

98-05-08b

Okay, we're back now from our break and we're looking at this terrible condition of civilization and what it has done to the earth in Genesis chapter 6 verse 5 through 13. It says that Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations. Noah walked with God.

This is a choice that Noah made. It doesn't say God walked with Noah. It doesn't say that God, in his own inscrutable randomness of mind, came down and picked one man and said, I'm going to bless him with grace.

It would have been very easy for the scriptures, if that were the case, to say God elected Noah or God chose Noah or God walked with Noah. God made Noah blameless. God made Noah righteous.

The emphasis here is that Noah is different because his choice is different. The intents of the thoughts of his heart are not only evil continually. And you see also that the Bible can occasionally use universal language and yet there are exceptions as we saw in the Psalms this morning.

When God looks down on the sons of man and says there is none righteous, no not one, we know that there are some righteous. The psalmist who is writing, the children of God that God mentions, his people who are being eaten up like bread and those who are waiting for the deliverance of God are not included in that utter evil category even though universal language is used. And the same is true here.

The implication, by the way, also is that the sons of Noah are righteous and we'll see why that is a little later. But it says Noah is blameless in his generations. This word blameless is the Hebrew word tamim.

And it is not, as I said earlier, applied to people very often. The basic idea of it is that something is whole or something is complete. And for that reason it was used of the sacrificial animals.

In Leviticus chapter 1 for example, when the sacrificial system is being described, talking about the burnt offering in Leviticus 1.3 If his offering is a burnt sacrifice at the herd, let him offer a male without blemish. And this is tamim, a blameless animal, a complete and whole animal without fault. The same thing in verse 10.

If his offering is of the flocks, of the sheep or of the goats, as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male tamim, without blemish. This is also a description of those who will dwell in God's holy hill in the Psalms. Look at Psalm 15.

We read 12, 13 and 14 this morning. But in Psalm 15, David says, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly and works

righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend, in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord.

He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

The one who is blameless, there in 15.2, is the same word used here of Noah. Those are the ones who can dwell with God in his holy hill. It doesn't mean that we never fail or that we never sin, that we have somehow achieved sinless perfection.

It means that through claiming the grace of God in forgiveness and cleansing, in God's eyes, we are blameless. In God's eyes, we are righteous. And that's what counts.

This description of activity that we saw in Psalm 15 is also echoed in 2 Samuel 22. If you look at 2 Samuel 22.24, this is David's song, David's song of deliverance, talking about God. He says in verse 21, Now the way the scriptures present this is not that God came down and cleansed David's heart, or God came down and washed David's hands.

David presents this as we see throughout the scriptures, that this is cause and effect. We decide and God acts accordingly. God has told us ahead of time, if you do well, you will be lifted up.

Remember what God told Cain at the very beginning? If you do well, is there not a lifting up? Is there not forgiveness? Is there not a restoration of fellowship? But if you do not do well, the croucher is at the door. I have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them.

I was also tamim, before him, blameless. And I kept myself from my iniquity. He doesn't say, I never had any iniquity.

He says, I kept myself from my iniquity. Iniquity cropped up, but I have claimed the grace of God. God has forgiven, God has cleansed, God has answered the prayer.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. To believe anything less about our sinfulness is to blaspheme the power of God.

If God can make whiter than snow, if God can make clean, that's final, it's permanent. Sin is separated as far as the east is from the west. It's a function of God's power, not our sinfulness.

So look at verse 25. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his eyes. With the merciful, you will show yourself merciful.

With a blameless man, you will show yourself blameless. With the pure, you will show yourself pure. But with the devious, you will show yourself shrewd.

Those who ruin their way, God will ruin them. You will save the humble people, verse 28, but your eyes are on the haughty, that you may bring them down. This is clearly God evaluating the thoughts and intents of the heart and treating men accordingly.

With the pure, he shows himself pure. With the haughty, he will bring them down. Those who elevate themselves, God will de-elevate them.

So this is all tied together by the concept of blameless. The Bible has a lot to say about being blameless. Look at Ezekiel chapter 28 and verse 15.

Remember Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are the two chapters that describe Lucifer under the guise of the king of Tyre and tell us something of his history and his fall. Ezekiel 28, 14, you were the anointed cherub who covers. I established you.

