

“Noah’s Blessing and Curse”
(Genesis 9:18-29)

As our society continues to slip further and further away from the Lord, there is one sin that becomes more and more prominent, and that is the disrespect and dishonoring of parents. There was a time when parents were held in very high regard. They were considered to be the most special and most honored part of the family. They still should be. They are the ones without which the family could not live, which is why orphans are so vulnerable. The father generally works outside the house to bring home what is needed to support his family by way of food, clothing and shelter, while the mother works inside the home, taking those necessities and ministering them to her family. Parent’s work is mainly that of service, as you who are parents know very well. But that is one of the reasons why it is such a place of honor, as we saw this morning. The more people depend on your ministry to them, the more important your work is, and the more important your work is, the more you should be honored by those to whom you minister. Parents give up a lot for their children. Our parents did. They laid down their lives to bring us into the world. They took care of us when we were too small and helpless to take care of ourselves. They provided everything we needed. They equipped us to live in this world. They gave up a great deal of time and money and made many sacrifices, just so we could be here today. Being a parent is the most demanding and self-effacing job there is, which is why parents should be honored. The Lord takes the honoring of our parents so seriously that He included it in His Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment is, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Ex. 20:12). He takes the breaking of this commandment so seriously that He included it at the end of Romans 1 in the list of serious sins that those who reject God commit. Paul writes, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, *disobedient to parents*, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (1:28-32). The pastor of a church I used to attend once said that he couldn’t understand how this sin got into the list. I used to wonder about that myself, until I began to see how important this is to the Lord. God wants us to honor our parents. It appears in the Scripture that honoring our parents is next in importance only to honoring Him. This is what our passage this evening shows us. It shows us that the Lord wonderfully blesses those who honor their parents, but curses those who dishonor them.

Our passage begins by affirming what we saw two weeks ago: that the Flood of Noah’s day was a universal flood that destroyed the whole earth. Notice that verses 18 and 19 again tell us that the whole world was populated by Shem, Ham and Japheth. I don’t want to spend any more time on this, except to say that the Bible clearly teaches that the Flood covered the whole earth, and not simply the Mesopotamian Valley in which Noah and his family lived. If everyone hadn’t been destroyed, then there would have been other families populating the earth.

Now what we read about next is really quite sad. It has to do with the sin of Noah. After

they got off the ark, they began doing what they used to do before the Flood -- namely, farm. In those days, if you were going to have something to eat and drink, you needed to farm. Stores were in short supply. And so "Noah began farming and planted a vineyard" (9:20). And when the grapes were ripe, he made them into wine, and drank the wine until he became drunk. Now I want you to notice that wine in the Bible is not simply grape juice, nor is it so heavily watered down that it contains next to no alcohol. Wine was able to make a man drunk. And I also want to remind you that the Bible does not say that it is a sin to drink wine, or even strong drink. But it is a sin to get drunk. This is what Noah did. Some commentators try to excuse Noah's drunkenness by saying that things changed after the Flood. The wine fermented differently than it did before. Noah didn't know what he was doing. That's possible, especially since the Lord didn't seem to call any attention to the fact that Noah sinned. But it's also possible that he did sin. One of the reasons why drunkenness is a sin is because of what it makes you do. You lose control of yourself. You don't know what you're doing. Look at what Noah did. He uncovered himself inside his tent. This is why Paul tells us that we should not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Wine makes us do silly and even sinful things, if we drink too much of it. But the more we have of the Spirit, the more we will do holy and righteous things, because the more we have of God's Spirit, the more we will love Him.

But what Moses really wants us to pay attention to in our passage is not so much Noah's sin, but that of his son, Ham. Ham happened to come into his father's tent and saw his nakedness. And when he did, he didn't do what he should have done -- which is to cover his eyes so he wouldn't see his father's shame, cover over his father's nakedness with a blanket or something else, and then cover his mouth so that others wouldn't know what his father had done --, but instead he looked at his father's nakedness, left his father naked when he couldn't do anything about it, and even went out and exposed his father's nakedness by telling his brothers, perhaps thinking that they would find it as humorous as he did. He didn't honor his father, but greatly dishonored him.

Another thing Moses wanted us to see was how Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, honored their father. When they heard what Ham had to say, they were probably very embarrassed for their father. And instead of doing what Ham had done, they laid a piece of clothing across their shoulders, walked into the tent backwards so they wouldn't see their father's nakedness, and covered him. They didn't dishonor their father, but were doing their best to preserve his honor. There is a lesson for us here besides that of honoring our parents. We should do everything we can to cover over each other's faults, rather than expose them. If we do, it will certainly go a long way in preserving the love and unity which should exist among God's people.

Now even though Noah was drunk enough to lose control, he was still conscious enough to know what had happened. He knew what Ham had done, and he knew what Shem and Japheth had done. And when he awoke from his wine, he repaid them accordingly. In those days the blessings and curses of a father were very significant, especially if the father happened to be the one who had the promises of God with regard to the Messiah. Noah was the line in which the seed of the woman was to come. There couldn't really be any doubt, since Noah was the last righteous man on earth, and it was his household alone that had been preserved through the Flood. I'm not quite sure how we would apply this ability to bless and curse today. Noah and the patriarchs were not merely members of Christ's church, they were also prophets. When

they blessed, those they blessed received a blessing, and when they cursed, those they cursed were cursed. We as fathers, on the other hand, aren't prophets and don't necessarily have the exclusive promise of God that the blessings of redemption will be in our line. However, we are fathers, and we are a part of God's covenant people, so our words and prayers must make some difference in the lives of our children.

