

The Window to the Soul, Genesis 6:1-8

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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. This summer we are walking through the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis in a series subtitled, Creating Culture. It's taking us from the very beginning of the world, as God creates culture for the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, all the way to the covering of the world, as God multiplies cultures by dispersing people from the Tower of Babel. We're doing this not only with an eye toward culture in general—though one of our mission convictions as a church *is* that we give high value to language and culture—but we're also doing this with an eye toward our own culture as a church.

Today we're going to be skipping ahead in the story to Genesis 6:1-8 if you'd like to open your Bible with me. You can find that on page 5 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. Don't worry, later we'll return in the series to Genesis 5 and its long genealogy. The title of today's sermon is: "The Window to the Soul," and here's the main idea: This passage gives us a window into the heart of humanity, but more importantly, into the heart of God. We'll break down the passage like this:

- 1) Humanity sees sin as the way to ignore death - vv. 1-4
- 2) The Lord sees sin as the way to deserve death - vv. 5-7
- 3) The Lord sees grace as the way to escape death - v. 8

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Genesis 6:1-8. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, "I

will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:1-8

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God’s people said, *Amen*. You may be seated.

Exposition

“The eyes are the window to the soul.” It’s a popular phrase in our culture, but what does it actually mean? Does it just mean that when you look deeply into someone’s eyes, you can tell all kinds of deep things about them? Well, that’s usually what we assume it means. But I think there’s much more to it than that. Some actually attribute this phrase to Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, where he says,

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! Matthew 6:22-23

Once again, it’s not about the eyes themselves, but how the eyes take things in. With our eyes we don’t just see things, we *perceive and process* them.

For example, if I suddenly started dancing, even though it would be seen the same by everyone, it would be perceived and processed in lots of different ways, right? Some would think I was trying to be funny, some would think I was a huge dork, and some would think I was having a seizure.

So how you perceive and process says a lot about you. In other words, your eyes are the window to your soul.

Interestingly, today’s passage, from beginning to end, has much to do with the eyes—the eyes of humanity and the eyes of the Lord.¹ And how they perceive and process what they see gives us a window into their hearts—and into our own.

You see, modern humanity would not allow for much of a connection between ourselves and the ancient people of Genesis 6, people so wicked that God had no choice but to wipe them out. We’re not that bad, right? We’re making the world a better place, not

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), Kindle Edition, Loc 2109-2110, 2114-2115

worse, right? Even though this passage will show us some particularly bad forms of evil that existed in that day, the bigger and more relevant message to us is that, well, these are our people, and their ways are our ways.²

All this comes not only on the tailend of the story of Cain killing his brother Abel, which Patrick walked us through last week, but an entire section that describes how humanity grew in both quantity and quality. Some of them called on the name of the Lord³, while most pursued life apart from him. The result—and consequences—of such unrestrained wickedness is what we see in chapter 6.

1) Humanity Sees Sin as the Way to Ignore Death - vv. 1-4

This brings us to our first section in the passage, that humanity sees sin as the way to ignore death. Read with me beginning in verse 1:

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Genesis 6:1-2

At first glance, it seems like nothing's wrong here. After all, didn't God command humanity from the very beginning to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"?⁴ Well, that's what they were doing, right?—except that the rest of the passage shows God wasn't too happy about it.⁵ What made it so bad?

Well, a lot of that depends on how you interpret "the sons of God". Over the years there have been several popular ideas, all of which you can gather some measure of biblical evidence for. Here are three of them:

First, some people think that you have the intermarrying of the evil lineage of Cain with the godly lineage of his younger brother Seth. My problem with that is making out some people as better than others seems disjointed in a passage that shows everyone was a lost cause. (Although I guess you could say that "bad company corrupts good character".⁶)

² Ross, Loc 2100-2102; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 262

³ Genesis 4:26

⁴ Genesis 1:28

⁵ Ross, Loc 2131-2133

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:33

Second, some people think what you have is fallen angels, or demons, taking human wives and spawning children. The main evidence for this is that in the rest of the Old Testament the phrase “sons of God” refers to angels⁷; and in the New Testament there are references to what seems like God’s judgment of demons in the age of Noah.⁸ My problem with this is there’s no evidence in the Bible for a demon being able to have intercourse and reproduce with a human. (Although I guess this could be *that one time* it happened in the Bible, and that’s why God shut it down.)

Third, some people think the “sons of God” were simply mighty rulers and warriors of old, such as those mythologized in ancient Greek epics like *The Illiad*, or modern fantasy novels like *The Lord of the Rings*.

