

Who Do You Think You Are?

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- [0 : 0 0] Good afternoon everyone, I'm Ian. Well done Jonathan and Corey. When you're asked to read, I think that's probably the last passage that you want, but beautifully done, thank you. The world is changing at a pace that's never been seen before.
- Urbanisation and ease of transport and travel mean that there's a lot more connected than there's ever been. Humans are harnessing the power of nature to make their lives better.
- The arts are flourishing. Technology is bringing about an ease of life that previous generations could hardly have dreamed of. And yet, marriage is being devalued.
- Anger and violence and pride are rife. Human life is valued cheaply. And the world's heading towards a climate catastrophe.
- Welcome to Genesis 4. Now I've tried to make it sound fairly modern, and obviously it's not. We're talking early Iron Age here. And yet many of the themes of what we see here are still very relevant today.
- [1 : 1 7] And this passage, these two chapters that look full of names and genealogies, I think still have quite a lot to teach us and to help us to understand how God wants us to live in our day.
- Some theologians call the period that goes broadly from Adam to Noah as the dispensation of conscience. Now whether you agree with that theology or not, I think it's actually a helpful description.
- Because what's happening in this period is that by and large, human beings have very little knowledge of God. The law hasn't been given. The covenant promises through Noah and Abraham are still in the future.
- And largely, men and women are living by conscience of what we'd call today their moral compass. And we know, of course, that human conscience is flawed.
- It does not always get things right. I think that is very much a link with where we are today. By and large, people around us, even the people who are making our laws, don't really take God into account when they do it.
- [2 : 3 2] They're going by what they want to think is right. But actually, very often, it's not in accordance with the Bible. And that, I think, brings Genesis 4 very much into the kind of territory we're in today.
- The title of Given Who Do You Think You Are, of course, is taken from the BBC genealogy program. But it may be relevant to what God thinks and what God thought in Genesis 4 about humans.
- Who do you think you are that you can go your own way and you can forget about my instructions? And in Genesis 4, it is personified in this family of Lamech.
- I think we could describe it as a very dysfunctional family in many ways, and yet a family of high achievers. And again, that's something that maybe is quite current in our day.
- That often the families where the people are the greatest achievers in the terms of this world they do the most, actually behind the scenes there are all sorts of problems. Sometimes they come out, sometimes they don't.

[3 : 41] But Lamech and his family, I think, really helpfully bring out the contrast in Genesis 4. I've called it civilization question mark.

So on the one hand, you can see that mankind is progressing. That things are, from that point of view, getting better. So at the start of our reading, we had the first city being built, the start of urbanization.

We then have this man, Jabal, the first of Lamech's sons. It says he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. Now in his own way, living in tents was probably almost as significant as building cities.

Building cities meant you could group together and people could live together and help each other. But building, having tents meant they could move around and they could go to the best places, in this case the best places for pasture for their flocks.

Lamech also was the one who started farming, systematic farming, rather than just having lots of beasts breeding and so on, seemed to go back to him. Then the second son, Jubal, who was the musician.

[4 : 58] I don't think it was violins and trumpets, but to get the idea. He was the one who first started making music and seeing that as part of human life and something that people could enjoy and benefit from.

And then the third son was Jubal Cain, and he was the one who made tools. He got bronze and he got iron, and he made things that would make life easier.

And all of these things are presented to us as mankind, humankind, really progressing. Civilization is growing and developing, and that's a good thing.

But at the same time, we're told a number of things about Lamech that would make us pause and think, well, perhaps it's not all good. The first thing we see is that he had two wives.

Now, it's not uncommon in the Old Testament to have more than one wife. Many of the leading characters in the Old Testament, like David, indeed did. But this is beginning to get away from God's plan for marriage.

[6 : 04] Remember God's plan for marriage? One husband, one wife, they become one flesh. And as soon as you introduce the third person into that, it's kind of going. You don't have the same value being placed on marriage and on the intimacy of relationship, which is a one-to-one thing.

