

February 28, 2021

God and Man

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."

Genesis 6:5-6

As we continue in our effort to better understand both our God and ourselves from the book of Genesis we come to the account of Noah and the flood, and in this story we learn a great deal about both. In chapter 5, verse 6, we learn that God can be grieved by our behaviors just as any loving parent can be and we learn that we can cause God pain.

As the story unfolds we also again see that God is a God of judgment. He will ultimately hold us accountable for the choices that we make. And we also learn, I think, that God is a God of mercy.

Of all of the things we can learn about man from this account one of the saddest and most disheartening is, I believe, summed up as God observes of man that ***"...every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all time."*** And even after the flood, as God lifts his curse from the ground he still says, ***"...every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."***

It is hard to accept that there is a driving force within each of us that is ***"...only evil all the time..."*** but I believe that is exactly what God is saying. So, what is there within each of us that serves as this source of evil?

I have come to believe that Jesus shows us the answer when he teaches, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."*** (Mattehw 16:24-25) There is within each of one of us a driving force to survive, the 'self' and that inherent force within us is absolutely selfish.

All life forms, man included, are created with this inherent drive to survive and while this drive is essential for life, it can be and often is, I believe, the source of mankind's overwhelming evil. Any organism's drive to survive is always and only self-serving. The deer that eat my flowers every year do not care that it upsets me for them to do that. They are hungry, my flowers are tasty, lunch is served.

Our drive to survive is no less self-serving. We believe that we must have something or keep something in order to 'survive' and we will go to almost any lengths to get it. Even in the very first sin we see this drive in action. The account reads, ***"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it..."*** (Genesis 3:6)

Eve is driven by the same inherent force to satisfy what she believes she must have in order to survive even at the price of open rebellion against what God has commanded. I believe that Jesus would have us understand that in order to follow him we must deny this force within us and ultimately put it to death. We must surrender our drive to survive, he will teach, if we want to live.

In his letter to the believers in Rome the Apostle Paul echoes this same idea. He writes, ***"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your***

mortal body so that you obey its evil desires..." (Romans 6:8-14) Our sin is sourced within us, not from outside us and if we would follow Jesus we must put that source of sin to death.

As those who have the capacity to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, we absolutely have the capacity to set aside our self-serving drive to survive and to surrender the question of our very survival completely to God. So, the Apostle will conclude, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" (Philippians 1:21) and "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*" (Galatians 2:20) If I can choose to surrender my very survival to God, to lay down my own 'drive to survive', then and only then, can Christ live in me.

