, many speculations about the length of lives in this chapter. I may mention that next week when we look further into the chapter. But there is an important point, surely. The grace of God gave to these long-lived antediluvian figures years and years in which to repent, years and years in which to come to know him.

And yet, most of them apparently didn't. Because all we read about them is, and he died. And in some ways, that shows the total insignificance of human life, doesn't it? But secondly, we have the emergence of the descendants of Seth. That's what this chapter is about. And from Seth is going to come one individual, the serpent crusher, who is going to destroy sin and death. So we've got these two strands running. We've got the strand of human weakness, of vulnerability, of death, gripping the infant world in its grasp. And yet, we have in the grey dawn of history, these first faint gleams of hope.

That one day, someone is to come who will crush the serpent. So let's look at these two streams as they flow through this short chapter. And I want to say two things. The first thing I want to say is that God is still committed to his original purpose. When God created man, verse 1, he made him in the likeness of God. In one very real sense, the whole Bible is a commentary on Genesis 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God always completes what he begins.

God never leaves a work unfinished. And here we have a restatement, a reaffirmation of that purpose. Because when God created heaven and earth, he made humans in his image and in his likeness.

And he made them to populate the earth and to carry that image throughout the world. And so here we have a reaffirmation of that purpose. So the image of God in humanity survives the fall.

[6 : 39] The fall has already taken place, but the image has not been destroyed. Humanity is still in the image of God. Although as we sang in the hymn, but Adam fell and with him all our race. Now we are made perfect only by God's grace.

And though we marred his image in the fall, still marks of glory dignify us all. You get an idea of this when you look at a magnificent ruin. If you go once again to the east coast of Scotland and visit the town of St Andrews and look at the ruins of the ancient cathedral, they are still magnificent.

And give us some glimpse of what that building must have been like in all its glory. And that's the truth about humanity. Humanity, even in spite of the fall, even in spite of our vulnerability, we still have the image of God.

Marks of glory dignify us all. We still have the capacity to respond to God. Indeed, we still have the duty to respond to God.

And God, as the book of Ecclesiastes says, has put eternity in our hearts. We recognise deep within us that we were not simply made for this world and for our lifespan in this world.

[7 : 56] We were made for God. We were made by God. We were made for God. You notice it's also affirmed once again that male and female together are the image of God.

And that's the basis of all biblical teaching on human relationships and human sexuality. A man and a woman bound together in the covenant of love reflect God's original purpose for mankind.

And the story of the Bible is going to culminate in the wedding of the Lamb when Christ is married fully to his bride. The image survives the fall.

The male-female image survives the fall. So what's said, in other words, in Genesis 1 and 2 about the image about human relationships remains God's purpose and will continue to be God's purpose.

But notice too, verse 2, he blessed them. Now when God blesses, it's more than wishing us well. God isn't saying the equivalent of have a nice day. God is saying when he blesses that we were created for a destiny of salvation.

[9 : 06] We were created to be with him, to enjoy him, to live with him forever. An echo of Genesis 1, verse 28, God blessed them and God said, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

The whole of the created order is given us to enjoy. We talked a bit about that last week. The beauty of creation. The variety of creation. The productivity of creation. Civilized arts and the kind of things that are mentioned at the end of chapter 4.

These are all parts of the blessing of God. Psalm 104, O Lord our God, O Lord our God, How manifold are your works. The earth is full of your creatures.

Have you ever thought about the extravagant generosity of God in creation? He didn't simply make a functional universe. He made a beautiful universe. He didn't simply make a universe which was useful.

He made a universe which reflected his own glory. And which continues in the fallen and in the cursed world. And in this fallen world we catch glimpses of Eden and we look forward to the new creation.

[10 : 14] And this is always the case when we look at the created order. Just as in winter time, in February, in a grim, bleak February day, snowdrops and crocuses begin to appear.

Some of you will remember the path and the lion, the witch and the wardrobe where the snow begins to melt. And the dwarf said, This is not a thaw. This is the springtime.

And that's the gospel always has about it. Creation, even in its fallen state, has about it. The promise of springtime. So, God is committed to his original purpose.

The image remains. The purpose of blessing remains. And descendants are still coming. In verse 3, When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness after his image and named him Seth.