And then in Lamech, you have violence. Violence like you had with Cain, and perhaps in some ways even worse. Now, the poem that Lamech gives us in the passage is quite interesting.

I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77 times.

What's he saying? On the surface, I think maybe he's saying, my crime is not as bad as Cain's crime. Cain killed Abel in cold blood, if you like.

It was murder. Lamech is saying, well, it wasn't murder in my case. Someone came and attacked me. I defended myself, and I killed them. And if Cain has God's protection seven times, then I deserve even more.

[7 : 13] I deserve 77 times. But of course, in it all, he is really just boasting in himself and in his power.

He has no concern for the young man he killed. Doesn't sound like that young man had done him great harm. Maybe had some kind of feud with him. He'd come and attacked him. And Lamech had responded.

He over-responded. And he had ended up killing the man. And he thinks, well, that's okay. If someone comes up against me and does things I don't like and hurts me in some kind of way, I'll get back at them, and I'll do it much worse than they did to me.

Sound familiar? In our day, that kind of thing happens as well. And this thing of seven times and 77 times is interesting as well.

So Lamech is saying, I deserve extra protection compared with Cain. Now, actually, Cain received God's grace, which he didn't deserve as a murderer.

[8 : 17] However, Lamech is assuming that he can have the same grace and that he in some way deserves it. He has totally misunderstood a God and the kind of relationship we should have with him.

And it's interesting also because the Lord Jesus picks up on it in the New Testament. Jesus has a conversation with Peter where Peter says, well, how often should I forgive somebody? Should I forgive them as many as seven times?

Peter's thinking, this is really good. I'm showing him a really good follower of Jesus. I'm willing to forgive even up to seven times. And Jesus says, no, not seven times, but 77 times, or perhaps it's 70 times seven times that people disagree on that.

But I'm sure he was echoing what Lamech said. But instead of talking about vengeance and about getting revenge, Jesus is talking about the love that we should show and the forgiveness that we should offer.

So the world under Lamech is regressing. It's going backwards because although technology and everything else is doing fine, in the human heart, things are getting worse and the pride of life and the desire to have more for ourselves and to do whatever we need to to other people is greater and greater.

[9 : 39] So what's the application for today? Well, the first thing I think is we should celebrate the achievements of our generation. We should celebrate the fact that in most of our lifetimes, man has made so much progress in understanding our environment, in using it for our good, in developing technology, that even 20 years ago, certainly 50, 100 years ago, people could hardly have dreamed of.

And we should celebrate it because we're using the talents that God has given us to find out more about his world and about his universe.

As someone said, we're thinking God's thoughts after him. And we shouldn't despise technology or the arts or the way man harnesses the world as long as it's done in a positive way.

That is something to be celebrated and to be enjoyed. It's something that God wants us to rejoice in and to benefit from and to give him the glory for because he has given us the minds, the mental capacity to be able to do these things and to appreciate them.

So there definitely is an element as we look at this that we should rejoice in God and rejoice in what is happening, that his universe is so marvellous and we're just now finding out what's always been there and which is beyond our comprehension in many ways.

[11 : 16] But at the same time, we need to recognise that we're living in a world which is in many ways regressing. Marriage. I don't think bigamy is a big issue in this country in our day.

But perhaps that's because people don't think you need to bother to get married if you want to have an intimate relationship with someone. You can have two women or you can have two men and that's okay.

You don't have to tie the knot for that. And just one example of the way in which marriage is being devalued and we're getting further and further away from God's plan for us.

And then you look at attitudes. And you see in many ways a real pride and arrogance about many people. We see it in our leaders.

We see it perhaps also in ourselves and those we come into contact with. And some of the great things that we're finding that we're inventing are also doing great harm.

[12 : 23] So the internet is wonderful. The way that we have access to information that no one in any generation before has ever had. I want to find something out.

