

THE STORY OF HUMANITY

THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATION

03 OCTOBER - 06 NOVEMBER 2021

THE REBELLIOUS HUMANITY

(24-30 OCT 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Humanity was created by love for love. This is an important aspect of our being. Love is the ability to care, embrace, risk for one another, fellowship, and any other good that we can do not just for self, but for the other. This also applies to our relationship with God. The more we are in tune with God, the more loving we become. The more we are misaligned with God, the more our lives become chaotic and destructive. We stumble most of the time in walking together with God. We choose to walk our own path with God at a distance from us and when we hit a snag on our path, we then remember God is here for us. We stretch boundaries and explore ways that make us feel we are independent. We seem to find joy in doing things our way, whether it is in relationships, money, responsibility and service, worship and any other means of relating with God, other human beings and creation in general.



From Order to Chaos – When we read the story of Genesis 11:1-9 (The



Tower of Babel) there are some aspects of humanity that need to be thoroughly examined. At face value this story is about humanity wanting to also remain united by staying together in a city. The motives behind this though express something else:

THE ARRIVAL MOTIF – At times we feel comfortable in life and the journey has come to an end, and yet God still has so much in store for us. Complacency captures and often, we do not pay attention to God. Gen 11:2 tells us of the children of Noah came to the land Shinar and settled there. Could it be that they found the land comfortable? The name itself is telling – *Watch he who sleeps*. They would not allow their minds to sleep. They toiled on what they could do with their lives, toying with many ideas. They then came to the idea that they are okay on their own. When our minds are not at rest, we think of all sorts of things that in the end give us the false identity of who we are. We struggle with life until we convince ourselves that we are okay on our own, especially when we have arrived at our *Shinar* – which was later known as Babylon (the gates of the gods). Today this would be known as Iraq between Tigris and Euphrates rivers. As they settled, they became gods and wanted to reach to the heavens on their own. Their Image of God made them to think they are equal to God and so they wanted to reach the heavens on their own. The arrival can result in a burning desire and quest to arrive wherever you want irrespective of God’s will and plan. Their settling and building a city was going to work against God’s blessing in Gen 1:28 – “multiply and fill the whole earth.” That plan would have been lost completely. Not every ambitious idea is a fulfillment of God’s will and plan.

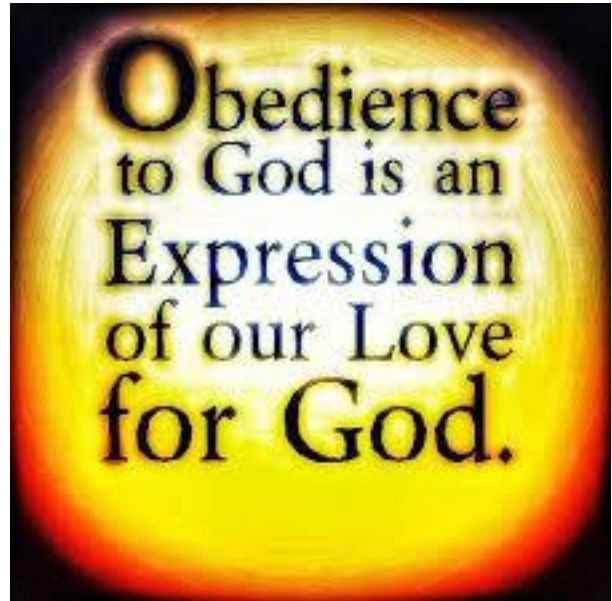
LEGACY MOTIF – The world is obsessed with making a name for oneself. This is often accompanied by self entitlement, personal ambitions and so much self elevation. God’s children now who were saved from the flood and whose father, Noah had even made a big sacrifice for God, no longer pay much attention to God, but self. Noah built not only an ark for God, but also an altar (Gen. 8:20). His descendants chose not to follow in their father’s footsteps in doing things for God, but now it was about self – *“Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.”* (Gen 11:4). This is a clear indication that a new culture that focused on self was being entrenched not only in individuals, but a societal way of doing life. First it was Cain who was selfish and now that had grown to become the whole descendancy. It is put nicely, *“let us make a name for ourselves.”* Some invitations to issues of legacy are against God’s will and plan.