But now let's look at the curses and blessings which Noah gave to his sons, to see the consequences of what they did, but also to see the promise of the Messiah in them.

First, when Noah woke up, he cursed Canaan, the son of Ham. Now if the names of the children in the genealogies are listed from first-born to last, which I think they are, then Canaan was the youngest son of Ham, after Cush, Mizraim and Put (Gen. 10:6). The question is, Why did Noah curse Canaan? After all, it was Ham who sinned against him, not Canaan. Some say it was because Canaan had also taken part in this sin, or at least agreed with what his father had done. It's possible that he might have agreed with his father, but we don't read anything about this in this passage, nor do we read that he was involved with his father's sin. I think a better way of understanding this is to realize that our sins don't only affect us, they also affect our children. Remember what the Lord tells us about this in the Second Commandment. He says, "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Ex. 20:5-6). If we sin and do not repent, God will bring our iniquity on our children and grandchildren, to the third and fourth generations, and even beyond, if He wants to. But if we obey; if we trust in Him, turn from our sins, and seek to honor Him in all things, He will bring His blessing upon our children even to the thousandth generation. This doesn't necessarily mean that everyone of our children will be blessed. After all, Noah was a righteous man, and yet one of his sons -- namely, Ham --, and especially one of his grandsons -- namely, Canaan --, ended up being cursed. Now we know that God will not punish the children for the sins of their fathers (Deu. 24:16; Jer. 31:29-30; Eze. 18:20). But what a father does or doesn't do will have consequences on his children in that it will either bring the blessing of God, or His curse. In this case of curse, the children will suffer for their own sins, rather than for their father's. The Lord can sovereignly choose to withhold His blessing which would have caused the children to turn and be blessed, because of the sins of the father, just as He can choose to bless them for the father's obedience. In the case of Canaan, He chose to withhold His blessing for the sin of Ham. If we ask why He did this to Canaan, rather than to any of the other sons of Ham, the answer is simply that it was God's good pleasure to do so. "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Rom. 9:18). Although we may find that Ham's other children also didn't fare that well.

So then what was the curse and what was the blessing? Noah cursed Canaan by making him the lowest of servants to his brothers. Now we saw this morning that becoming a servant is really the way to be exalted. Is this what the Lord was intending for Canaan? No. It's one thing to humble ourselves, but another to be humbled by God. If we humble ourselves, the Lord will exalt us. But if we exalt ourselves, the Lord will humble us. And when He humbles a man, that isn't necessarily a blessing. Now the Lord didn't fulfill this prophecy right away, as often He doesn't. But He did eventually, when He sent the children of Abraham into the land of Canaan to destroy utterly all the people who lived in that land. Ham uncovered the shame of his father, and it ended up bringing a curse upon him and his posterity. But Noah blessed Shem and

Japheth. When he blessed Shem, he said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.” When a blessing was to be a great blessing, very often the eyes of the blesser looked up to God to praise Him for the greatness of His blessing. This is what Noah did for Shem. Here, Noah is actually naming Shem as the one through whom the seed of the woman would come. It is through this line that Abraham comes, then David, and finally Christ (Matt. 1:1). And he also blessed Japheth, saying, “May God enlarge Japheth.” The name “Japheth” means “to enlarge.” The Lord was promising Japheth that he would become numerous, and he did. Japheth is the father of all the Gentiles. They were far more numerous than Shem or Ham’s children. But notice one more thing. He adds, “And let him dwell in the tents of Shem.” Here is a promise that one day the children of Japheth would dwell with the children of Shem. This is the first foreshadowing of Gentile salvation. The covenant was made with Abraham and his seed, who were the children of Shem. The Gentiles were strangers to that covenant. But through Christ, the seed of the woman, one day the Gentiles would become fellow members of the household of the saints (Eph. 2, 3). These blessings all had to do with the coming of Christ and with who would be saved in Christ. But they all appeared to stem from how they treated their father Noah.

The Bible says that if we dishonor our parents, the Lord will not honor us, but if honor them, we will be honored. There are consequences to the things we do. Even though God has ordained the end from the beginning, He has also ordains the means by which these things will happen. We can’t know what He has ordained until it happens, but we can know everyday what His will for us is: obedience to all His holy will. God tells us to honor our parents. Examine your hearts to see if this is what you have done. Your father may not be a Noah or an Abraham, your mother may not be a Sarah or a Rebekah, but they are your parents, and the Lord says you need to honor them. But who can really honor God apart from Christ? Who can really honor their parents apart from His grace? Even our best works are filthy rags in His sight. We must have our hearts cleaned by His grace, through faith in Christ, before the Father will accept us. We must have His strength which comes through Christ, if we are truly to honor our parents. May the Lord grant to each of us that we may. May He grant to us the blessings of Japheth, that we may dwell in the tents of Shem. Amen.