You were on the holy mountain of God. You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until iniquity was found in you.

He was complete and whole. He was described with the same word that describes Noah, until a day that iniquity was found. Where did that come from? Was this some omission on God's part? Some lack of action on God's part that resulted in Satan's fall? Not at all.

This is a free will decision by a divinely created free agent. We are free agents. God evaluates us and treats us based on what we choose.

Our good choices do not merit anything. The Bible makes that clear. But our bad choices will bring upon ourselves the wrath of God.

So you have the concept of Noah's blamelessness here. We see from these parallel passages about Tammim that this implies conscious decision and conscious action and a conscious claiming of the grace of God. It doesn't mean that someone is sinless.

It means that they stand before God blameless because God has cleansed. God has forgiven. God has made righteous.

Continuing in Genesis 6 and verse 8, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. How did we find grace in the eyes of the Lord? We could take a Reformed perspective on this if verse 8 had occurred a little earlier. The Lord saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth and every intent of the evil of his heart was only evil continually.

The Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and he was grieved in his heart. One of the things I hope we can bring away from our analysis of this passage is the realization of the immediacy of God's involvement in human life and human history. It's

easy to look at the truth of God's omniscience and look at the truth of the divine decrees.

God in eternity past knew everything, planned everything, heard every prayer and so forth. Sometimes in our daily life as we're grinding through circumstances and we're having our ups and downs, our blessings and our challenges, we start to go to God in prayer and we think, well, it's sort of all predetermined. What's going to happen is going to happen.

I can't really have an influence over these bigger events. God already has made up his mind about how things are going to go and how it's going to go is how it's going to go. God decreed history in eternity past.

And that is true. However, what is the emphasis of the Bible? What does the Bible emphasize about God? Does it emphasize him sitting in the remoteness of eternity past, pre-decreeing everything and then sort of winding up history and then walking away and letting it tick down like a clock? The Bible consistently presents God as in the here and now, as God listening and looking and speaking in the midst of events, in the midst of lives, in the midst of history, responding to what he sees in the moment. Not saying, oh, yes, I remember this from my omniscience back before I created the angels.

God presents himself as coming to knowledge in the course of history. God doesn't create the earth in the first six days and look around and say, well, this is good now, but I know it's all going to be spoiled here in a few years. God looks at it in the present on the sixth and seventh days and says, everything I've created is good.

He looks at it in the moment. He evaluates it in the moment. Here, many years and generations later, God looks at the same earth that he pronounced good and he says, it is only evil continually.

It is ruined. It's corrupted. God presents himself as in time, responding and reacting in time.

And that's important because it makes God personal. It makes God real. We are not children of a concept.

We're not children of an essence box. We're children of a real and personal God, and he cares. He's watching minute by minute.

He's listening minute by minute. He is responding in the present, in the immediate, to the things that occur in human history and in our lives. And that's what we are to believe.

That is what we are to act on. That's how we are to view our God. That's the way he presents himself in scripture.

It would be so easy in passages like this to see God in some other way. But notice what it says. The Lord saw in verse 5 that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.

And in verse 6, the Lord was sorry that he had made man. Now, was the Lord sorry earlier? Was the Lord sorry when he planted the garden and said not good that the man should be alone and be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth? Was God sorry when Abel came and offered the pleasing sacrifice? Is God sorry about Noah, who is blameless and upright and walks with God? Was God sorry about Enoch? Not at all. God is sorry in this circumstance.

God is sorry in this immediate point of time. And God presents himself in human terms. It's what we call an anthropopathism.

We have anthropopathism and anthropomorphism. Morphos means form. Pathos or pathism has the idea of thinking.

Here God is experiencing an emotion of sorrow according to the scriptures. He is sorrowful. He is sorry.

And that is a pathism. Anthrope means it's manlike. God expresses himself in human terms.

And as he looks and sees in this moment the terrible corruption on the earth because of man's ruination, it pains him. It grieves him in his heart. It tells us he's grieved in his heart.

God has a heart. And we tend to forget that. We go through our little essence box.

Sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, veracity. And we lose sight of God's heart, God's joy, God's sorrow, God's regret. We think, oh, wait a minute, he's God.

