

“Like Father, Like Son”
Genesis 5:1-32

June 28, 2015

SI: We’re studying the first eleven chapters of Genesis this summer.

These chapters are foundational for a Christian world view.

How we are to think about God, creation, mankind, sin, society and culture.

It’s all here.

This morning, in chapter 5,

we come to one of the most important spiritual principles in the Bible,

absolutely crucial for a proper Christian world view—

the role families and generations play in salvation and judgment.

INTRO: I have a snapshot taken 16 years ago of Will when he was a baby, also in the picture are me, my dad and my grandfather.

Four generations of Siegenthaler men in one photo.

I've mentioned before that I've done a little genealogical research on the Siegenthalers. They're from a village outside Bern, Switzerland.

I've gone back to my great-great-great-great grandfather Siegenthaler.

His name was Ulrich. He was born in 17--.

Ulrich had a son named Christian, and Christian had a son Bernhard.

Bernhard immigrated to America in 1873.

He settled in Ohio where the next three generations of Siegenthaler men born—my great grandfather Albert, grandfather Clyde, and father Ron.

Then, by God's grace, the next Siegenthaler male was not born a Yankee—

I was born in the Southland and Will, as you know, was born in this most wonderful place of all of Dixie—Cullman, Alabama.

The Swiss-born Siegenthalers were dairy farmers and cheese-makers.

My great grandfather was an engineer on the Great Northern Railroad

My grandfather was a mason. My father was a Presbyterian minister.

The average length of life for five generations of my forefathers

is 74 years, 3 months. That means I have only 24 years, 2 months left to live.

But the thing that I wish I knew, that I have no way of finding out,

is the spiritual condition of my Swiss forefathers. Did they know the Lord?

I know they were all baptized in the Protestant Church in village.

But I don't know if they had a personal faith in Jesus Christ or just tradition.

I do know my great-grandfather and my grandfather were good, hard-working men, but they seemed to have had little interest in the things of God..

That would have been my heritage. I could have grown up as a moral,

hard-working, non-Christian, estranged from God and going to hell.

But the Lord stepped in. Through the ministry of Bethany Presbyterian Church

in Ft. Lauderdale, my grandmother was converted, and my father and my aunt.

And I became a Christian through my parents' teaching and example.

Allison and I have the joy of children who have claimed our faith as their own.

My hope is this genealogy of faith, started with grandmother, is never broken.

That my children will tell their children, and they in turn will tell their children, and the family of the faithful will multiply and enjoy God's blessings for the generations until Christ returns.

There's something about the Bible that we individualistic Americans need to reckon with—the importance the Bible places on genealogy.

The book of Genesis itself is divided into genealogical sections that all begin with the phrase, “These are the generations of . . .”

The generations of Adam, with the genealogy of Cain and Seth.

The generations of Noah, with the genealogies of Shem, Ham, Japheth.

The generations of Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob all include genealogies that take up several chapters.

There is that massive genealogy in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles.

The long genealogical lists in Ezra and Nehemiah.

And, of course, the genealogies of Jesus Christ in Matthew and Luke.

Why are these in the Bible?

So-and-so was the son of So-and-so. It's easy to skip these as unedifying.

They're in the Bible for a theological reason.

To show us how God works in the world and through history.

To show us that his way from the beginning is to work through families—to pour out his grace along the lines of generations.

This interest in genealogies is all about the progress of the seed of the woman.

Remember the very first promise in the Bible, Genesis 3:15?

Right after the fall, the Lord promised that there would be born a seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

As we proceed through Genesis and the Bible,

that seed is progressively identified—who it is and who it is not.

So even in Genesis, we are already on the way to Jesus Christ.

The way of God's working in the world, the way he brings salvation to mankind and arranges for the birth of the seed of the woman, the promised Son, is through families.

If we are going to be thoroughly biblical Christians,

we have to understand this generational aspect of God's grace, and incorporate it into our thinking and life.

Let's look at this passage under three points:

1. The two genealogies of the human race.
2. The principle of generational succession
3. The geometric growth of the faith.

Credit where credit is due: Sermon by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Pres. Tacoma

MP#1 The two genealogies of the human race

Last Sunday, we studied the genealogy of Cain in chapter 4.

That is followed immediately by the genealogy of Adam and his son Seth.
Two genealogies back to back.

These genealogies are more than just a list of descendants.

