

## 2. We cannot make it on our own

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now if you have the Bibles there, if you turn to page 4 please. This began this little series which I've called Hope for a Hopeless World. And last week we read the story of the first murder, of the story of Cain and Abel.

And now in Genesis chapter 4 we're going to read the second part of this chapter, verses 17 to 26. Genesis chapter 4 verse 17.

Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city he called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Airad and Airad fathered Mehujel and Mehujel fathered Methusel and Methusel fathered Lamech.

And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Ada and the name of the other Zillah. Ada bore Jubal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal Cain. He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

[ 1 : 18 ] The sister of Tubal Cain was Nehemiah. Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah hear my voice. You wives of Lamech listen to what I have to say.

I have killed a man for wounding me. A young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.

And Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and called his name Seth. For she said, God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel.

For Cain killed him. To Seth also a son was born and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Amen. May God bless this passage to us and speak to our hearts and to our lives through it. We cannot make it on our own.

[ 2 : 19 ] That's what I'm calling today's study. Many years ago, when I was an English teacher, one of the assignments we used to set youngsters was to imagine that they were a visitor from another galaxy, another planet.

We were visiting this earth of ours and sending back home a description of what it was like. I want us to imagine that for a moment. Just suppose we were visiting here from a totally different dimension.

What would we send back? Oh, we might say this world has starving children in a refugee camp. This world is full of violent gangs who beat up people.

This world has sleazy nightclubs full of drugs and promiscuous sex. This world has graveyards. We might send that back. We might also say this world has healthy children playing in a well-run nursery.

This world has young people who go on a run for charitable purposes. This world has happy homes and families. This world has newborn babies.

[ 3 : 29 ] Now, which of these is the true picture of planet earth on which we live? And surely the answer is both. Both these realities exist in our planet.

The first reality, the gangs, the refugee camps exist because we are sinful. Because we have turned away from God and gone our own way.

The world is under a curse. The world is sinful. The world is fallen. The second reality is the realities of the newborn baby and the happy homes are also true because this is still God's good creation.

And God will one day bring about a new creation in which all these things will flourish without the curse, without sin and without death.

And last week I said that these chapters not only give us the reason why things are the way they are, they give us the remedy. Last week we looked at the blatant arrogance of sin and we looked at the patient mercy of God.

[ 4 : 39 ] And here in this incident, verses 17 to 26, less well known than the story that precedes it, the story of Cain and Abel, we have a picture of the rapid growth of population.

We are now seven generations from Cain and Abel. Remember the Bible doesn't tell us everything about everything. If you are coming here hoping to get the answer to questions like, where did Cain get his wife from?

Then don't bother because I don't know any more than you do. That's not what this is about. The purpose of this book is that we might know God and his son Jesus Christ.

The Bible does not tell us everything about everything. It tells us what we need to know Christ. It gives us everything we need for life and godliness.

And it tells us that in spite of our sin and hopelessness and the tempting of the serpent, there is hope. And that's our title today.

[ 5 : 43 ] We cannot make it on our own, but there is hope. In particular, there are two things I want to draw your attention to in these verses. One of them is wholly negative.

The other is ambiguous. First of all, we have the growth of corruption. That's the first thing we're going to look at. And then secondly, we have the growth of culture, the growth of civilization.

And both these realities are existing together. So first of all, the growth of corruption, the growth of sin. Now, as humanity spreads, sin and corruption spread along with it.

And in particular, this is exemplified and embodied in this most unsavoury figure of Lamech. At the end of verse 18, one of the descendants of Cain, Methusiah fathered Lamech.

By the way, that's not the father of Noah, in case you've been reading on into the next chapter. Nor is the Enoch of this chapter the one who walked with God. We're looking at him later.

[ 6 : 47 ] The growth of corruption. And this shows itself in two ways. First of all, we have deviant sexuality. Verse 19, And Lamech took two wives.

Now, it's very interesting. There's nothing in Scripture that actually forbids polygamy. There is no actual text that forbids it. What the Bible narrative does is it shows us when it happens, there are always disastrous consequences.

Because it's impossible to fit in with the biblical pattern of one flesh. Back in Genesis 2, God says a man will leave his wife and they all become one flesh.

