

THE STORY OF GOD

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE, BUT FULLY EXPERIENCED GOD

05 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2021 PREACHING SERIES

THE SUFFERING GOD

POWER EXERCISED WITH CAUTION – WEEK 4 (27-02 OCTOBER 2021)

The God we have seen from Genesis 1 and 2 is a very powerful God. We also read of a gracious God who is lovable even though God's heart gets to be broken from time to time. The stories themselves cannot be told or reflected upon without noting the manner in which God suffers as God struggles with Creation.

The first struggle is God having to work. Doing something takes something from the one doing it. It is the energy, emotions, the resources and any other kind of input that goes into doing such a task.

The second is the manner in which God looks at creation with disappointment as God finds the beautiful creation having fallen. This week we look at these events that share the story of a suffering God.



GENESIS 3

The difficult decision – As indicated in the 2nd week of our series, it was never in God's plan for God to chase human beings out of the beautiful Garden God had



not only created, but also dedicated it to their care and stewardship. The choice that the human beings made in the Garden by allowing other influences to shape their future made God to decide to allow the human beings to live with their choices. This is a difficult aspect of loving to allow a person to be even if you know their choices will only lead to more strife

and struggle. We can only deduce from this that God must have suffered tremendously when God had to make this decision.

REFLECTION

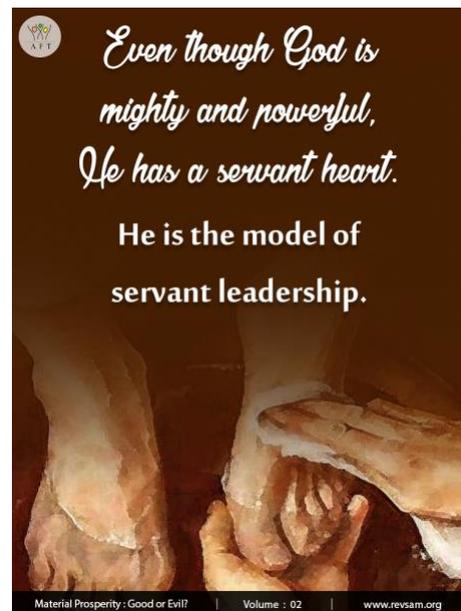
***What are some of the ways that we force God to make difficult decisions?
How does this thought make you feel about God and your own life?***

The Self-destruction of creation – God watches the most painful of things, creation turning against creation. Picture a family where the siblings are not only rivalries, but also kill each other. This does not happen only once, but several times. The order God had brought is now being disturbed by the very creation God has entrusted to each other and the rest of creation. God created partnerships (Gen 2:18-25), but humanity creates enmity amongst themselves. It is the worst thing God must have had to watch with creation being plunged into chaos again. God must have suffered hugely at that point.

REFLECTION

Self-destruction is a serious dysfunctional state of being. In what ways do you engage in this mode of doing life? Can you think of the consequences?

The Servant Creator – The power of love exercised by God in Genesis is of prominence, but not dominance. It is such a powerful thing to be a Creator. Such power though is exercised by God with so much grace through the nurturing nature with which God interacts with humanity. Even when God finds humanity having transgressed to the point of seeing their disturbing nakedness, God goes an extra mile to put together clothing for them (Gen 3:21). God serves humanity when God could have just left them to live in shame. Jesus will later show humanity in the New Testament times of this King who is a servant.



REFLECTION

It would have been easier for God to sit back, allowing life to become easy for him by being served by the creation. Why do you think God chose not to do this? How is God serving you in your own life?

The Pursuant God - The generous nature of God is seen in the manner in which God is playing catchup with creation. It is not the creation that pursues God, but God pursuing creation. God finds humanity hiding and God searches for humanity and even had to ask, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:8-9). From the very beginning it is God who came to the formless universe, not because God was invited to do so, but God saw the chaos and brought beauty. God must love beauty, perhaps that's why God pursues creation. God would look back and declare, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Gen 1:31). We will also see this pursuant nature of God in Jesus as God even gives the world His only Son to a world that has not fully appreciated God. The story in Matthew 21:33-45 illustrates this understanding of God doing all God can to save humanity and is met with rejection. God suffers as God saves humanity and yet that does not stop God from loving unconditionally.

REFLECTION

We have the ability to walk away from God's love and yet God does not give up on us. How has God loved you when you did not feel you were loving God? How has this made you feel?

GENESIS 6

The mounting wickedness – Genesis 6:1 is a rather controversial story to read. We are told about the sons of God. This could mean several things:

Read from a **mythical** (legendary, fictitious – though with so much meaning in it) **perspective** (some of the Old Testament is full of such legendary stories that have deep meaning and unlikely to have really happened in real life or exaggerates things like the “*days*” in Chapter 1 or “*God walking in the Garden*” in Chapter 3) – if the ‘sons of God’ means the angels (the heavenly creatures who are God’s servants) then the rot in the world has even now affected the heavenly beings. They too are driven by lust and greed. They compete with the earthly creatures and do as they please. This is a disturbing thought as the values of God’s reign are justice, respect and enabling of life.

