

# The Solution? (Genesis 9:18-29)

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 May 2022

Preacher: Nathan Cutforth

[ 0 : 00 ] This is Genesis chapter 9. Please, yeah, so have a look from verse 18. And this is the word of the Lord. The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Ham was the father of Canaan. These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside.

But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders. Then they walked in backwards and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, Cursed be Canaan. The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.

[ 1 : 14 ] He also said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem. May Canaan be the slaves of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth. And may Japheth live in the tents of Shem.

And may Canaan be his slave. After the flood, Noah lived 350 years. Altogether, Noah lived 950 years. And then he died.

This is the word of the Lord, and I'll pass it over to you. Thank you so much, William. Let's pray before we think about this passage. Father, we thank you so much that we can be here together to think about your word, to sing your praise, to lift our voices in prayer.

And I pray as we look at this passage, one that may be less familiar to many of us, I pray that you'd give us ears to hear. Just as we have praised you and worshipped you with our mouths, I pray that we'll continue to worship you as we listen to what you have to say.

Give us hearts to receive your word, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm not sure what this says about me as a person, but lately I've found as I scroll through social media, whether it's Facebook or Instagram, they keep giving me these ads about work, how to work more efficiently, how to get more done during the day.

[ 2 : 38 ] Maybe it's because I'm, you know, scrolling in the middle of the day and they think this guy's lazy. They need a... I get a lot of things about procrastination though. I'm always being told how to beat procrastination.

I didn't know I had such a problem. But apparently I do. Apparently I do. And one of these ads which caught my eye recently was one that said, procrastination isn't laziness, it's a bad coping mechanism.

And that made me feel real good. Because what it was telling me is that I'm not procrastinating on Facebook in the middle of the day because I'm a useless person. I just have this problem and procrastination is a bad way of fixing it.

The problem is that there's a hard task or a boring task or something I don't want to do and I'm solving that problem by procrastinating. And that made me think about other problems in my life that I might be using bad coping mechanisms on.

Other problems which I'm trying to solve in the wrong way. One of the things I think we see in this passage is the wrong... What is the wrong solution to one of our big problems?

[ 3 : 53 ] Last time I preached here, it wasn't here. It was online. We had a lot of fun in the chat, but we can't do that. So we've got to go old school. So I'm going to need a show of hands.

I'll ask some questions. Put your hand up if it's true for you. Who here grew up in church going to Sunday school hearing stories like Noah's Ark? Have we got any?

We've got a few. Yeah, we've got a few. Great. Of those, hands up. Keep your hands up. Who remembers this story from Sunday school? There's a few hands up.

There's a keen... There would be a keen Sunday school teacher. All hands down. For everybody, regardless of whether you went to Sunday school, who remembers hearing this passage read out loud or taught from?

Great. Oh, this is so good. I'm the first. First, this is... I actually... I like this passage. I think it's wonderful. I think it speaks so much. And I think there's no such thing as an easy passage.

[ 4 : 55 ] So this one is... It's more apparent that it's difficult. But it's not like any other passage. All the Bible, you have to think about it. There's no free lunches. You really need to study it and think about it.

And this passage is the same. It's just more obvious that we don't know what's going on immediately. But there is stuff that we can learn from it. And that's what we're going to do. I think this passage is illustrating a bad solution.

A bad coping mechanism. So here's why I think that. You guys have been going through the book of Genesis, thinking about it all the way through.

I'm going to give you Nathan's five-second recap on what we need to know coming into this passage. I think as we read this book of Genesis, often we kind of miss out on the drama.

Well, I feel that way because I did, growing up, go to Sunday school. And I heard all these stories before. And I know what's coming. And now I've been to Bible college. And I know there's like, you know, heaps of other books.

[ 5 : 56 ] And nothing really gets solved in Genesis. We need to get to the very end. So I know, you know, we're going to have to keep reading. We're going to have to keep going. So I miss what's so exciting.

I already know what's going to happen. I already know I'm going to have to get to Jesus and get to heaven before we solve all the problems that we see in Genesis. So why keep reading?

And so I miss the drama. And I have to think about it. So let's think about it together. Let's think about what's been unfolding in the story of the beginning. We start with God creating a wonderful place for humanity to live, for people to live, plants and fruit and birds and animals, things to eat.