They represent two trajectories of human life.

One ordered by unbelief and rebellion against God.

The other ordered by faith and knowledge of God.

It's interesting to note that even though Cain was Adam's first son,

Cain's genealogy begins with him, not with his father.

But Adam's genealogy passes over Cain to begin with Seth.

This is the first appearance of an important theme.

God regularly breaks the law of the firstborn, so important in ancient world.

Cain was Adam's firstborn, but he was rejected and God chose Seth.

Cain was not the seed. He was not in the line of promise.

Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn, but Isaac was the child of the promise.

Ishmael was not the seed.

Esau was Isaac's firstborn, but the younger of the twin brothers, Jacob

carried the seed into the future. Esau was not the seed.

It's the first demonstration in the Bible that salvation is by grace.

It's God's choice that the elder will serve the younger.

Salvation is not determined by nature, custom or personal right.

Another pattern in Genesis.

The genealogies of these two lines are always placed side by side in pairs.

First the line of unbelievers is listed, then the line of believers.

Cain's, then Seth's. Japheth and Ham's genealogies come first, then Shem's.

Ishmael's before Isaac's. Esau's before Jacob's.

This shows God is not uninterested

in that part of humanity outside redemptive history.

They are objects of his kindness and care.

He has purposes for them in the advance of the human race.

We saw that last week with Cain's line. They were culture-makers.

They played an important role in invention and discovery.

But in the history of redemption Cain's line was irrelevant.

His genealogy was a dead end.

His line ended with at the Flood.

The genealogy of Chapter 5, on the other hand, is a succession of believers.

The point is made in several ways.

The last sentence of chapter 4 not only separates the genealogies,

it indicates that those about to be named called on the name of the Lord.

In the list, Enoch and Noah are identified specifically as righteous men.

Enoch is said to have walked with God. Same way devout life described today.

The Lord took him. He did not die but was taken up into heaven.

Cain's line culminates in Lamech, a man boastful of his violence and murder.

Seth's line ends with Noah—the man who saved human race and re-founded it.

Enoch, the 7th in the line of Adam and Seth is contrasted with Lamech,

the 7th in the line of Cain. Enoch walked with God. Lamech shook fist at God.

There is a Lamech in Seth's line too, but unlike his distant relation by same name,

this godly Lamech acknowledged judgment of God and yearned for deliverance.

He named his son Noah in thankfulness for God's gift.

Two different populations based on two diametrically opposite principles of life.

The rest of the Bible proceeds on the assumption that all people in the world

will be found in one of these two genealogies—Cain's or Seth's.

One genealogy tells the story of escalating disobedience and pride.

The other tells the story of faithful men following faithful men

and culminating in the one man who by God's grace saved world.

And coming at the very beginning of the Bible,

these two genealogies teach us to understand the human race in theological terms

as permanently divided into believers and unbelievers.

But the point is not just that the world is divided into

those who love the Lord and those who do not,

those who believe and those who do not,
those who aspire to obey and serve God, and those who do not.

The two genealogies of the human race point to something deeper.
And that's our next point . . .

MP#2 The principle of generational succession

Cain didn't produce some good sons and some bad sons.
He produced a line of consistently unbelieving men
who passed their unbelief on to their progeny.
In the same way, Seth produced a line of believers
who passed the faith on to their sons.

Now, certainly, either line can be interrupted
by the interjection of the contrary life principle.
That's exactly what happens in the next chapter.

The faithful line of Seth loses much of its faith. World left with few believers.
And the opposite happens in chapter 12.

The unbelieving line of Terah, who was a typical Babylonian idolater,
was interrupted by the Lord calling Abraham to faith in him.

So there are certainly interruptions in generations.
But the fact of generational succession in either faith or unbelief
is identified here at the beginning of the Bible as a feature of human history.
God created the human race as a family, the race fell as a family.
And it either rebels against God or worships him as families.

Genesis is basically the story of the spiritual ups and downs of one family—
the family of Abraham.

And through the rest of the Old Testament, the relationship between fathers
and sons, children and parents is the lifeblood of the Kingdom of God.

King David was the product of a godly line.

Boaz and Ruth, their son Obed, Jesse, David.

In the New Testament Paul reminds his young assistant Timothy that the faith in his
heart first lived in the hearts of his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice.

This is one of the ordinary means of salvation.

