



For the first five years of my ministry career I had the privilege of working with junior high, high school and college students. I loved being a student ministries pastor. One of my favorite things about the ministry was taking our high school students to summer camp at Hume Lake. We would spend a week there having tons of fun, listening to great speakers, worshiping God, all with 1000 other students. What I loved most was seeing God move in our high school students. Many of my former students came to faith in Christ or recommitted their lives to Christ at Hume Lake. But here is what would typically happen.

While at camp, they would have an incredible experience, which gave them what I called the “camp high.” These students would be fired up for Jesus, ready to live for Him and share Jesus with the world. It was so hard to leave Hume and come home because the reality of real life was imminent. What would quickly happen is that the camp high would only last for a few weeks, then the struggle with sin, life, choices, and friends would come back with full force. Throughout the rest of the summer I would hear all the time, “I wish we could go back to camp!” My response was always, no you don’t! Summer camp is life lived in a Christian bubble! It is easy to live for Jesus when everyone else is. I was always prepared to teach our students after camp that we are called to be salt and light to the world and that we cannot rely solely on our emotional experiences at camp.

Have you ever been on a spiritual high only to find yourself flat on your face later? Maybe you’ve been to one of our retreats, or to a great Christian conference, or you heard an incredible sermon, or read a life-changing Christian book. We’ve all been there and done that. We would get excited about the Lord, ready to fight sin, encouraged in our marriage or parenting; we would be on the “camp high.” But the high quickly wears off and the reality of sin, struggles, pressure, parenting, marriage, and life came back in full force, knocking us to the ground like a middle linebacker.

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? This is exactly the place we find our friend Noah. From a spiritual mountaintop high to the valley low. What I want to do this morning is first explain this bizarre passage and then end by giving us some very practical life application points.

“The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were

dispersed. Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.’ After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died” (Genesis 9:18–29).

Noah’s Fall

Make no mistake about it, Noah was on a spiritual high. His family was spared and humanity was saved because of this man’s faith and righteousness. They had survived the flood and were experiencing God’s blessing in the new world. Just imagine the incredible journey Noah has been on. The Bible devotes five whole chapters to the life of Noah (Gen. 6–10) as well as many references to this great man in the New Testament. Genesis 6:9 tells us that, *“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”* What a way to be described! The writer of Hebrews also describes Noah as a man on faith and righteousness (Hebrews 11:7). Even the Apostle Peter called Noah *“a herald of righteousness”* (2 Pet. 2:5). But should we really be shocked and surprised at Noah’s fall? I don’t think so. Remember what the Lord said earlier in Genesis 8:21? *“...for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”*

What’s really not at all that surprising is that the great Flood did not get rid of evil. Sin had survived the flood and was alive and well both in Noah and his sons. Sin had weathered the storm and came out without a scratch and did a number on Noah and his son.

Verse 20 begins to paint the picture of Noah’s new life. Noah became a man of the soil and became the world’s first great wine maker—Noah in Napa. Like any good wine maker Noah took great care of his grapes. Remember it took years for his vineyard to grow, mature and for the wine to ferment. Noah was not

ignorant of the power of wine. He was a seasoned man of the soil and knew exactly what he was doing. But Noah, in his old age, let down his guard, became careless and found himself not only drunk but laying naked in his tent. Noah's sin was not only drunkenness but improper nakedness. Inappropriate nakedness and drunkenness was an offense to God and condemned in the Bible. Let me read just one verse of many that talk about this: *"Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness!" (Hab. 2:15).*

We need to understand the historical and cultural setting of the passage in order to appreciate the severity of Noah's situation. In our modern world today, we read this passage and think, "What's the big deal? Noah had a little too much to drink and got naked?" Unfortunately in our American culture today drunkenness and nakedness are common in marketing and in the media. You don't have to travel to Las Vegas anymore; just turn on the TV, log onto the computer, or open a magazine. The truth is that we've all been, at some level, desensitized to these images. But in the ancient world, especially in a patriarchal society, seeing another's nakedness, especially your father's, was a major offense. Nakedness in the Old Testament, since Adam and Eve, are often connected with sin and shame. One writer said this, "To be exposed meant to be unprotected; to see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation" (Ross, 215).