Honestly, I don’t know that we have enough evidence to say with certainty which interpretation is correct. I think there is wisdom in seeing parts of all three influencing this time in history. Here’s what I mean:

In the story and genealogy prior to this there is definitely a contrast between those who were satisfied to walk with God beholding his glory and those who walked away to obtain their own glory. So how did men of old, and some still today, seek to obtain glory for themselves? Often by becoming renowned warriors and then ultimately powerful rulers, who could then do things like defy death in battle and snatch harems of beautiful women like trophies. How then did women of old seek to obtain glory for themselves? By binding themselves to such powerful men.

Ok, we’re seeing all this in the passage—but where do the fallen angels come in? Well, how does Satan and his demons respond when humans seek glory? They encourage it! Because to seek your own glory and to build your own kingdom suppresses God’s.⁹ So in the very least they stirred up the evil of humanity, and very well may have possessed mighty men. We know the Bible shows the possibility of that, demons possessing humans. So, what if it was God-hating, glory-seeking, demon-possessed men taking from the daughters of man and reproducing? And such women and their fathers consenting to these marriages despite the obvious demonic presence.¹⁰

⁷ Job 1:6; Psalm 29:1; Daniel 3:25

⁸ 1 Peter 3:19-20; 2 Peter 2:4-6; Jude 6

⁹ Romans 1:18

¹⁰ Ross, Loc 2133-2134, 2138-2161; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1967), 89-90; Wenham, 250-252; Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 156-158

Thus, all over this story you have the outright defiance of God's well-ordered boundaries. If you boiled down all these actions I think you'd end up with a simple three-word phrase, a blasphemous hashtag that characterized their movement: "I am God—I can do what I want; I can get what I want; I can live forever." And though it may seem extra bad all wrapped up in such actions, it's really no different than this simpler moment from a few chapters earlier:

[Just as the sons of God saw the daughters of man were *good* and took them,] *...the woman saw that the tree was good...and she took of its fruit and ate, Genesis 3:6*¹¹

Whether it's simply reaching out for something we know we shouldn't, or reaching out to take over people like trophies, it all crosses the same boundary: he is God and we are not.

And so how does God respond to us when we're out of control and breaking through the boundaries he's set for us? He graciously gives us a new one to remind us we're not God, and hopefully bring us to our senses. Look in verse 3:

³ Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." Genesis 6:3

What's the new boundary? Well, since humanity was pursuing sin in order to ignore death, it seems that God was limiting their lifespan to no more than 120 years. If we hadn't skipped over Genesis 5, you would've seen how it was common for people to live hundreds of years in those days. That shows the grace of God to not enforce the penalty of death so rapidly. But what may show his grace even more is that he limits the duration in which humanity can live in wickedness.

But the new boundary might also be looked at as God graciously giving humanity 120 more years before he destroyed them with the flood.¹² Or it could be 120 more years before he began giving humanity an external law rather than allowing him to be guided by his own judgment.¹³ Regardless, what's at work here is God's gracious limitation of our wickedness. Left to our own devices, we simply get worse and worse. You, me, and all people are far more capable of evil than we even realize, but God in his common grace limits it in ways we often can't see.

¹¹ Wenham, 253; Kass, 159

¹² Ross, Loc 2164-2167; Wenham, 255; Kidner, 90

¹³ Kass, 160

So, as always, woven into God's boundaries and consequences, are blessings with an eye toward a greater story of redemption playing out. And for God's Old Testament people, that story would include a strange race of people referred to in verse 4:

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. Genesis 6:4

The mention of the Nephilim here takes us back to our discussion in verses 1 and 2. Who are they? Well, their only other direct reference in the Bible comes from Numbers 13, when the Israelites sent spies into the land that God had promised them, and all but two of the spies returned with a faithless report, saying,

“The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” Numbers 13:32-33

So, we take it the Nephilim are *big*—in fact the word itself can be translated “giants”.¹⁴ But the word might also be translated as “fellers,” not as in “howdy fellars,” but as in those who makes things fall, like lumberjacks. Except, based on the context, this ancient race didn't seem known for felling trees, but for felling people. They were mighty men of renown, feared and terrible warriors who were likely at the center of the depraved and demonic wickedness of this age.¹⁵

So, mentioning them would have been significant to the original readers of Genesis. Why? Because they *still* faced the Nephilim at that time, along with other mighty, defiant people raging against their God.¹⁶ God was being sure to show them that no one was too great to ignore his boundary of death. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Or in other (better) words, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”¹⁷ Therefore, the humble hearer of this passage will see into the window of his or her own soul and say, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Wenham, 256