And kind of the capstone of this creation is humanity made in his image. And not only that, he gives them all the world as their place.

But then comes the great conflict of the story that man and woman sin. Paradise is destroyed because people disobey God.

[ 6 : 58 ] The relationship they have where they walk with him in the garden is gone because they sin. And the whole creation is broken because of that.

There's these curses now that affect everyone and everything. The big question of the book is how do we get back? How do we get back into the garden?

How do we get back to this place of paradise where we can walk with God? And I think we're meant to read the book looking for the solution. Looking for how the garden is going to be restored.

But far from seeing a solution, all we've read since then is how bad this problem really is. Adam and Eve's child becomes the first murderer.

We go from one sin to murder in a single generation. And his descendants continue to commit sin in all the same ways.

[ 7 : 59 ] Then I don't know how many weeks ago it was for you, but in chapter 5, verse 29, we meet Noah. And Noah is presented as a bit of a solution. We read in Genesis 9, 29, And Noah's parents have these huge expectations of Noah.

I don't know what expectations your parents have for you, but Noah's parents expected him to save the world. That's a huge weight on your shoulders.

Noah was the one who they were hoping would solve the problem of sin, solve the problem of toil and labor and pain. And then you get the story of the flood.

God pouring out judgment upon the sin, upon the wickedness, showing us how bad that problem is. And in chapter 9, there's God's covenant with Noah after the flood, after most of humanity has been wiped out.

And God talks about filling the earth and subduing it. God gives this covenant to Noah that's really similar to what he said to Adam and Eve. It's almost like this is a restart.

[ 9 : 25 ] This is a second go for humanity. Noah and his family is the only one that's left, and now we're going again. Again, it's almost like we get a second go. And so this, I think if you're reading this for the first time, it's a huge moment.

This is an incredible moment in world history. This is a second go for people. But as we're about to see, the problem of sin persists.

And so I think we're meant to ask, what kind of solution was the flood to the problem of sin? Is it a failed coping mechanism for sin?

Today, we're going to think about these four different family members. Noah, Ham, Shem, and I call them Japheth, because that's easier for me to say.

So that's what we're going to call them. We're just going to think about this family, these four members of the family, and what they teach us about sin and its solution.

[10:32] And these four are significant for all of us, because they're the ones from whom the nations come, as you're going to see later. And they're significant, because this is the beginning of the new world.

So first, let's chat about Noah. It's the first one we meet. Let's talk about him. Noah is the one who we've had our hopes in, right? He's been like the hero of the story.

This man was incredible. He spent 100 years building a boat, and people were laughing at him, and he did it because God said he should.

And he didn't know how God was going to flood the world. He didn't know how it was all going to work. He just trusted that God was going to work it out, and God did.

And Noah kept trusting. What a champion. What a man of faith. What an example. Doing something that is outrageous, simply because God said he should.

[11:28] And after doing all that, after this fantastic victory of faith, he comes down, plants a vineyard, gets drunk and naked in his tent.

And this is the last we hear of this hero of faith, him lying drunk and naked in his house. He starts off so strongly, and yet it kind of ends on this disaster.

It's so disappointing to see this person fall. As the rainbow reminds us of the seriousness of sin and the faithfulness of God, and as it arches through the sky in the background, in the foreground here is Noah falling to sin.

And that's a warning. It's a warning to us. You could be returning from the battlefield where you've won some great victory for Jesus, where you feel like you've overcome, where you've done some great act of service in the name of the Lord, and that might be genuinely true.

It might happen on the way home from church this afternoon, after we've spent time worshipping our heavenly Father, standing on the foundation maybe of years and decades of faithfulness, and yet what we read right at the beginning, sin is crouching at the door.

[13:04] It's always present. No one has overcome it. No one has killed it. No one is free of it. Even Noah, a hundred years of faithful service, still falls.

It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. We're all vulnerable. We can all fall just as Noah did. What a lesson for us.

At this point, in walks Ham. Ham sees his father lying naked and drunk, lying in his shame and his failure.

Now, in terms of what Ham did, the nitty-gritty of his sin, we're not really told. It's not clear. We know what is, that it is wrong, that he did do something that was sin, because he is cursed by his father.