This was also true outside the Bible. In the ancient Greek story of Gyges, written by the Greek historian, Herodotus, who lived in the 5th century BC, (*Histories* 1.8-13), it was told that Gyges, a military general, accidentally saw his master's wife while she dressed and saw her naked. By Greek law one of the two had to be put to death because of the shame that the occasion brought. Being drunk and naked was no joking matter in Noah's time or even in ours for that matter. What is really sad here is that Noah had an incredible opportunity to start a new, godly, and ideal society, but failed by the work of his own hands. His son Ham soon found him drunk and naked, lying in shame and disgrace inside his tent.

The Responses of Noah's Sons

At first reading, we are left wondering, what was Ham's sin? Were there details of the story left out? What else, if anything, did Ham do? The answers are found in understanding the passage in its original language. Ham *"saw"* his father naked. The verb makes it clear that this wasn't an accidental observation. The verb used here literally means that "he gazed with satisfaction." Remember too that Ham was not a little boy wandering into his father's bedroom. Ham was over a hundred years old by this time. He was basically a peeping Tom and his sin was

voyeurism. He became sexually excited by secretly looking at his father's naked body. But that is not all Ham did.

Ham then comes out of Noah's tent and begins to gossip and brag to his older brothers. By doing this he exposed his father's sin and shame to his brothers. He even had the garment in his hands that was supposed to be covering his dad. Ham's actions showed complete disrespect for his father. It was obvious that he enjoyed seeing his father's demise and shame. His evil character became clear by his actions as he mocked and ridiculed his father. Ham was blatantly breaking the 5th Commandment to "Honor your father and mother," which would be written by Moses later.

Thankfully Noah had two righteous sons, Shem and Japheth. They immediately take the garment from Ham and carefully place it on their father without seeing his naked body. By doing this they preserved the honor and dignity of their father. I can only wonder what these two older brothers said or did to Ham afterwards!

Noah Curses and Blesses

Once Noah woke up and took a few Advil, he somehow finds out what Ham did to him and pronounces a curse on Canaan, his grandson, and blesses his two older boys. There are several things that need to be explained here. First, in the ancient world, a curse was only as powerful as the person making it. There was no magical power in Noah's words nor was this some way to force the Lord to act. Noah's curse and blessing were really a prophecy and a predication of things to come. It is God and God alone who could bring about the curse or the blessing if He chose to do so.

What's really interesting here is that Canaan, the son of Ham, is cursed. His curse is that his descendants will be slaves, and *"servants of servants."* In other words, they would become the slaves of the slaves. Canaan and his entire lineage would be cursed, not just because of what Ham did, but also because of their own shameful actions.

You may be wondering why Noah curses his grandson Canaan. There are several possible answers. Maybe Canaan, like Ham, did something disrespectful to his grandfather. It is very probable that Canaan did something awful that was not recorded in the passage but was worthy of cursing. Perhaps Noah has continually seen evil in both Ham and Canaan's behavior and this occasion was the last straw. I wonder if Noah, while they were inside the ark, began to see these evil traits in Ham. Whatever the reasons, on the basis of Noah's insight into these two men, he delivers a prophecy about their future descendants. In fact, both the Bible and history tells us that Canaan will become a nation of sexual immoral people (they were the inhabitants of Sodom

and Gomorrah) who are slaves to other nations. The Canaanites would eventually become one of Israel's greatest enemies.

Noah not only curses Canaan but he blesses his two older boys, Shem and Japheth. Shem would be served by Canaan and this blessing would also extend to Japheth. What's significant is that the Lord, the God of Shem, is blessed first. In this blessing God's divine name, Yahweh, is used. Shem and Japheth are two men who, like Noah, walked with the Lord. They are blessed because of their relationship Him. Their numbers and territories are blessed and increase. The chosen seed of Eve continues through the godly line of Shem and Japheth. While the wicked seed of the serpent continues through the family lines of Ham and Canaan.

You may be thinking that Noah over-reacted. But listen to what Deuteronomy says, *"Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"* (Deut. 27:16). It is really hard for us reading this passage today to understand the gravity of Ham's sin. What is wrong with gossiping or joking to your brothers about your parents' failings? What's the big deal about seeing your dad naked? But as I've said, there is much more to this incident than meets the eye. We also need to remember that the entire world would be populated from the lineage of these three brothers. It was very important to Noah to set the path for blessing and the path for the curse. Noah's sons in many ways represent two kinds of people—those like Adam and Eve, who allow God to cover their nakedness and shame, and those like the Canaanites, who have no sense of their guilt or shame before God. The line of Shem is the way of blessing. The line of Canaan is the way of the curse. These two ways of life are alive and well today.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by answering the question, "Why was this weird passage preserved for us in the Bible?" I believe there are several reasons. First, if you are not a Christian and you are visiting us this morning you need to understand that the flood did not and could not fully eradicate sin. This passage makes it clear that we need a greater salvation than the ark because sin lies in the human heart. If you are like me, before I became a Christian, I had no problem understanding that I was a sinner. I couldn't even keep my own standards, let alone God's. If you are not yet a follower of Christ, you need to understand that our nakedness and shame cannot be covered by anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can cleanse the human heart and deal with sin. He did this once and for all by shedding his blood on the cross. Jesus is the ultimate covering for our sin. He is our atonement; He is *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). What the flood couldn't do, Jesus did. Have your sins been washed by the blood of Christ? Have you experienced His grace? If not, I would encourage you to talk with