Notice how the divine work of creating is delegated. Now, in a very real sense, we are all born in Adam. We are sinners. But the gospel tells us that we can also be in Christ.

[11 : 22] Because we are in Adam, we still sin. And we will die. But because we are in Christ, that sin is forgiven.

And one day, we will be raised from the dead to a glorious new creation. So here we have the family likeness. It never is a wise thing to say to a young person, is it?

Oh, you're so like your dad. Or you're the image of your mother. Young people don't like that very much. But nevertheless, it's true. We can so often detect family likenesses in people.

I often met young people whose parents I've known, and whose parents I know, and they tell me who they are, and I bite back the words, you're just the image of your dad. But this is the family likeness.

We all bear the likeness of Adam, the man of dust, as Paul calls him. But Paul also says that if we believe, we will bear the likeness of Christ, the man from heaven.

[12 : 26] So you see, the original purpose continues. In the sin, in the fallenness of the world, God is working his purpose out. God will make a new heaven and a new earth.

More glorious, more wonderful than the old creation. He will create a new humanity who are like Christ. Not that we'll be identical.

The individual personalities which he has given us in the new creation will still be there. But all the rough edges knocked off, and all the weaknesses and the sinfulness and the fallenness not there any longer.

God's original purpose to reproduce images of himself realised in Christ. But the second thing is this. The second stream is humans are still sinful and vulnerable.

God's purpose remains humans are still sinful and vulnerable. Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for you, this chapter is saying to us.

[13 : 28] This is an ancient graveyard and it's a melancholy chapter. And he died, and he died, and he died. That's all they appear to do.

To be born and then to die. And this is true of the world in which we live, isn't it? When someone dies, it's sometimes almost as if they had never been.

As if they had no... Those who lived, loved, had real existence as we do. They vanish. And where are they? Oh, Adam, what have you done?

That could be written over this chapter as well. You notice the lack of detail there. They must have done many, many things. They must have gone to many places.

And yet, the only thing recorded about them, with one exception that we'll look at next week, is, and he died. The book of Ecclesiastes expresses this eloquently.

[14 : 32] There is no memory of former things, nor will there be any memory of later things, yet to be among those who come after. And as you know, when people die, they slip into a twilight of hazy memory, and are forgotten as if they had never been.

And we have to remember this. That's what Psalm 90 says. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Teach us that we are not created to live forever in this curse-laden, and in this sinful and fallen world.

And there's also the sense of lost potential in this chapter. Death is always a nailing. It's an intruder. It's never something we can simply come to terms with.

It is an enemy. Death always leaves things unsaid and undone. Death always leaves loose ends to be tied up. It's particularly sad when the death is a death of a child, the unfulfilled potential.

It's very sad as well when someone dies in vigorous middle age at the height of their powers. But it's not easy when death comes at old age either.

[15 : 47] When someone you love dies, whom you have known for many, many decades, and have been part of your life, the sheer futility and the sheer agony of death comes across.

Death is an outrage, because death divides what God has joined together. God has joined together body and soul. Death divides it.

What God will do when the new creation comes is he will reunite soul and body. He will reunite what sin and death have divided.

So, the chapter, and these verses in particular, these two strands. Let's not forget our sinfulness. Let's not forget our vulnerability.

Let's not forget our mortality. Because if we forget these, we are never going to seek the remedy. And the remedy lies in the fact that God is still committed to his purpose, that God will carry it out.

[16 : 51] So, there is an emphasis on grace in this chapter as well. Where, another touch you give to this chapter is the title from Paul's letter to the Romans, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.

For the long lives give many opportunities. We will not live these length of days, but however long or however short God gives to us, this is the time to hear his voice.

This is the time to do his will. Today is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. And today is the only day in which any grace can be received and any prayer prayed.

So, we ask the Lord to teach us to number our days that we may find a heart of wisdom. Let's pray. Father, we live in a world dominated by death.

We live in a world conscious of our own mortality. We live in a world where every part of living is a part of dying. And yet, in your grace, you point us beyond that to a world where death is swallowed up in victory, where sin and crying and tears and death itself will be no more.

[18:18] In that glorious new creation in which a world, a heaven and the earth reflecting fully and eternally the glory of its creator in that creation in which will live redeemed men and women who are totally made in the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, Lord, teach us indeed to number our days that we may find a heart of wisdom. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.