There were no uncertain terms of what, if this is bad or good. It was bad. But what we don't know is, you know, was it that he mocked his father? Was it disrespect? Is it something else?

[14:11] What's going on? And I think the details of the exact goings-on are carefully admitted, because that's not the point.

Exactly what Ham did is actually kind of irrelevant to the lesson of this passage. But certainly, he didn't honour his father as he should have, as his other brothers did.

But this passage is good for us to look at, because we really have to think. And when you don't have the details that you'd like in a passage, think about the details that you do have, which you're not sure why you have them.

As we read this passage, we notice something about Ham. We're given a detail about him that should surprise us. Did you see it when we read it? Every time Ham is mentioned, we're told he's the father of Canaan.

We're told he's the father of Canaan. Now that seems like just an irrelevant detail, because as you'll find out later, Ham has heaps of children. Like, all kinds of... One of them's called, like, Egypt or something. Like, he has heaps of kids.

[15:21] Why are we told that he's the father of Canaan? Well, we're told that because it teaches us something about him. It tells us what kind of person Ham was.

So imagine this. Imagine you're an Israelite, and it's like, whatever, 100... Sorry, 1,200 BC. You've just conquered the Canaanites.

You've just destroyed the civilization. You've moved into their houses. You've moved into their cities. What you find out is this... This people from the land of Canaan were terrible people. They were awful. They sacrificed children. They did all kinds of just awful things. And you've come in, and you've kicked them out. You've killed them because they are bad news for the world. They are terrible people. And then you're reading the story of Genesis, and you find out that there was a man who was their father. A man, and his association is that he is their dad.

[16:23] You'd probably think Ham was pretty bad. All the evil that the Canaanites symbolize, Ham stands for that. That's the kind of person Ham is.

It's not a one-off mistake where Ham kind of disrespects his father in a weird situation. This is symptomatic of the kind of person Ham is.

He's not a good person. He's not a good person. Ham is the Canaanite. And I think when we get to verse 25, it's sort of a curse because of what Ham has done.

But I think we see there that the two are linked, almost inseparable. To curse Ham is to curse Canaan, and to curse Canaan is to curse Ham. And from Ham come kind of all the bad guys from the Old Testament.

There's Egypt, there's Syria, there's Babylon. But let's pause for a moment and take stock of what we've seen. As we read through the book of Genesis, like we said, we're looking for a solution to the problem of sin.

[17:31] And Noah is sort of presented as a potential solution. It was expected that he would be. It was hoped that he would be. And now he was given a second start.

And we've come off the boat, and we're waiting to see. Is sin fixed? Can we go back to the garden? Can we go back to relationship with God? And this passage gives us a resounding no.

No way. Not even close. Sin is still present. Not only is it sort of present, it's there in the life of the most faithful man, Noah himself.

And one of his sons, at least, is terrible. It's present. The flood hasn't fixed the problem of sin.

I imagine most of us already knew this. Hopefully you already knew that. But we need to have it reinforced. The problem of sin goes on. And I think the question from there becomes, if the flood didn't fix the problem of sin, why have it at all?

[18:42] What's the point? The question is, why did we have the flood? Why did we have this judgment? It is judgment on the world for wickedness and sin.

But why, if God was, that's all God's intention was. Why did he stop with no and his family? They actually deserve the same punishment as the rest of the world. What's God got to do about sin? What is the flood about? One thing which I think, and possibly the main thing which this passage is doing, is illustrating something that I think we need to be reminded of from time to time, that judgment doesn't actually solve the problem of sin.

Judgment alone cannot reverse the curse of the fall. It's not the solution that's going to get us back to the garden.

I think God is trying to tell us that. He's trying to tell us that ultimately judgment's not going to be the mechanism for coping with sin. It's not the solution. It doesn't work.

[19:49] It's a bit like this. Imagine your car breaks down, and imagine it's like something really bad, and it's going to cost a whole lot of money to repair. A lot of us would think, and if it was my car, my car's not very expensive, and I'd look at it and think, maybe I should just get rid of the car.