This life that is about the comfort of arrival creates the attitude to be idle and think things that do not advance God’s will and plan and can lead to legacies that exclude God, but make us the center of attraction rather than God being at the center. This can be chaotic towards God’s plan and will.

REFLECTION

What are some of the things that draw us away from God?

From Obedience to Disobedience – The complexities of being human soon reared their ugly head with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Humanity would be sucked into a dark phase of living in a manner that does not honour God. This was never without human beings knowing what they were doing, but the inability to resist the temptation to rebel against God. Adam and Eve knew exactly what they needed to do as they kept on repeating what God had asked of them not to do. And yet, they did exactly that. Our disobedience is not without knowing. We just choose to ignore and neglect God's guidance – the very hope for our lives.



Out of lack of patience at times we move from being obedient to God, by wanting to handle things our way. We see this in Abram and Sarai in Gen 16. The complications of this way of doing life soon leads to undermining and disappointment. Sarai complains about Hagar's attitude when she developed a sense of entitlement. Sarai could not see herself as fulfilling a purpose, but rather as a substitute to Sarai. When we run impatient with God, we could easily develop egos and arrogance. We see ourselves as the solution and no longer the servants of God. As a consequence, we undermine, degrade, humiliate and become insensitive even to the plight of others. Listen to the quarrels that follow after Hagar becomes pregnant, there is no peace even between Abram and Sarai. Sarai consented to the idea and finds it hard to live with the consequences of their decision with Abram.

REFLECTION

***How do you think you have been impatient with God in your life?
What has been the results of such impatience?***

From Honesty to Deception – A new Chapter in the story of humanity unfolds between the two brothers Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25. We have explored the hatred by Cain against Abel in Gen 4 and its consequences. We have even explored the deception by the Serpent in Gen 3. This deception is now between the family members. It began with a struggle for power within



the family. Jacob in Gen 25:27-34 is an indication how human beings can take advantage of each other. Esau operates from the premises of trust and vulnerability. He sells his rights because he was starving. Jacob then takes advantage of his vulnerable brother.

The story of greed and dishonesty develops and is now joined by their mother Rebecca in Gen 27. Rebecca becomes a very powerful individual who manipulates and deceives. Rebecca overhears Isaac and Esau and takes exception at the blessings being given to Esau instead of her favourite son Jacob. Preferences can lead to unfairness and injustice. The rationale can be skewed when preferences come into play. Rebecca's preferences for Jacob end up getting in the way of the family relations and dynamics. Her self-centered interests destabilize the family unit and send the two brothers on a collision course. She plots and advises Jacob on how to win Isaac's blessings meant for Esau (Gen 27: 5-17). Rebecca and Jacob would then trick Isaac, once again taking advantage of someone's vulnerability – this time, Isaac who is blind (Gen 27:1).

Rebecca subtly manipulates things and influences even the personal choices her sons ought to make on their own (Gen 27:46).

REFLECTION

How have your personal interests and preferences clouded your judgement and affected your good character?

From Generosity to Greed

– The human condition of rebelling against the Image of God in us seems inherent and left unchecked has the potential of making life difficult not only for us, but for God as well. The story of Adam and



Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3) cannot be far from greed. They have life, eternal life, but at the deception by the serpent, they long for knowledge of good and bad. Lack of contentment with what we have leads to lifelessness. We end up losing the very things we have for the things not meant for us. When the quest to have more captures us, then we lose higher and helpful values like integrity, credibility, faithfulness and many other values that make us to be dependable, may we remember our lives hang on the thread of grace, love and being the co-creators with God.

There is the story of Cain where envy leads to anger and anger leads to murder. At times when we feel we lack on the things that others have, we lose sight of the mature human beings without introspection/searching for things that can help us to grow. We then get threatened by those whom we see to have grown in faith and not allow ourselves to be on a journey to becoming better disciples. We no longer see them as a gift, but a threat. The competition we subject ourselves to through envy at times is very dangerous. We are never satisfied with what we can do and end up making others lose or fail so that we can assume the position of attraction.