I go into Google. I go into Wikipedia or somewhere and it's there and it's great. And yet the internet has fuelled the rise in pornography and in people interacting with their computers rather than with one another.

Mobile phones are great. We are more connected with each other than ever before. Even if we're out and about we can easily talk to each other by phone or we can text each other or we can use social media or whatever.

And yet how often is social media used in a way that's inappropriate? That's intemperate. We've seen the example of that in our own country this week.

We could go to America and some of the things the president there has said on social media and we look at it and say yes, social media is a great thing but man is not using it in the way that we should.

[13 : 30] Our world is in many ways regressing even as it is progressing. What shall response be to that? Well right at the end of Genesis 4 in this chapter full of names and this family which has so many problems we have the birth of another child a man named Seth and then his son Enosh and at the end it says at that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.

Even in this world where God was largely forgotten about and was glorying in his developments and in his power rather than in God. There were people who recognized that they couldn't do without God.

The name of the Lord that's used here if you've got a Bible in front of you you'll see it's in capital letters. It's the covenant name of God later in the Old Testament Yahweh. Not sure how much the people then would have understood exactly what that meant.

But it is calling on the God who is personal and the God who is interested. And there were some people perhaps not many who recognized the importance of that.

And for us today if we're Christians we call on the name of the Lord. And we give thanks for all the great things that are happening in his wonderful world. But we should also be on our knees as we see around us that people are getting further and further away from God and from his standards.

[15 : 02] We are called to call upon the name of the Lord. So that's Genesis 4. What do we make of Genesis 5 which is even more a long list of names and of dates.

Well genealogies in the Bible are quite important. And this particular genealogy is the introduction to a new section in Genesis which runs basically through the account of Noah.

So we finish off in chapter 4 essentially the creation narrative and we're now coming on to the Noah narrative. And as a link in that the writer positions where the two sit together.

So it takes us from Adam down to Noah. If we keep going through the Bible we can get that list taken right down and it ends up with Jesus. The key genealogy in the Bible starts with Adam or starts actually with God if you read it in Luke's Gospel and it ends with Jesus.

The writer is positioning here where Adam and Noah sit together. But I think there's more to it than that. Quite a lot of people are into family history I am myself and it can be quite fascinating.

[16 : 13] Now when you do family history you have two things that you look at. One is you get a long list of names and of dates.

So you go through your ancestors you go through the record office and the birth and marriage and death certificates and the censuses and everything else that's available and you end up with a big chart which has lots of names of people and lots of ages or dates on it.

And that in a sense is the core of doing your family tree. It is looking at the lives of ordinary people but actually just looking at their names and a small amount of information about them.

But when you do family history very often you find someone you think that person looks interesting. Perhaps I can find out a little bit more about them. Now in my family tree there's no one who's particularly famous.

I don't think there's anyone you could Google and find much information about them before my grandfather. Previous generations largely forgotten. But there are interesting people.

[17:17] There are some very strong women. There are some families which went through really difficult times. And there are some people who think well it would be good to find out a bit more about them. They look quite interesting.

And that's what the writer does in this chapter. There's a long list of what I've called ordinary lives. And then he has a couple of examples of what we might call extraordinary lives.

lives. So I've called this one lives well lived. As I said there are ordinary lives and there are extraordinary lives. Now you might look at Genesis 5 and say there are no ordinary lives here.

Almost everyone on this list lived to be over 900 years old. That's kind of not normal in our day. So let's just deal with that one quickly before we look in more detail at the genealogy.

There are a number of different views about what the ages here mean. Some people think it could be dynasties that are being talked about. So when it talks about Adam or it talks about Methuselah whoever, it's not talking about an individual, it's talking about a dynasty was started with that person.

[18:27] And so having dynasties for 900 odd years isn't out of the question. The problem with that is at least a couple of people on this list are definitely presented as being real individuals.

They're not just a dynasty, they are real people who had real lives. So that is slightly difficult. Second possibility is it says years. Actually does it mean months or does it mean something different?