someone on our prayer team right after the service. They would love to explain what it means to walk with Jesus.

Second, I think Noah's downfall was recorded and kept to be a warning to us about the power of sin. Don't ever be fooled by the thinking that you are above any sin because you are not! I sometimes hear people say, "I'd never do that!" or "that would never happen to me" or "how could she do that?" I've been a pastor long enough and talked to enough people who have been fooled by thinking they were safe from certain evils. Noah wasn't safe from his fall and he was a man of faith and righteousness! I am convinced that you and I, under the right circumstances, under the right pressure, at the right time, truly are capable of doing anything. If you think otherwise, you are in danger of finding yourself in the same place as Noah. Noah could not make it on his own power and strength; he needed God's grace and so do we! Noah was a flawed man, a sinner, like me, who needs God's grace every single moment of every day. And you do, too.

This passage is also given to make us wise. Isn't it true that wisdom can be gained by learning from other's mistakes? Noah's story reminds us that just because you get older doesn't mean you can let your guard down. Noah put down his guard at home, in his own vineyard. He was now out of the public spotlight, he was an old man, and he got complacent. He didn't finish strong. I personally have to be very careful and watchful after any ministry "success" or "camp high." After preaching what I think is a good sermon, or after a successful event that I was responsible for, I can't let my guard down. Often the Enemy will try his schemes in my life after the mountain top experience. Like Noah, I've made plenty of mistakes. Noah's example gives us wisdom by reminding us to fight sin and stay on guard always.

Another application I thought of this week has to do with parenting. I truly believe that there is no such thing as the perfect parent. Noah's fall reminds us that parenting is truly all about God's grace! There is so much material out there in the Christian community today that basically says if you follow these steps, or this book, or use this technique, then your children will turn out well. I am not saying that any of those books or methods are wrong. As parents we should be reading, studying, talking to other parents and strategically and intentionally raising our children. However, when anyone reads the Bible carefully, especially Genesis, it becomes obvious that parenting is all about God's grace. Adam and Eve have two sons and Cain murders his brother Abel. Did Adam and Eve fail at Parenting 101? Cain then has a few sons; Lamech was a disaster that followed in his dad's evil footsteps, but his other son, Enoch, walked with God. What kind of father was Cain? And of course we have Noah's example. Out of his three sons only two walked with the Lord. Did Noah not parent his younger son like he did his older boys?

I've talked to and seen many parents who have done everything that we would consider "right" and whose children have had some significant challenges. I've also seen and been around parents who were clueless and whose kids are walking with the Lord. I really hope this is an encouragement for the parents of CPC. Yes, teach your children about Jesus, instill values and character traits in them, bring them to church, read all the books, listen to all the sermons, be intentional, and pray hard for your children. But at the end of the day, you and I are absolutely dependent on God's grace and activity in the lives of our children. If I am honest with myself, I need to spend more time on my knees praying for my children.

Lastly, I want to ask the men a question. What do you do to protect yourself from looking at women inappropriately? This passage is a wake-up call for us to pursue holiness and purity. We, both men and women, as followers of Jesus, need to fight

against our culture that has slowly chipped away and eroded the Biblical values of modesty, sobriety, and honoring our parents. Guys, what is your plan to fight lust and temptation? Maybe, like a friend of mine, you need to post the verse from Job 31:1 on your computer screen, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a woman." If you struggle with pornography (I know there is growing problem among women, too), you need to get an internet filter and ask someone to keep you accountable. We all, myself included, need to be careful with the movies, TV shows, internet sites, magazines, and books we look at. I'm not trying to be legalistic here, I am just being realistic.

Noah's sin is a sobering reminder to us that righteous people can and will fall into sin.

What are you doing to protect yourself?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.