He can't have regret. That defies his omniscience. How can God regret something when he already knew it was going to happen? What does the scriptures say about God? God feels sorrow.

God feels grief. God is a real, sentient, emotive being. He is not passionless.

And it's a great comfort to us to realize that God has fatherly feelings toward us. God has feelings. We think, oh, that's just bordering on blasphemy for God to have feelings, for God to have emotion.

We are made in the image of God, and we have emotion. What does that tell you? God is not a great, grand supercomputer in the sky. He's a person.

And he feels. He feels for and about us. It pains God when we disregard him, when we

reject him, when we're apathetic toward him.

It gives God joy. Remember the parables that we studied about the lost coin, and the lost sheep, and the lost son? When the woman who has the coins in her headdress loses one, and she lights a lamp and searches the house, and when she finds it, she's joyful, and she goes and finds her friends. And she says, this that was lost is now found, and there is joy.

And Jesus says, there is joy in heaven when a sinner changes his mind. And that doesn't mean, well, God lets the angels be joyful, but he himself is impassive and stone-faced like Mount Rushmore. God is joyful when we express faith, when we change our minds, when we pursue his plan, when we seek to walk with him.

He enjoys it. God gets pleasure from things. God was pleased in the Old Testament when sacrifices were offered.

God is satisfied. He has the range of emotions that we ourselves experience. Yet without sin.

So here in verse 6, when it says, the Lord was sorry, we don't have to say, well, this is just language of accommodation. God wasn't really sorry. What are you saying about the Scriptures when you say that? If the Scripture says God was sorry, then he was.

They used to try to get around this. If you look in the Old King James, it says something like, it repented God. It repented God to try to somehow obscure the personhood of God the Father.

He is a real person, and he really did feel that. Let's look at some of the passages that talk about God's change of mind. You see, beginning in Genesis 1.31, this is the contrast with what God is currently seeing.

In Genesis 1.31, God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Now, when God looks at the earth, he is sorry. Look at Exodus chapter 32, verse 11.

Remember the golden calf? Not too long ago, they showed the Ten Commandments, Charlton Heston, and so forth, Edward G. Robinson, and you've got Moses going up, being in the mountain, and they do the golden calf business down below. Moses comes back down, dashes the stones on the ground. Then, in verse 7 of Exodus 32, the Lord said to Moses, Go, get down, for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves, have ruined themselves.

And you see the language there. What does the Old Testament consistently say? I am the Lord God of Israel, who brought you forth from the land of Egypt with my mighty hand. But when Israel perverts and corrupts his way, what does God say? Your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

God tells Moses, This is your bunch. I don't even claim them at this point. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.

They have made themselves a molded calf and worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, This is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt. The Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people. They are stubborn.

Now, this isn't some withholding of grace on God's part. God is in the midst of dispensing grace up on the mountain of giving the law of life to Moses. And in the midst of God acting in grace on the mountain, man is corrupting his own way down below because he continues to be a free agent.

Now, therefore, God says in verse 10, Let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. This is not the impassive essence box God speaking here. God says, Moses, stand aside.

And you get the idea of this great ball of fire, this great streak of fire that is going to come past Moses and utterly consume Israel like it does the top of Mount Carmel when Elijah offers his sacrifice. Let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them and I will make of you a great nation. Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God and said, Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? You could spend days in this passage.

God presents a reality to Moses, doesn't he? He says, Moses, your people whom you brought out of the land, that's the way God sets it up to Moses. Moses says, No, Lord, here's what I know to be true. They're your people and you brought them out of the land.

The situation forces Moses to bring to God's attention truth. Moses... God sets this up. God says, Stand aside your people whom you brought out.

I'm going to wipe them out. I'll make a new nation out of you. And this circumstance, this situation puts Moses in the position of rehearsing before God what he knows to be true.

And he says, No, Lord, the way you're phrasing this, the way it appears is not the way it is. They're your people. You brought them out of Israel with your mighty hand.

Look what's going to happen if you wipe them out, Lord. You said when you brought them out that the Egyptians may know that you are the Lord. Remember that? You can go back to the early part of Exodus.

God says with the Passover and so forth, when I bring them out so that Egypt may know that I am the Lord. Moses remembers that and Moses brings that piece of doctrine up in his prayer, his conversation with God. And he says, Remember what you said? Your

whole purpose in delivering Israel with a mighty hand, part of it at least, was to demonstrate to the Egyptians that you are God and there is no other.