There never would have been a godly Noah, without a godly Enoch and Lamech.

There never would have been that other evil Lamech, without a Cain.
Unbelief usually begets unbelief in biblical history, and belief begets belief.

Remember the words of the Second Commandment:

For I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing mercy to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The sins of the fathers visited on the children does not mean punishments.

It mostly means continued rebellion against God in next generation.

That deepens the guilt of the family and exposes it to great measure of God's wrath.

The simplest reason why most people don't believe in Jesus Christ
is because their own parents don't believe in him.

But don't focus on the negative in the Second Commandment and miss positive.

The Lord says that he will be faithful to a thousand generations
of those who love him.

This why conversion is so important.

Because when a person from an unbelieving line comes to faith in Jesus,

it's not just that an individual has found eternal life,

it very often means a whole new line of spiritual life has begun.

That new line of faith could produce generations of believers.

Now, once again, a line of faith can be broken.

That's a sad reality we are all too familiar with.

We all know of sons and daughters of believers who turn their back on the faith
and sever connection with the church and raise children as pagans. It happens.

But, on the positive side, the long line of believers mentioned in Genesis 5
is not presented to us as the exception.

It's a pattern often found in the Bible and throughout church history.

Most Christians in the world have always been, and are today,
the children of Christian parents.

There are rare times of great missionary advances.

What I mean is that there have been times when vast numbers of brand new
Christians are swept into the kingdom out of paganism and unbelief.

It happened in China in the 70s and 80s.

But those generations who were saved are now producing larger numbers
of Christians by having their own children and raising to love and serve Lord.

That brings us to the third point, the third truth . . .

MP#3 The geometric growth of the faith.

The kingdom of God, like the kingdom of the evil one,
can grow geometrically, not just arithmetically.

Do any of you remember the name Stan and Donna Armes?

They were missionaries to South Africa that our church supported financially
for about 12 years. They retired about four years ago.

Stan is the 8th generation descendent of a Scottish woman named Anne Hamilton.

Anne lived from about 1750 to 1800 and she was a devout Christian.

Anne Hamilton's deathbed words have been handed down from generation
to generation through the geometrically expanding crowd of her descendants.

Probably in the same way Enoch's story was told to children in Seth's line—
how he walked with God and was no more because God took him.

The story goes that Anne Hamilton was a cheerful, outspoken woman.

But on her deathbed she became troubled and quiet.

When her family asked her what was wrong, she didn't reply—
which was completely out of character.

Then, after this period of darkness and perplexity, her face lit up.

She called her family to her bedside and she said:

“Children, I have it, he has given me the promise.”

(Then she quoted Isaiah 59:21 from memory.)

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you,
and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the
mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the LORD,
“from this time forth and forevermore.”

More than two centuries have passed since her death,
and her descendants are numerous and scattered all over the globe.

And that verse, Isaiah 59:21, hangs in the homes of many of them.

But what's fascinating about this very large extended family

is how many of them, like Stan and Donna, have been missionaries and ministers.

Stan's own parents were pioneer missionaries to a very remote part of Kenya.

When they arrived there were no Christians; 40 years later there were thousands.

That's where Stan grew up.

So from this one woman who believed the promise of God's generational grace,

and who called her children to believe it, has come a tribe of believers, who have been particularly dedicated to sharing the Gospel. That's geometric growth of the kingdom. And that's why it's not just conversion of pagans that is important—sharing the Gospel with unbelievers and bringing them into the kingdom. It's also vitally important that our children be reared in the faith. Faith in God and walking with the Lord can be transferred from parents to children for expanding generations.

Now we're not told here what the Bible tells us later about how to raise children in the fear of God, and the vital importance of setting an example for them of Christian goodness, love, and joy. There is a lot in the Bible about the spiritual nurture of children. But that's not the lesson of this chapter.

Here we learn, at the beginning, God's most common and ordinary way of extending and expanding salvation through the world is to bring parents to faith, and for them to transmit that faith to children. God must do the work in the heart—We understand that. You must be born again. But God mostly intends to do that through generations of believing families.

It's our calling both to raise our children in the love and faith of God, and to seek and win the lost. With the understanding that another believing line might form— from which a will produce a great many branches over course of generations.

From everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

Or as G.K. Chesterton put it:
“There are two ways of getting home, and one of them is never to have left.”