And that's the basis of all biblical teaching on sexuality. The mess we're in today is because that pattern is so often deviated from. This is not just an Old Testament truth.

Our Lord reaffirms that in Matthew 19. He who created them beginning created them one flesh. And right through the Old Testament, when polygamy happens, this is the first example, there are disastrous consequences.

[ 7 : 58 ] Read the beginning of the book of Samuel. Domestic unhappiness. A man called Elkanah takes two wives. Hannah, who is barren, and the depressingly fertile Peninnah.

But from that, God's grace overrules and brings Samuel with his message of grace. Or on a mega scale with Solomon, who takes, we are told, hundreds of wives and hundreds of concubines.

So you see, we have deviant sexuality. And notice verse 23. Kind of a man was lamish. It's difficult not to sense the swaggering arrogance here.

Ada and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to what I see. That doesn't sound very like a loving husband to me. That doesn't sound very like a gentle husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church.

You see, this is another of those consequences. If a man has more than one wife, it's impossible to treat her as one flesh. It's impossible to fulfill the biblical mandate.

[ 9 : 05 ] So when the divine purpose of one man, one woman, in lifelong fidelity is rejected, then disaster follows. Disaster is the consequence. So that's the first thing in the growth of corruption.

There is sexual deviance. But secondly, there is selfish violence. Let's look at verse 22. I have killed a man for wounding me.

Notice the excess here. The man wounded him. May have been an accident for all we know. Probably was. A young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's seventy-sevenfold.

You notice the escalation of the violence and of the corruption. Cain tried to hide his violence. Lamech boasts about it. Lamech is the patron saint of the swaggering macho culture that glorifies violence.

That glorifies brute force. Later on in chapter 6, verse 11, one of the reasons why God sends the judgment of the flood is that the earth is filled with violence.

[ 10 : 11 ] Now you see, both deviant sex and selfish violence are an example of perversion of God's mandate to be fruitful, to reproduce and to fill the earth.

It's what happens when people are like God, try to be like God. Think of today. Think of those young girls who come over from Eastern Europe in search of a better life and may even fall victims to predatory and evil men.

That case that happened just not very far from here in that church, not so very long ago. And the violence of our society, not just in the cities, but in the countryside. One of my favourite places is the Cotswolds in England.

There's a particular beautiful place called Borton on the water there. And I was reading the other day about how that idyllic place, picture postcard place, is subject like other places to violence.

Bored youth who hang around with nothing to do. So we have the growth of corruption. People turn away from God and the earth is filled with deviant sex and the earth is filled with violence.

[ 11 : 20 ] You can see how relevant this is to today. This is not an ancient story. This is a story that meets us on our television screens. This is a story that meets us all around us.

But secondly, there's a less straightforward thing happening. The growth of culture, the growth of civilisation. Verse 17, Cain built a city. Growth of orderly society.

Then in verse 20, we have the growth of agriculture, animal husbandry. The father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. We have the growth of the arts.

In 21, the father of all who play the lyre and the pipe. And we have the growth of the sciences. Verse 22, the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

And what are we going to make of this? Now there have always been two different attitudes, two extreme attitudes towards culture and civilisation in the church. In the early centuries, a man called Tertullian, one of the church fathers, used the famous phrase, what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?

[ 12 : 26 ] In other words, what has Greek philosophy and culture and education got to do with the gospel? And he adopted a very hostile attitude that education, culture and so on take us away from God.

In the Victorian era, there were many people saying exactly the opposite. People like the scholar and poet Matthew Arnold, who argued that culture, civilisation, was almost an alternative way into the city of God.

That what people really need is education. Education, education, I suppose. What people need is better housing, better... Now all these things are good.

But Arnold found, as all others found, they did not lead to the kingdom of God. So what we're going to say about this, what does the Bible say about civilisation and culture?

And I think the first thing it says is that it is ambiguous. Think of cities. Cities provide great opportunities, don't they? They provide education. They provide education. They provide jobs.

[ 13 : 29 ] They provide society. They're exciting places. Places with a buzz about them. Many of you are city people here, and you'll recognise what I mean. But cities are also places of violence.

Cities are places of loneliness. Cities are places of homelessness, of drunkenness. Cities are places where it's possible to be far, far more lonely than you ever would be in the countryside.