What will the Egyptians speak and say? He brought them to harm to kill them in the mountains and consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your fierce wrath and relent from this harm to your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore, Moses claims, promises in his conversation with God. He says, God, this is what you said.

You promised Abraham. You promised Isaac. You promised Jacob.

You swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have spoken of, I give to your descendants and they shall inherit it forever. And what is the result in verse 14? The Lord relented. The Lord repented.

The Lord changed His mind based on the prayer of Moses. Was this all a part of the divine plan and the divine decrees in eternity past? Of course. But how are we to view the actions of God? Are we to constantly think of God sitting in the remoteness of eternity past? No.

We are to think of God the way Moses does, in the here and now, listening and responding to what we think, what we claim, what we pray, and that the way things appear can change. The policy of God in a particular situation can change. God can change His mind based on what we think and what we speak and what we claim in our prayers.

God is immediate. God is in the here and now. God is present in this room looking at you and looking at me and evaluating the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

And He is basing His policy toward us on what He sees. It's a truth of Scripture that's too often overlooked. You can see the same thing in Deuteronomy 32-36.

You go back a little bit to get the context. This is the Song of Moses, one of the most concentrated collections of Old Testament doctrine you can find. These verses are freighted with so much truth.

This is another place you can spend hours and hours in study and meditation and reflection. Moses is delivering his swan song, as it were, to Israel. He talks about the fact that there will come a time when Israel is put to flight and Israel is under discipline from God.

In verse 28, they are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end. How could one chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight unless their

rock had sold them and the Lord had surrendered them? Why does God sell and surrender His own people? Because they're devoid of wisdom, because they lack understanding, because they don't pursue the opportunity to seek and to know Him.

Their rock is not like our rock, these enemies. Even our enemies themselves being judges, their vine is the vine of Sodom, their fields the fields of Gomorrah, their grapes are the grapes of Gaul, their clusters are bitter, their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras. Is this not laid up in store with me, sealed up among my treasures? Vengeance is mine and recompense.

These enemies were being used to discipline Israel. Their foot shall slip in due time, for the day of their calamity is at hand and the things to come hasten upon them. And here's verse 36.

For the Lord will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their power is gone and that there is no one remaining, bond or free. He will say, Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you and be your refuge. Now see that I, even I, am He and there is no God besides Me.

I kill and make alive. I wound and I heal. Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

So God judges His people. It's in the here and now. God's policy toward us can be blessing or it can be discipline.

It can be grace. It can be judgment. We are so often encouraged to think of history and our lives as being sort of an LP back when we still had vinyl records.

I've got quite a few back there. If you look at a vinyl record, what is it? It's a piece of flat plastic and it's got a groove cut in it that starts on the outside and spirals slowly inward. And in that groove you have wobbles and dips and that's the place where the music or whatever's on the record is stored.

Once you put the needle in the groove on the outside and the turntable revolves, it has to follow the groove. As long as it's not scratched or damaged, it goes from beginning to end. We think, well, God pressed the record of human history and eternity passed with the divine decrees and time is just the needle in the groove and wherever we are, we're just playing a predefined plan.

There is a sense in which that is true. We know that God knows the end from the beginning and that God has decreed things. But the emphasis of Scripture and the view that we are encouraged to have by Scripture is not a pressed record in which the needle is following the groove.

It is God in the here and now coming down and looking and seeing. We're going to see

this very soon in the Tower of Babel episode back in Genesis when then instead of spreading across the face of the earth and fulfilling the command of God, you have the Tower of Babel incident. Look at Genesis chapter 11 as a preview.

The whole earth had one language and one speech. It came to pass as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. They said to one another, Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.

They had brick for stone and they had asphalt for mortar. They said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

God said, I want you to be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. I want you to be fruitful and multiply and fill it. These people developed a purpose contrary to that of God.

They said, Let's build a ziggurat with its top oriented to the heavens. Let's do astrology. Let's get back in touch with the stars, those sons of God that used to be here on the earth, represented by the stars.

