

ReGroups 8/13/23

Origin Stories: Mercy Triumphs - Genesis 6

By Contrast

Artists employ different tricks in order to realize their vision for any given portrait. You can observe in paintings and even edited photography, that one of the choice tools in making the focal point of a picture pop is that of *contrast*. They use lighting and shading in order to add emphasis. Sometimes shadows are added so as to bring greater color to the image's star.

Genesis 6 is an important chapter for a lot of reasons, but mainly because it sets up this contrast that will be seen throughout the rest of the Bible. We will read about the certainty of judgment, but also discover the provision of mercy and grace. It's the looming backdrop of judgment that will ultimately make the center-stage placement of mercy and grace stand out all the more.

There are many examples of this contrast throughout the Bible, even if this is the first and one of the most prominent. The impending flood makes Noah's salvation all the more special. The plagues against Egypt make Israel's exodus more impactful. Christ's suffering God's wrath on the cross puts our own forgiveness and pardon in the most dramatic light.

Needless to say, the inevitability of judgment establishes a backdrop which magnifies and underscores the Gospel and salvation. This is not just speculation or observation, this is actually how the Bible frames judgement vs salvation. Read **Romans 9:22-23** and **discuss** how these two realities go hand-in-hand. **Have you ever thought about how there would be no Gospel, no mercy, and no grace *if not for* the impending certainty of judgement?**

God of This World

It's safe to say that God could've justifiably ended the Earth experiment after things fell apart in Eden. He owed nothing to Adam or Eve, and they were absolutely at fault and solely responsible for Earth's descent into sin. However, it was because of God's love that He spared the world. As we've read over the last few weeks, His patience would be continually tested as the population increased. With this increase of people, came an increase of lawlessness and corruption, as described in **Genesis 6:1-6** and **discuss** the dire conditions of creation.

First up we read that people weren't just turning away from God because of their fallen nature, but they were receiving a little extra help. It's so important that we don't ever take lightly just how much evil pressure there is on our world. We don't just have a sinful bent within us, Satan is at work all around us to make things as dark as possible.

It's not an overstatement to say that our world and its systems all have a trajectory away from the Lord. The only morally *good* institution in this world is the Church of Jesus Christ. No one else and none other are seeking to honor and glorify God.

Here a few passages that detail the chokehold that Satan has on our world:

- **Luke 4:5-7, John 14:30, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Ephesians 6:11-12**

All of these describe Satan as the ruler or "god" of this world. The implications of that given title is that when the world fell into sin, it essentially fell into enemy hands.

Revelation 12:7-10 and **Daniel 7:9-12** promises that God will rescue the world from the enemy's grasp. This passage allows us to see the kingdoms and systems of this world in their true light: They were mere beasts, controlled by the dragon (*Satan*).

The passage from Revelation helps explain the unholy unions that were taking place in Genesis 6. When Satan fell from Heaven, *a third of* the angelic host were banished with him. These fallen angels were part of the devil's ongoing plan to further harass humanity. With God announcing that He was going to send a Savior through Adam and Eve's children, he was set on trying prevent this.

Throughout Genesis you can witness several attempts by Satan to corrupt the human race or even stunt it completely. Here we see the deformed, demonic race of giants that came into existence. Genesis 19 features the introduction of homosexuality and incest, all of which ultimately fall under this attempt by the devil to prevent a Savior from ever being born. Satan targets God's promises and attempts to either frustrate them from coming true or offer a counterfeit. **Can you think of any examples of how he does this in other areas? In your own life?** Consider how he offered Jesus counterfeit bread in **Matthew 4:3** and how **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** tells us that Satan is the master of disguise and deceitfulness.

Striving With Man

In **Genesis 6:3** God vows that His Spirit will not always strive with man. In the world's short history, God was forced to fight for man much more than He should have had to. **Exodus 15:3** describes God as a determined warrior.

Deuteronomy 1:30-31 tells us that God's greatest fight is the battle He faces to win us, to fight for us and win us back from His enemies. He does this gladly and feverishly, however this passage makes it clear that He will not contend with us forever.

Ultimately, He will not force Himself where He is not welcomed or wanted - just like Jesus left Gadera when He was asked to (**Matthew 8:34**) and like He couldn't do great works in His hometown because He was unwelcome (**Matthew 13:58**).

Genesis 6:5 highlights the reason why God was growing wearied in His efforts to rescue people. Notice the indictment served on the entire human race:

“Every intention of every heart was only evil continually.”

Can it get much worse than that?

Is this true about our hearts today? As uncomfortable as this may make us feel and as easy as it is to brush this off as only applying to a few, extremely depraved people. The Bible is consistent with this message. From **Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:19, and Romans 3:10-12, 23** - all of these paint a pretty grim picture over our species.

It's good that we come to terms with this, because to sugar coat this or gloss over this truth is to set ourselves up for deception and regret. If we have a false sense of confidence in our hearts' nature, then we won't cling to God for redemption and we won't constantly lean on His grace to bail us out and make us better.

Therein lies our hope, as sinful as our hearts are naturally, we can find supernatural help and strength through redemption. This is the hope of the Gospel and the promise of salvation. **Ezekiel 35:26-27** describes our conversion as a spiritual heart transplant. **Romans 6:7 and 10** shows how our sinful nature can be supplanted and overpowered by a new, spiritual nature.

We've both faced with honesty what the Bible says about our sinful nature and heard with gladness and relief the hope it says is available to us. Discuss these two extremes and this spectrum of human nature. Perhaps **Genesis 6:5** only sounds as hard to process as it does to our ears, because we're so familiar with and have been graciously impacted by the Gospel. How should and does this humble us all, knowing what our condition is apart from Christ? Read **Titus 3:3-6** and **discuss** how if not for Christ coming to find us, we would be totally and hopelessly lost.

Finding Favor

This leads us into our final set of verses, **Genesis 6:7-8**. Again we see the backdrop of judgment painted with broad brush strokes. Nothing was going to be spared, so as to totally cleanse the earth. Verse 7's hyperbolic proclamation only makes verse 8 have that much more of an impact.

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.”

If are to take verse 5 literally, Noah wasn't any better than anyone else nor had he done anything deserving of salvation. He was just as sinful and inclined to evil as the rest of the world. His saving grace? Well, it was *literally* that - the saving grace and overwhelming favor of the Lord.

As we read in Titus, God's grace and favor are not based on our merit but rather totally rooted in God's goodness. **Romans 11:5-6** explains that grace has nothing to do with our works. It's the overflow of God's kindness and love.

This puts into new and fresh light the entire redemption story. Consider the story of the Prodigal Son, who never imagined his father accepting him, yet found a father ready and waiting and actually running towards him! Jesus' most repeated message was one of how He came to look for and rescue those who are lost. Read **Luke 15:20 and 19:10** and discuss how Noah exemplifies the approach God has always taken.

We'll never know why Noah was chosen or if others were given the chance but refused to believe. All we know is that God showed Noah grace and his heart was moved to respond. It's clear however, if not for God's grace making the first move, Noah would have remained lost and received the very same judgment that came on the rest of the world; see **1 Timothy 1:15-16 and 2 Timothy 2:25b-26**.