¹⁵ Kass, 161

¹⁶ Ross, Loc 2199-2203

¹⁷ Matthew 23:12

¹⁸ Luke 18:13, NIV

2) The Lord Sees Sin as the Way to Deserve Death - vv. 5-7

But many people of our day will not respond that way, just as they did not in Noah's. So how did the Lord respond? That brings us to our second section of the passage: the Lord sees sin as the way to deserve death. We read in verse 5,

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5

Whereas humanity sees wickedness as an opportunity to take something good and twist it into something evil, or to take something evil and just call it something good, God sees it all for what it actually is. Here, he's not suddenly seeing everything clearly for the first time; he's pronouncing his evaluation of things, just like he did at creation when he "saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."¹⁹ Except here, behold, it was not very good.²⁰

It was so *not very good*, in fact, that "every intention of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually." There couldn't be a stronger statement in the Bible about the condition of the human heart. But is that too harsh? Surely this only applies to ancient humanity, not us!

I must confess, there have been times in my life where I have struggled with this verse; because I can look at good, moral people who aren't Christians and compare their lives to mine, and sometimes I don't see a lot of major differences. We're both trying to be faithful spouses and parents, hard workers, good citizens, kind and generous to others. But according to the Bible every intention of the thoughts of their hearts is supposed to be only evil continually, while mine as a Christian is now supposed to be pure—so shouldn't our lives look drastically different?!

What has helped me work through this is remembering that the focus of God's evaluation isn't the behavior on the surface, but the deepest part of our hearts: our desires and motives. That's why we're told in Proverbs,

*²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23*

¹⁹ Genesis 1:31

²⁰ Ross, Loc 2168-2170; Wenham, 257

The heart is the spring, or source, of all we think and say and do. So if it goes toxic, it poisons everything that comes out. That doesn't mean humanity isn't capable of thinking or saying or doing anything good—no, the image of God is still beautifully alive within us all.²¹ The difference is that when a Christian mother consoles her child in the middle of the night, she does so with a heart that has been changed and is capable of loving the glory of God. And when a mother apart from Christ does the exact same thing for her child, she does so with a heart that hasn't been changed, and still lives for its own glory. So, though her action may be good and beautiful in itself, it's still poisoned at the source by the wrong desires and motives, hidden far from the eyes of any human, but clear as day to God.

That's why we keep emphasizing during this sermon series not just the head and not just the hands, but the heart. From it flows the springs of life—be attentive to it!

And speaking of the heart, look at this window that we get here into the heart of God. He's not some distant, impersonal deity who has wound up the clock of his creation and just let it go. He is *crushed* by this. Verse 6:

⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Genesis 6:6

Many of you over the last couple years have commended me for my vulnerability before you. Trust me, I'm not always vulnerable and I don't always share things that I should share, and sometimes I can hide behind a facade of "vulnerability." But when it does come out of me, or even out of you, where do you think that comes from? Look at our God here in this verse. This was long before he would hang displayed on cross, but isn't his bleeding heart already laid bare before us? He's regretting and grieving in bitter anguish over his beloved creatures; the prophet Isaiah uses the same language later to describe a wife who's just been deserted by her husband.²²

And here we begin to really understand why it was that pain came into the world as a consequence of sin—just like we love because he first loved us, we are pained because he first was pained.²³ And when you experience, not just anger, but great pain and grief over something or someone, you know what it says about them? That they were really valuable to you. That's why God was crushed—he loved these people, just like he loves people today.

²¹ Ross, Loc 2171-2174; Wenham, 257-258

²² Isaiah 54:6

²³ Ross, Loc 2174-2181; Wenham, 258-259

But, wow, thanks be to God that his response wasn't just compassion—he could've left humanity in its condition forever, just getting more and more wicked with no way out. But instead his heart was also filled with righteous anger, and in the paradox of both love and justice,

the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." Genesis 6:7

What we have here is a sentence that describes the complete reversal of creation; it's un-creating. And the language God uses is the picture of someone completely removing the contents of a plate and wiping it clean. God is going to completely "blot out" not only all humanity, but also animals; which suggests that they too had become grossly corrupted and were devouring each other like the people who ruled over them.²⁴ It was a bitter punishment, but it had to be done.

All this reminds me of a time early in mine and Katie's marriage. We had made the commitment to celebrate big when we paid off all our student loan debts. That time came and our *big* celebration was buying a *big* dog—by big I mean a 170-pound great dane named Tag. We spent a lot of money on him and made a lot of room for him, so even though he seemed a little rough around the edges, we quickly loved him. That is, until he began biting people. The first person he bit while we were hosting a family group, and she had to go to the hospital to get a couple stitches. We tried training him and keeping him away from people, but then one day a friend who was over approached him before we could stop her and Tag tried to bite her in the face. It was then that we realized how corrupted he was, probably from years of harsh treatment that we didn't know about. And even though we loved him, we knew it was only right to have him put down because of how much harm he could do. I still remember the sick feeling I had driving him to vet, and then the unexpected, heaving tears that came out as I had to help hold down his massive body until the life passed completely out of him. What a trainwreck.