Let's get into that sort of a thing and ignore God. Look at verse 5. But the Lord in eternity past, having already foreseen these things, implemented His plan. That isn't what it says, is it? The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

And the Lord said, Indeed, the people are one and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. Now, nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. God says, This is liable to happen.

They're liable to all stay together, congregated around this giant ziggurat and engaging in astrology and demon influence and so forth. He says in verse 7, Come, let us go down and act. Let us go down and confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore, its name is called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. You get the idea here that this is the origin of the races, the physical distinctions and language barriers that have divided men.

We see an undoing of all of that in recent days, don't we? We see the initiation of sort of a one-world language, our language, English. We see the melting pot effect over all the earth where races are no longer distinct. It doesn't mean that every interracial marriage is evil, but you look at the trend of human society.

You look at the one-world government attempts that are going on in the European Common Market and the ECC and so forth. One currency, there's a movement sweeping to have the entire planet under one money system and so forth. All of these things are undoing the work that God did at Babel, and we'll discuss that more closely.

But the point here is, look at God's active involvement as history unfolds in the lives of people. He comes down and looks. He doesn't sit in the remoteness of his throne room and say, I knew that was going to happen.

He is immediate. He's involved. He reacts.

He presents himself as interested and reacting and taking action in a situation. There are countless examples of that. Look at his preservation and his activities with Israel as they wander in the wilderness.

The pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, parting the sea, providing. God is active and real and immediate. We tend to forget that.

We lose sight of his personhood and his emotions, his changes of mind based on what he sees. And it's a shame. We've depersonalized God and made him into a concept and into a box of characteristics instead of the living, breathing God that he is.

Look with me at Psalm 106.45. Psalm 106.45. This rather lengthy psalm recounts the history of Israel after they have left Egypt. Picks up sort of where we left off there at the foot of Mount Sinai. In verse 40, Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against his people so that he abhorred his own inheritance.

And he gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times he delivered them, but they rebelled in their counsel and were brought low for their iniquity.

Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction. When he heard their cry, and for their sake he remembered his covenant and relented according to the multitude of his mercies. God looked and saw their iniquity and pronounced judgment and discipline.

But when they turned to him and cried, what does he do? For their sake he remembered his covenant and relented according to the multitude of his mercies. They got less than they deserved because of the multitudinous mercies of God. And he relented.

He changed his mind. Scriptures are replete with reference to this. You can turn a few pages to Psalm 110.4. The Lord has sworn and will not relent.

There are some things about which God never changes his mind. You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand, and so forth.

This is the famous passage, Psalm 110. It begins, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. And so you have a case here where God will not change his mind in declaring the Davidic king, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ, a high priest forever.

Jeremiah 18 Verse 5 The word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, Can I not do with you as this potter? Remember the potter working at the wheel. The clay spoils in his hand and he has to make a different vessel. O house of Israel, Can I not do with you as this potter? Says the Lord.

Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. God says, I will change my policy.

I will change my mind if you turn and repent. In the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it, if it does evil in my sight so that it does not obey my voice, then I will relent. I will change my mind concerning the good with which I said I would benefit.

There can be a decree of blessing. Remember the promise that God made to King Saul? I will establish you and your dynasty in Israel and you will have a son on the throne of Israel perpetually. But Saul, through his disobedience and through his evil attitude toward God, God abolished that covenant promise.

The promise to Saul was never fulfilled because Saul was not obedient. He wasn't a man of faith. He did evil in God's sight.

So you have in Jeremiah 18, verses 5-10, God stating that He will change His mind, change His plan, change His purpose based on what people decide, on what they choose. He can speak harm against someone, but if they repent, God will change His mind and that harm will not come. God can speak blessing for someone, but if they do evil and reject God, that blessing will never be fulfilled.

Remember when Paul talks about us and he says we are sons of God and if sons then heirs, heirs according to promise. And this is one of those promises. We have been declared heirs of God.

We have been promised an inheritance with Christ among the saints. But that is a promise that has conditions. And God can change His mind about that blessing and that reward.

Some things God does not change His mind about. Our salvation is irrevocable. Our eternal life with God is irrevocable.

But those things that depend on our daily decisions, that depend on our choice for or against God as believers, God will switch from cursing to blessing or from blessing to cursing. There are a host of passages. You might turn a few pages in Jeremiah to chapter 26.