Think about cultivation and all the rest of it. And think about the way in which we have often exploited the earth, ruined its resources, acid rain, all the rest of it.

All these ways in which we have literally raped the planet and destroyed its resources. Think about the arts. I would hate to live in a world without beautiful buildings, without poetry.

I know some of you could easily live in a world without poetry, but that's your loss. Without music. Without art. You'll need to walk around this building to see how much art adds to the decor and so on.

[ 14 : 41 ] We would hate to live in a world without science, wouldn't we? Think of the advances in medicine in particular, in sanitation and so on, the kind of things we enjoy in this 21st century.

But think of the way in which the arts have been used to corrupt and to deprave. Think of the evil books that have been written. Think of the way that music has often been used to stir up the animal passions and to stir up people.

Both people's sexual appetites and people's violence and so on. Think of pornography. Think of the way in which the internet, which is such a marvellous invention, think of the way in which pornography is streamed from that.

Think of the way in which science has been used for destruction. So you see, it is ambiguous. So what are we going to make of this then? Now if we see these blessings from God as ends in themselves, if we think we can make it on our own, in other words, we can make it on our own.

We're very clever, we're very talented, we can control our environment at least until there's a snowfall, but we can do all these sorts of things that the people in the world of Genesis 4 couldn't do.

[ 15 : 58 ] Then we simply become arrogant and we simply destroy ourselves. Just like Frankenstein's monster. He creates this monster which turns on him and destroys him.

But if we see all these things, the beauty around us, music, art, poetry, and all the advances in science and the standard of living, if we see these as gifts from God and anticipations of the new creation and receive them humbly and thankfully, then we can carry out the mandate to fill the earth, to subdue it, because that's one of the ways in which that's carried out.

But we cannot make it on our own. These are gifts of God's grace, what the reformers called common grace, the blessings that we all enjoy, whether we're Christian or not.

But the only way we can make certain of enjoying these blessings fully without the curse in the new creation is by his saving grace, by the one who was to come.

And that's the point of these last verses, 25 to 26. We have a flashback here. This is obviously going back to a much earlier period. By the way, don't try to work out a rigid chronology from these chapters, because it's continually moving backwards and forwards to make the point.

[ 17 : 21 ] God's purpose was not set aside by Cain's murder of Abel. He's still faithful to his promise. And remember what that promise was.

From the woman will come one descendant who will destroy the work of the serpent, who will get rid of the violence, who will restore the deviant sex into true, genuine love, who will prepare a people who will be the bride of Christ.

And notice verse 25, God has appointed me, says Eve, another offspring. At the beginning, Eve thought it was all down to her.

I've got a man with the help of the Lord. Now, he contributes a little bit, but really it was me. But notice, God has appointed for me another offspring.

In other words, this is faith in Eve. Not I have achieved. And so, in the midst of corruption, in the midst of decadence, God provides this child, and another child called Enosh, which means weakness and frailty, in order to show that his purposes are going to be fulfilled.

[ 18 : 38 ] And notice the end of the chapter. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. People began to pray. What does prayer mean?

Prayer means I can't cope. Prayer means I cannot make it on my own. So you see the relevance of these chapters. We are looking at our world. Our world of deviant sex and all kinds of illicit passion.

We are looking at our world of selfish violence. We are also looking at our world with all its wonder and splendour, all its culture and all its civilisation, and thanking God for his common grace.

Human sin is continuous. Human sin spreads. That's the reality. Until we recognise that reality, we're never going to turn to the Lord.

But my final point is this. It's not God's common grace which saves us. It's not beautiful buildings and art and music and poetry. It's God's saving grace.

[ 19 : 41 ] That descendant who one day is going to come. That descendant who is going to destroy the serpent. The Lord Jesus Christ who offers to us not only salvation in this world, but points us to a world where the curse is no more and where sin and death have gone.

You may not have made that decision. I urge you to make that decision today and to join yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ and become his true disciple.

Let's pray. Father, you have given us so many gifts and we thank you for them.

But above all, for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one in whom we have not only life in this world, but eternal life in the world to come.

Bless each one of us. Help us in wherever part of our journey we may be. And bring us safely at the end, trusting in your grace, to that city where there is no corruption, but only glory.

[ 20 : 50 ] To that city where there is no violence, but only peace. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.