Read from a **systematic and historical point of view** there is a problem with the genealogy in Chapter 5. Only sons are being born since the days of Adam and as if it is men giving birth. The patriarchal view cannot be overlooked. That being said, Gen 6:1 corrects this view and begins to mention that with the sons, daughters were also born. The problem though is that the ‘sons of God’ could be referring to generations from Adam’s bloodline. If Adam was created in the Image of God and Gen 5:3 states that Adam gave birth to Seth made in Adam’s image. So, the wickedness we read about in Gen 6:1 takes place between the sons of Adam who was made in the Image of God and the daughters of men as indicated by Gen 6:4. Now there is a distinction amongst the human beings – those of God and those of men. Could it be that already there were people who had rejected God and chose not to identify with God. Scholars differ in the understanding of Nephilim in Gen 6:4. There are those who say these are the fallen ones and yet Numbers 13:33 refer to them as persons of gigantic stature. Either way, the sons of God were not supposed to approach the daughters of Nephilim who are seen as the daughters of men. This inter-marriage as Gen 6:3 suggests would make God’s spirit not to dwell in human beings forever. The NRSV version uses the phrase, “*shall not abide in mortals forever,...*” This is a troubling thought that now brings uncertainty for God – if the spirit, will remain with human beings forever.

This must be another fall just as the Gen 3 talks about the dying of human beings. Again, in this story God the Creator is at odds with Creation, precisely the human

beings. God suffers again in this story and makes utterance that show how broken God's heart is (Gen 6:5-8). God regrets the choice God made in the beginning, even to the point of wiping them out of the face of the earth.

REFLECTION

God sees creation pulling towards destruction. How have you disappointed God in your own life? What lessons have you learnt from these episodes of your life?

GENESIS 7

The Great Sacrifice – The story of Noah in Genesis 7 is an indication of how God suffers for creation. Because of the wickedness of humanity, most of the creation goes down with humanity. Only pairs of the living creatures are saved from the calamity. This is not to be taken lightly. The rescue plan goes with collateral damage. Salvation is never without a sacrifice. We will see this with Jesus who is sacrificed by God to save humanity. There is always a sacrifice when God saves. This is huge suffering for God, no wonder in the end only one is sacrificed for the sake of the many, unlike the many in Genesis 7 in the place of the few.

REFLECTION

God makes tremendous sacrifices to save humanity. What is the greatest sacrifice you think God has ever endured for your own life? What was God saving you from?

GENESIS 8

The Initiative – Whenever creation is plunged into chaos, it is God who takes the initiative to redeem it. This redemptive power is not because creation deserves it, but out of love God does this amazing work of mercy and grace. God in Genesis 3 makes garments for the humans. God gives a mark to Cain so that he is not hurt by others. Now in



Genesis 7 it is God who designs the plan to save Noah, his family and the animals. God always goes an extra mile whenever humanity goes astray. In Chapter 8 God takes another initiative to restore creation, but God ensures sustainability of creation when creation would have been doomed for destruction. In the end it is not death that defines God's relationship with creation, but God's ultimate love for creation.

REFLECTION

Even if we wanted to save ourselves, where would we begin? How do you feel about God doing all God can to save you?

The promise – God makes an inexorable statement in Genesis 8:21-22. This is not because there is no chance that humanity would continue to please God, but God makes another choice to love humanity no matter humanity's unfaithfulness. God does not wait until we prove ourselves in order for God to love us and embrace us. God loves us not because we love God back, but God loves us purely because of our hopelessness in fully loving God. God accepts our frailty and God chooses to respond with God's steadfast love and unwavering grace. Thus far, every time God enters into a covenant with humanity, humanity does not respond in the affirmative or in any other way for that matter. It is as if God has no expectation of us ever



keeping our end of the bargain, so God does not even bother to bargain with us. Notice that the promise God is making here unlike that of Chapter 9, this one in Chapter

8 is to all creation. God makes promises not only to individuals, but to the rest of creation, with no expectation for a response – such is God's grace through this unquenchable love.

REFLECTION

We all want people to keep their promises. What promises have you made to God? How easy or difficult has it been to keep this/these promises? Why?

CONCLUSION

God suffers for creation as God suffers with creation. The story of God is intricately intertwined with the complex story of humanity. This story that shows us the chaos in creation is the chaos amongst creation. God keeps on intervening by making very difficult decisions that were not part of God's initial plan. God keeps evaluating the way forward and at times with great sacrifice. God is forced from time to time to take the initiative to save the hopeless creation. This initiative goes hand in hand with the promises God makes without humanity and creation doing anything pleasing before God. The worst that humanity does is confronted with everlasting love.

REFLECTION TIME

Ponder this story of God each day this week.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of the decisions God keeps on making in order for your life be sustained as God's child?
2. If the story of God cannot be fully explained without God looking upon you with love, what is the meaning of love therefore for you from God's perspective?
3. Why is it important for you to respond to this love and grace? What are some of the practical things you can do to illustrate this importance?
4. Sacrifices are part of the story of God. When you think of the sacrifices God has made in the past, what sacrifices could God be still making for you today?
5. How is this love, promises, sacrifices and initiative shaping your life as a disciple?

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What sense are you getting from this week's story of God about God's relationship with humanity?
2. The story of God is written at times in a language that is difficult to simply understand without searching meaning. What deeper truths are you getting from this story this week?
3. The Story of God is told with varying similarities over different chapters. Why are these variations and repetitions important for us today?
4. How can you best explain God's grace within the Chapters of Genesis?