We see this with the Sons of God in Gen 6. They take whatever they like from the daughters of man. They take what they see as best. They must have looked at the daughters of God and started comparing them to the daughters of man. The competition troubles God and God decides that God's Spirit will not be in human beings forever. What had been given as a gift is now threatened by greed resulting from lust.

Laban opens another window for us to watch the unhelpful behaviour of humanity in Gen 30: 25-43. Jacob has worked for Laban for many years and has enabled Laban to prosper by looking after his flock. Jacob negotiates a severance package. They agree on what that would be. Laban's resistance must have been driven by fear if not of the unknown, it must have been the fear of relapsing to not having wealth. On that day of compensating Jacob, Laban goes and removes all the animals that should have been received by Jacob (Gen 30:34). This forces Jacob to also come up with a counter plot (Gen 30:37-43) to the point that Laban was left with only the weak animals. Instead of growing in having wealth together there was plotting to outsmart the other to the point that Jacob ends up fleeing Laban (Gen 31). Laban's unhappiness with Jacob's planned departure spilled over to his own daughters, Rachel and Leah who also complained about how Laban was suddenly treating them, like foreigners (Gen 31:15). Greed out of fear complicates life for everyone and influences the dynamics in relationships.

REFLECTION

What fear seems or fears seem to make you unsettled and lose trust of others? What promises have you made that you have struggled to keep, and they have compromised relationships?

CONCLUSION

The story of humanity this week takes us to places where our desires and interests have hurt us and others. This is a difficult place to be as it leads to loneliness, deception, greed and untrustworthiness. Things can gradually change over time, and we get sucked into this way of doing life until it is a norm as we see it with Rebecca who seems to have lost any other way of relating with her family except to manipulate, cheat and sow seeds of division.

Our potential can also change because of the plans we put in place to ensure that we come out as winners. We alienate, eliminate, undermine, humiliate and end up treating others with disdain and no longer see the Image of God in them like Cain did with Abel. We lose sight of our need to grow and become better people, instead our selfish interests and inadequacy leaves us even

poorer. We lose loved ones and relationships. Families like Jacob and Esau become estranged, Laban lost his daughters because of his deceitful plan.

We need to guard against our fears that threaten even our ability to be objective. Not only does Laban not appreciate what Jacob had done for him, but Laban cannot even keep any of the promises he made to Jacob. Our fears can make us to be unreliable. We must not forget how this affects others. Rebecca fears that her favourite son will have no blessings and so, teaches Jacob a very dangerous way of living that takes advantage of others. Instead of Rebecca restoring Jacob's goodness, she feeds the monster in Jacob who took advantage of his starving brother Esau and then escalating this to his blind father, Isaac. We do the unthinkable when we are possessed by fears of not having and wanting to grab the things that do not belong to us. We end up leading lives of always looking over our shoulders as we will read about Jacob running away from his very brother in Gen 32.

All this leads to us being disobedient to God. We stop relying on God – and this includes taking the values and principles that give life for granted. We establish our own ways of doing things. We build fortresses to defend our ways as we live in isolation from others. We work against God's will and plan just as the descendants of Noah did by wanting to build themselves a tower all in the name of making a name for themselves. It can either be God or us.

REFLECTION TIME

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What are some of your desires that if you were to carefully examine are contrary to God's will and plan? These may look okay at face value.
2. What plans have you put in place in your life, either currently or previously that point to you wanting to live a life that separates you from others and God?
3. What conversations are you concerned about that could leave relationships strained between you and your loved ones, friends, colleagues, and or disciples?

4. Have you ever been disappointed in yourself in terms of the choices, potential and any other way that has made you envious of others? How did you deal with or how are you dealing with it?
5. How have you been disappointed in others by them not keeping their promises? How are you responding to this challenge?

GROUP REFLECTION

1. How important is it for us to keep our desires, thoughts and plans in check? What can we do to ensure we are held accountable to this?
2. What can we do to remain honest in our interactions with people in our lives? Why is deception a dangerous way of doing life?
3. What are some of the ways in which we dishonour God in our lives? Why is it important to honour God in the first place?
4. How can we discern voices that seem to help us and yet in the end lead to strife in relationships?
5. How do you see fear playing a role in affecting our integrity? What is integrity and why is it important?