Now, I'm not trying to make myself out to be God, or a dog to be humanity. But I tell that story because it offers a very human taste of what it's like to wade into corruption and justice and death and yet still have your heart connected to it. Sometimes we can think of God's pronouncement of judgment in the Bible and see him as detached and heartless and robotic. But whatever glimmer of heartache I experienced in my little

²⁴ Kass, 162; Ross, Loc 2181-2185; Wenham, 259

story, multiply that by billions—and that's what flooded God long before any water flooded man.

3) The Lord Sees Grace as the Way to Escape Death - v. 8

And yet awaiting us there's still an even greater window into the heart of God. This brings us to a final brief section of the passage, that the Lord sees grace as the way to escape death. We read in verse 8 these precious words:

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:8

Now it would be easy here to get distracted by focusing on Noah—what about him was different from everyone else in the world? Sure, there was something different, and we'll talk plenty more about that next week. But the window here isn't into Noah—we're captured again by something God sees, how *he* perceives and processes, and what that tells us about him.

He has found someone upon whom he can shower his grace and offer a way of escape from the coming judgment. Which tells us, one, he *wants* to show grace. The prophet Isaiah confirms this:

*In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it...
Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you, Isaiah 30:15, 18*

And second, this shows us Noah didn't earn this grace—then it wouldn't be grace, right? It was unmerited favor, the gift of one who can be described by the prophet Joel as

*gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster. Joel 2:13-14²⁵*

This is who he is! Not delighting to dole out death, but for all to escape it if they would only return to him with a broken and repentant heart.

²⁵ Ross, Loc 2194-2196

Conclusion

We began the sermon by acknowledging the depressing thought that the wickedness of Noah's day is not that different from the wickedness of our day; put more personally, that to look through the eyes and into the dark soul of ancient humanity, is to look into our own dark soul. Why drudge this back up? Well, because the Bible does. But even more importantly than that, we go here again because if we want God's grace to escape death, we have to first (like Noah) acknowledge that *we need it!*

We can choose to distance ourselves from this, to believe we have progressed to a far more civilized condition, that our world doesn't need this kind of judgment. But in doing that we'd also be distancing ourselves from Jesus, who actually taught the exact opposite. Referring to the future age when he would come a second time to judge the world, the age in which we live *right now*, he said this:

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:37-39

- Does modern humanity still see the pursuit of sin as the way to ignore death and judgment? Yes!
- Does God still grieve over our sin and find us worthy candidates for death and judgment? Yes!
- But—just as Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord—is there still grace to overcome death and survive judgment? Thanks be to God—yes!

Here is God's heart: knowing that our wickedness would only grow, and that therefore his wrath would only grow, God didn't just find someone to whom he could shower his grace, he put forward someone through whom he could extend grace to the whole world forever—his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

- Jesus looked upon the sons of God, and he stood them up rather than cut them down.
- Jesus looked upon the daughters of man, and he loved them rather than used them.

- Jesus looked upon the glory he could've grasped for himself on earth, and instead he emptied himself.²⁶
- Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only good continually.
- And when he saw and felt how wicked humanity had become, it grieved him to his heart, and all the way to the cross he agreed with the Father and the Spirit, 'Blot *me* out from the face of the land, so that *they* might find favor in the eyes of the Lord!"

And so

*it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
 he has put him to grief;
 when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
 he shall see his offspring* [not the fruit of his sin, but the fruit of his sacrifice]; *he shall prolong his days;
 the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*
¹¹ *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied* [what would he see that would be so satisfying after all this?];
*by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
 make many to be accounted righteous,
 and he shall bear their iniquities.*
¹² *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong* [not the Nephilim, not the mighty men of renown, but with those who find their strength in God's salvation],
*because he poured out his soul to death
 and was numbered with the transgressors;
 yet he bore the sin of many,
 and makes intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:10-12*

So as you see and feel the wickedness of this world yourself, and even within yourself, let it remind you that the risen Son is coming again to sweep it all away in judgment, so that you run to *him* and keep your eyes on *him*; not just so you can feel superior to everyone else, or just so you can escape death, but that he might make you one of the many sons and daughters he is bringing to glory.²⁷

Communion - On the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you;

²⁶ Philippians 2:5-8

²⁷ Hebrews 2:10

eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ is the one through whom we find favor in the eyes of the Lord.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let’s pray.

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