Maybe I'll throw it on the scrap heap. Maybe I'll get someone to crush it up and throw it away and turn it into scrap, and I'll just buy a new car. That way my problem will be gone. And it would kind of get rid of my problem, but it wouldn't fix the car, would it?

The car would still have the problem, and it would just be destroyed because it has this problem. To fix the problem, someone's going to have to go and open the bonnet and get their hands dirty and pull things apart and try to figure it out and fix it.

It's going to be expensive and hard and time-consuming. Judgment is a bit the same. Often judgment, punishment, is an appropriate response to sin, and it's important.

Don't hear me saying that any kind of punishment is wrong. It's not. Punishment is so important because it shows us how bad sin is. It's the only way to get across to us how terrible our sin is. [ 21 : 03 ] Otherwise, we'd just excuse it and get away with it. Punishment is good. It exposes sin for what it is, but it doesn't fix sin. It doesn't repair the broken relationship that we have with the Lord.

And we see it so clearly here. Noah and Ham have both seen the destruction of the whole world because of sin. They have watched everyone else they know in the world die because of sin. And yet they still fall. And yet they still give in. And yet they still do it. It shows that judgment isn't going to solve this problem of sin.

We need something else. We need someone who's going to come and spend the time and the effort and get their hands dirty to actually fix it. And I think we see that with the last two brothers. These two act respectfully of their father, unlike their brother Ham. And Ham comes out and tells them what's happened.

[ 22 : 14 ] They try to respect their father's dignity as much as they can. They walk backwards and cover him and cover his nakedness and don't shame him even further.

And I think it's fascinating what we see about these two at the end. Again, we sort of notice the details. Some of the details are a bit odd.

Probably not what we'd expect if we were going to write this. Look at the blessing that he bestows on them. Look at the one he bestows upon Shem, sort of.

Well, it's in the place we'd expect him to bless Shem. But he says, bless be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.

It's not really a blessing on Shem, is it? It's a blessing on God. And so we think, what's going on here? That's a strange detail.

[ 23 : 14 ] Well, I think, like Ham, this is telling us something about who Shem is, what he's like. Just as the curse in verse 25 shows us that Ham is really just Cagan in disguise.

It's really, Ham's really just the bad person. This blessing shows us that Shem is a man who's defined by his relationship with the Lord.

Blessed be the Lord because he is the God of Shem. And that's what Shem would want. He doesn't want a blessing for himself. He wants the Lord to be blessed because that's who he is.

And we see that evident in Shem's action. He's a man who respects his father, who does what is good and right. And I think this is hinting at the answer that we've been looking at.

The answer to the problem of sin. The difference between Ham and Shem. What makes Shem become the man that he becomes? And Ham become the man that he becomes?

[ 24 : 18 ] The answer is a relationship. A relationship with God. A deep personal relationship with the creator. To solve the problem of the curse, we must know God.

We must look to God. He is the one who must reach down into our life and solve this problem for us. He is the one who must open our hearts and get his hands dirty and spend the time and the effort to repair us.

And that's exactly what he's done in Christ. Christ is the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. Christ is the one who can take it away, who can wash us clean, who can bring us back into relationship with the Father.

When Christ died on the cross, he took away our sin. It's God's way of coming into our lives, getting his hands dirty, solving the problem of sin in a way that works.

And because of him, we can expect grace. We can expect forgiveness. We can expect love. But he doesn't stop there.

[ 25 : 30 ] By rising again, by rolling the stone away, by emerging from the tomb alive, Christ shows that he's still on the campaign trail.

He's still coming out against sin. He makes a way for us to do battle with sin, to not succumb. He's living in us.

His spirit is living in us to empower us to defeat sin. That's what he's done for us. The solution to the problem of sin, which is so clear, is in Christ. The way that Christ gives us a relationship with God. Having our sin removed. Having our heart renewed. That's the answer. That shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us. Grace is the real solution.

Grace is the mechanism which God is going to use to rid the world of sin. Judgment doesn't work. We need grace.

[ 26 : 29 ] I wonder though, as we go through our week, this week, if we'll essentially act as if the opposite is true.

Do we, by our actions, show that deep, deep down we think that maybe still judgment's the right way to go about things? When we see someone doing something wrong and we know it's wrong, do we look at them and think, you know, inwardly, I know better than them.