So is the time period the same as ours? Again quite difficult because if you look at the ages of the people when they had children and when they died, if they had kind of normal lifespans we think of today, there were things like they became a father when they were seven years old and that really doesn't work.

There's genealogy a few chapters on where it says people had children that kind of what we think were normal ages like 30 and so on but not in this one and I think it is difficult to think that it could just be months rather than years.

So could it be really people living for that long? Well maybe it could. We are pre-flood and we are in a different environment from what we have now.

[19:36] Perhaps some remnant of the tree of life that Adam and Eve had originally eaten from before they were thrown out of the garden of Eden. Perhaps that was still affecting things. Maybe they had a very long life.

That has its own difficulties. Why would you wait hundreds of years before you had your first child? Things like that. But maybe it's the best explanation. I don't know. I'll leave that to you.

But actually although the writer undoubtedly means us to notice the ages, they're not the key point of this passage. The key thing in this chapter is that people were born, they had children, and they died.

They were born, they had children, they died generation after generation. That is ordinary life. You're born, you may not have family, and you die.

That for virtually every human who has ever lived, that is the pattern of life. That is the pattern of our lives unless the Lord should return before we die.

[20 : 40] And the writer is saying to us, this is the curse that came on Adam, the death that came through Adam, this is it in practice. People were born, they lived, they perhaps had families, and then they died, and they were gone.

They had ordinary lives. And then in the middle of that, there are a couple of extraordinary lives. Now we have at the beginning, Seth, I'm not going to talk in any detail about Seth, notice Seth in the likeness of Adam, Adam in the likeness of God.

Does that mean Seth in the likeness of God? To some extent, yes, but also affected by the fall. But the two are really interesting, Enoch and Noah.

And these are the two men in the Old Testament where it says they walked with God or they walked faithfully with God. Noah, that is mentioned in chapter six.

Enoch is before us in this chapter. And these are held up to us as examples of people who were different. They weren't just ordinary, lived, had family, died.

[21 : 53] They were people in their lives lived differently and behaved differently. And so at the end, they were treated differently.

Enoch, it says, never died. God took him. Noah was saved from the flood. And both of them, when we come to the New Testament, are seen as important characters.

Particularly in Hebrews chapter 11, we have that great list of men of faith. Then prominent among them are Enoch and Noah. and a reminder in that chapter that these were men who trusted in God and who sought to live their lives for God.

Enoch, the shortest lived of all the people in this chapter, but only because God took him. Noah, the one who out-survived all the others, he was the only one in the list who came through the flood.

Methuselah, just passing aside, Methuselah died in the year of the flood, if you count up the number of years. Noah was the only one who came through the flood. And Noah is presented, and we're going to look at Noah over the next couple of weeks in more detail, he is presented by his father as someone, he says, who will comfort us in labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground God has cursed.

[23 : 16] Now you wouldn't think of Noah and comfort necessarily together. Noah was the preacher of doom. He was the one who alone with his family was saved when the world was destroyed.

But if we jump forward to Genesis chapter 8, in Genesis chapter 8, God does give us that comfort through Noah as he sends Noah out to manage the earth and as he promises there will never be another flood.

But what do we make of Enoch and Noah? They are important characters in their own right, but a lot of their significance is that they point forward to Jesus.

There are people in the Old Testament who displayed the kind of characteristics that we look for from Jesus in the New Testament. Enoch walked with God.

And Jesus walked with God. In his life on earth, he was completely obedient to God his father, and he was dependent on God his father.

[24 : 22] And he had that intimate relationship, but he knew his father's will and was able to pass it on to others and to live a perfect life. Jesus walked with God.

I know in the Old Testament it is a picture of Jesus as one who is able to save. He is saved by God, but a picture of God's salvation. As God in his mercy spares this small family and takes them through the flood and brings them out the other side.