Jeremiah 26, In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, thus says the Lord, Stand in the court of the Lord's house and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the Lord's house all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.

This is one of the places where we get the idea that Noah preached repentance in the days before the flood when he was building the ark. This is a consistent principle in God's workings among men. Speak the words that I command you to speak.

Don't diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way. What has the greatest potential for turning someone from their evil way? Is it a step program? Is it a change in diet? Is it a good book? Is it a movie or a play or something with a moral to it? Is it analysis or ministry? What is it that can cause someone to change their mind? It's the Word of God.

It's the one thing in the universe that has the power to change a human mind. The Word of God. God doesn't send Jeremiah and say, just love them.

Just share love with the people. And through your example, perhaps they will come to a knowledge of me. God says, Jeremiah, you go speak my word.

Don't diminish a single word. Perhaps everyone will listen to that word and turn from his evil way. But, look down at verse 19.

Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? This false prophet. Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lord's favor? And the Lord relented concerning the doom which he had pronounced against them. But we are doing great evil against ourselves.

If you read this entire chapter, you find that here's an illustration. When God did relent based on people's choice. Look at Hosea chapter 11 and verse 8. I like having you turn to Hosea because it's hard to find.

It's good to get those pages unstuck there in the Minor Prophets. This chapter in Hosea, Hosea 8, has the theme of reaping the whirlwind. They will sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Look at 8.1. Set the trumpet to your mouth. He shall come like an eagle against the

house of the Lord because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. Israel will cry to me, My God, we know you.

Israel has rejected the good and the enemy will pursue him. Look down at verse 7. They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud.

It shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up.

Now they are among the Gentiles like a vessel in which is no pleasure. For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey alone by itself. Ephraim has hired lovers.

Turn over now to chapter 11. Well, I've got two references here that I keep mixing because we've got 8.11 and we have 11.8. So let me finish in chapter 8. Turn back to Hosea 8 and look at verse 11. Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for sinning.

I have written for him the great things of my law, but they were considered a strange thing. So God has delivered His Word and it's a foreign thing. It's a strange thing.

Now turn over to 11.8 where we're still talking about Ephraim. And God says, How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Adonai? How can I set you like Zeboim? My heart churns within me. My sympathy is stirred.

I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.

And I will not come with terror. God says, My heart is churning within me. On the one hand, my righteousness and my justice demand your total destruction.

But on the other hand, I have love and I have compassion. There are the promises that I have made. And I will not destroy you.

How does God present Himself? He's not an essence box. I have great respect for the essence box and it's a wonderful memory aid. But that's not the totality of God.

It doesn't include the words compassion. It doesn't include the word heart. It doesn't include the word joy.

It doesn't include the word sorrow. It doesn't include God's change of heart and change of mind. The mercies and the compassions of God can't be contained in a box.

They extend over thousands of generations. They're renewed every morning. God's faithfulness is great.

And God presents Himself to us as able to control His own essence and exercise His own

will without violating that essence. And here, God says, My heart churns within me. God can be grieved.

God can experience pain as well as joy. And He does in our case. So if there's one thing we bring away as we look at this period right before the flood when mankind has corrupted His way, the whole earth is vile in God's sight, even as God looks like He did at the foot of Mount Sinai and He says, Moses, stand aside.

Let me obliterate the people. There's grace. There is the truth of God's promises.

There's the opportunity for God's mercy. And God will relent. God will change His mind for those who appeal to Him, for those who claim His promises and go to Him and say, Lord, I know I've messed up.

But I know that You can cleanse. I know that You can purge me and cleanse me. And I can stand before You blameless because of the greatness of the work of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And it's a thing we need to focus on and keep fresh in our minds day by day by day. Why is it that we have any hope of the future? Why is it that we have any standing before God? It's because of His mercy. It's because He changed His mind after the fall of man and provided a way of salvation.

It's because even in the midst of discipline on a group, people within that group who have a heart oriented in the direction of God, who seek His face and try to walk with Him, there's mercy. And like Noah, we too can find grace in the eyes of the Lord. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the greatness of Your grace and the ultimate expression of it in our Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that these things will live in our souls, that God the Holy Spirit will transform us, renew our minds by them, and that we can take steps and walk with You that are pleasing in Your sight. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.