Does it help them? Does it fix the problem? No, but it makes us feel real, real good. The gospel encompasses both judgment and grace. But I know for me, I'm much quicker to judge than to show grace.

Much quicker to condemn than to actually get my hands dirty. Spend my time, my effort to show the forgiveness and grace and actually deal with the problem of sin with other people.

Or in my own life, how do I deal with sin in my own life? Do I tell myself off a lot and, you know, say I'm going to work harder and try more and that kind of thing?

[ 27 : 43 ] Or am I throwing myself upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I coming to him and asking for forgiveness, confessing my sin and saying, I can't do this alone.

I can't fix myself alone. I need grace. The cross of Christ is the answer to the problem of sin. It's the only solution that will work.

And we need to be reminded of that so often. The cross of Christ is what works. But finally, got one more brother.

Japheth. What about him? In some ways, he's kind of the most confusing character. Because he's like, he's there, but he's almost not. What's he doing?

What's his deal? He stands with Shem, honoring his father. That seems good. And yet, in verse 27, he doesn't seem to get the glowing report that his brother received.

[ 28 : 41 ] Look at verse 27. Again, we ask, what does this mean? Who is this guy?

What's his deal? What do we learn from him? Well, if Ham is defined by sin, and he goes on to, you know, his descendants go on to be the bad guys.

And if Shem is defined by his relationship with God, and his descendants go on to sort of be the good guys, where does Japheth fit into there?

Well, we assume from the blessing, Japheth's going to have a lot of descendants. He's going to be big, but his descendants don't seem to be particularly significant in the story of Scripture as it goes on.

He doesn't seem to feature quite as much in the rest of Scripture, certainly not as much as the descendants of Ham and Shem. So who is he?

[ 29 : 44 ] Well, I think he's the everyone. He's the majority. He's the ordinary dude. He's not particularly significant.

His descendants don't necessarily get recorded in Scripture as the others do. He's just normal. His descendants become a bit normal. And that makes me think maybe we're all a bit more like Japheth than we are like anyone else in this story.

I think Japheth represents you and me here this morning. The ordinary person, the majority, the everybody. The person who, I don't know who you are, maybe you'll all be remembered in history.

I don't think I'm going to be. I think I'm going to be remembered like Japheth. And people will be like, who was he? Ordinary people. Ordinary people, though, who are faced with a choice.

Notice what Noah says to Japheth. Let him dwell in the tents of Shem. Japheth has this choice like every ordinary person does.

[ 30 : 52 ] Ham or Shem. We're going to be defined by our relationship with God. We're going to be defined by grace. We're going to be defined by the fact that we have been shown a forgiveness we don't deserve.

We're going to dwell in the tents of Shem. Or are we going to dwell in the tent of Ham? We're going to have a life that's defined by sin.

A life that's defined by judgment. An example of how bad sin is. Who will we be? We saw earlier, sin is a present temptation for everyone.

You can be as righteous and faithful as Noah. You can have done all kinds of great things for the Lord. But sin will still be crouching at the door.

We'll walk out into the foyer. The battle is raging. So what is our coping mechanism going to be? How are we going to solve this problem?

[ 31 : 56 ] Is it going to be the tents of Ham or the tents of Shem? Is it going to be judgment? Or is it going to be grace? Is it going to be the world? Or is it going to be Jesus?

I hope and I pray for this for you and this for me that we'll be people whose lives are defined because we dwell in the tent of Shem. We rely on grace.

We look to Jesus. We're defined because we have this relationship of forgiveness and love. And we're not those who will be judged.

But what's our solution? That's what we're called to consider today. Am I relying on Jesus for the solution to sin or not?

Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that there is this solution to sin.

[ 32 : 58 ] We thank you that because you are gracious and loving and kind, you sent your only son into this world to defeat sin. That we might be forgiven.

That we might be transformed. That we might be returned to a place where we can have a relationship with you. That ultimately we might return to the garden where you dwell with us.

And we thank you that this is of grace. We thank you that even though we couldn't earn it and will never deserve it, we can have it. Help us to rely on this.

Help us to be people who are shaped by that. As we go through life, people who radiate grace and forgiveness to a world that is full of sin.

We ask this, that Christ might be glorified in us. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.