And knowing that gives us a picture of what happens with Jesus. Those who are willing to believe the message that Jesus brings us, those who are willing to put their trust in him, are saved from their sin and from all the filth that is in our lives, the things we were talking about earlier, through the death of the Lord Jesus, we are able to be brought into a relationship with God.

So Enoch and Noah pictures of Jesus. But what does it mean to walk with God? Let me just bring you three verses from the New Testament that I think will help us with that.

Hebrews chapter 11 is the passage about Enoch, and it says that faith means you believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

[25 : 49] So the first thing of walking with God, what we learn from Enoch, is we need to seek God, we need to look to do his will, we need to have a faith in him.

We need to know God and to know him in our lives. The Old Testament book of Micah, it says, what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Very significant word there, humbly.

If we walk with God, we need to recognize how great he is and how insignificant by comparison we are. As we see our great God, that should be something that humbles us and helps us to understand how much greater he is than we could ever think or imagine and by comparison how insignificant we are but still in our insignificance loved by God.

And then the Apostle John, in his first letter, he says, if we walk in the light as he, that is Jesus, is in the light, God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

[27 : 09] So walking means walking in the light. It means trying to do the things that are right and to recognize what God's pattern for life is and not to walk in the darkness, ignoring God as all these people in Genesis 4 seem to have done, but to walk with him and to seek to be obedient to him.

Faith, humility, light. these are things that should characterize our walk with God. So, who do you think you are?

I hope from what we've seen that for most of us, we are going to be, in this world's terms, pretty insignificant. I might think my life is important just now, give it a hundred years, and I'll be doing well if anyone remembers me as more than a name.

In this world, all of us ultimately are fairly insignificant, and we will be, whether we like it or not, we will be largely forgotten very soon after our death.

And yet the Bible would tell us that although that is absolutely true, we also have a wonderful status before God. Who do you think you are?

[28 : 30] Who do I think I am? I am a child of God. I'm a sinner. I don't deserve anything, but because of God's grace, I have this wonderful status of being his child, and because of my faith in Jesus, being able to look forward and to know that one day I'll go to be with him forever.

And when you think of that, what happens in this world, and what people might think of me when I'm gone, actually doesn't matter that much. What matters is the relationship I have with God and the confidence I can have in him, knowing that I matter to him, and if my trust is in him, in the Lord Jesus, then my future is secure.

And I'm not looking at 70, 80, 90, maybe even 100 years in this world. I'm looking at an eternity spent with Jesus and enjoying his presence and understanding more of his greatness and the wonderful world he's made and the wonderful grace that he has shown in dying for me on that cross and giving me my relationship with God.

So we should go away this morning perhaps reflecting on the world round about us, on the great advances that are being made, but also the issues that we see everywhere we look, reflecting perhaps on our own sinfulness, our own failure, our own insignificance.

But knowing that in God's sight we're important, we matter, and he wants all of us to have a real relationship with him as we walk with him, as we call on him, as we know him as our father.

[30 : 23] If you're not in that position yet, I'd urge you to think about your relationship with God, the things that really matter in life. And if you are, let's go out, let's pray for our world, let's walk the way that Jesus walked, let's be God's people in our generation, not just ordinary lives, but extraordinary lives, because they're lived for God.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this rather obscure passage, which nevertheless has so much to teach us.

We thank you that you are a great God, and when we see all that man is able to achieve now, we should recognize that all he is doing is thinking your thoughts after you, uncovering, unraveling some of the marvelous intricacies of your creation.

But we do grieve for the world around us. We grieve for the sin, for the devaluing of marriage, for the way that pride affects all of our lives, for the conflict that there is, for the things that are done that are wrong.

Help us to be in prayer to you about them. But help us above all, each of us, to make sure that we are in a living relationship with you and with the Lord Jesus, and that in our lives we seek to walk with God so that we become not ordinary lives, but extraordinary lives as children of God shining as lights in our world.

[31 : 56] We give you thanks and we commit ourselves to you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.