Grace Amid Corruption

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0:00] I'm going to invite Don to come and read for us Genesis chapter 6 verses 1 to 14.! If you have a Bible with you, you can follow along. The words will also be on the screen.

They'll be in the bulletin that you received. There's also Bibles at the back if you'd like to follow along. Thanks, Don. Reading at verse 1, when man began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive, and they took as their wives any they chose. Then the Lord said, My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh. His days shall be 120 years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of man, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God, and Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them.
Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. We're in a series working our way through Genesis chapters 4 to 11 on Sunday mornings, all the way through to November. And each week we've said that while Genesis 3 is the fall story, the story where sin entered the world for the first time, that Genesis 4 to 11 is a series of fall stories.
[2:33] So each one of these stories in Genesis 4 to 11 is a story about decline, about things getting worse and worse and worse, and different ways that sin is spreading into the world. And we've asked the same question, or we've said that these chapters answer the same question every week, and that is, what is wrong with us? What is wrong with humanity? And the answer of the Bible is sin. And in Genesis 4, we get not so much a theological proposition, but a definition of sorts of sin. It says that sin is a beast crouching at the door of the heart waiting to destroy you. And you must not let it. You must instead rule over it. And every story, there's been new sins and new ways of corrupting the world, and yet God has been so, so patient. So we've seen murder and polygamy and vengeance and cycle after cycle. And even though in Genesis 2, God said, if you sin, you will die. That's the reality.

Spiritually and physically, yet God has been so patient. And we see already in the earliest moments of the Bible that God, the God that you worship today is a God who is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and wants to show mercy to generation after generation.
But today, we reach the bottom. So in Genesis 4 to 11, there are two cycles, two cycles in the narrative that go all the way down. And we're at the first one, and we'll be in the first one for a few weeks as we approach the flood story. The second one's the Tower of Babel, which we'll come to in November. And here, you've drifted from the Garden of Eden, the Land of Delight, all the way down, down, down to the flood of judgment. And it really is a story of ruin, that the world right now is in ruins when you open this passage. And that means that we're reading the first instance in Genesis 6 of the judgment of God coming into the world in a clear and publicly stated way. And you will have heard that in what Don read. He said, I will blot out or destroy the people because of their wickedness. Now, as soon as you get to a story like this, many of us will have the instinct as

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modern people, and many people in our city, of course, will have the instinct to say, I do not like the idea of a God who judges. You know, I come to the
Bible, I come to religion to read about a God of love. And for many, that is either where Christianity comes to an end or never really starts. As soon as you, you know, you might have read the Gospels and really loved the stories about Jesus and His mercy. And then you come and say, now I'm going to start at the beginning and read the Bible through, and you get to Genesis, and you get to Genesis 6, and a new concept comes, and it's God's judgment. And what I want to say is, it would be today, I think we'll see, that it would be such a mistake to dismiss the God of the Bible because of judgment.
judgment. And instead, we need the God of judgment. It would be an intellectual mistake, an existential mistake, a social mistake that would cost so much to not believe in God because of a passage like Genesis 6 and the flood narrative. And so I think we'll see that. Let me show you four things to get to there, and they come from the different sections of this passage. Number one, the potential of sin, and then secondly, the pattern of sin. Third, the direction of sin, and then finally, we'll see the judge of all sin. So first, we've got here the potential of sin. Now, in verse 5, just to go straight to the verdict that God gives in verse 5, He says in verse 5, every intention of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil continually. Now, so here's the verdict God gives on the current condition of humanity when you approach Genesis 6, that did you notice every single thought, every single intention was only evil continually. Every only continually evil.
[6:50] And here we've got the diagnosis and the statement from God Himself of the fact that this is a world now in Genesis 6 where the brakes have been cut. And you have to come to this passage and really see what it's saying, that the world has declined to such a state at this moment that there is very little good left in humanity. And so the theologians will talk about the difference between total depravity and utter depravity. And sometimes we can get these confused and think of total depravity as utter depravity. So what is total depravity? Total depravity says that from the time of Genesis 3, we have been corrupted by sin in every part of who we are. So our intellectual life is corrupted by sin. Our heart, we desire the wrong things. Our emotions are corrupted by sin. Our decision making is corrupted by sin. That's total depravity. But the Bible does not teach that all of us, and we know this, are utterly depraved. And instead, we know that so many people, most humans are morally decent, law-abiding citizens that, and many people who don't believe in God are nicer than we are.

Total depravity means that sin has corrupted all the parts of who we are, but it doesn't mean that we're utterly depraved. But here we're reading about a culture that did become utterly depraved, that became as wicked as someone could possibly become. And it's interesting here that the word in verse 5, the Lord saw every intention of the thoughts of the human heart, that's the same word that comes from Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 when God said that He formed humanity with intention. So in other words, the writer, there's so many puns in this passage, the writer is saying, just as God made you with such intentionality like a potter and clay, like an artist. So in the same way, humanity had descended to such a point where they were artists of evil. It was the only thing that they could concoct was evil. And so this world is a world where sin has been embraced. Remember Genesis 4?
It says that sin is a beast waiting at the doorstep to devour you, and you must rule over it. But if you don't, it will devour you. You will become it. And that's exactly what's happened here. I love post-apocalyptic movies. My wife can attest she does not, but I do. I don't know why. But if you like post-apocalyptic films, you know that the movies are not really about the zombies or about the asteroids. What are they about? They're about what humanity will do to humans in the condition of a world that's broken into chaos. And so here, that's what we have. We have no sense of punishment, no fear of guilt, no conscience. And that means we're being told here that all there is is murder, murder upon murder upon murder. William Golding was the famous author of The Lord of the Flies, and he had fought in war with the Royal Navy. And he came back from war and said, when I went to war, I saw that the evil intention was not just in the person across the trenches from me.
And he came back and wrote a book about well-educated British schoolboys who are respectable citizens that go and are stranded on an island, and there's no adults, and they try to establish order, but in a land without order, without rules, it descends and descends into chaos and murder and savagery ultimately. And Genesis 6 is telling you this is the original story of how that happened.

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This is what Lord of the Flies is all about.
It's not, in other words, it's not saying that there are good people, decent people, average people, most of you average, decent, law-abiding, relatively citizens, and then there are really, really bad people. It's saying that sin is within all of us, and it's a beast that wants to utterly deprave us and take us all the way down, down, down, but we must not let it. But that's exactly what's taking place in this story. So secondly, how did this happen? The pattern of sin. Now, if you go back up to the top of the passage, we learn how this happened. Verse 1, it says, when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters are born, this is Genesis 1. This is echoing Genesis 1. [11:22] Remember God said, I made you in my image, now go be fruitful and multiply. And here in Genesis 6, we have, and it happened. Humanity multiplied. They were fruitful. They spread, just like Genesis 1.

But then that Genesis 1 goodness has verse 2 tacked onto it. And in verse 2, it says, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were attractive, and they took as their wives, they took any as their wives as they chose. Oh, just look at the verbs. The sons of God saw the daughters of man, and they took as their wives as they chose. Those three verbs in that verse are the exact same thing as Genesis 3, the same three verbs, when Eve looked at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it says, she saw, she saw that it was attractive or good, the word is good, and she took.
Look, and you see the writer is being so strategic. He's repeating those same three verbs to say, what do you have here? You have here a cosmic fall. This is the Garden of Eden story recapitulated, happening over and over again. And we learn here the pattern of sin, and it's that humanity, we, because of sin, we see something, and then we see it's good. We want it. We lust after it. That's really the word. And we reach out, and we take it. When you have a child in your home, they come to you routinely before dinner, and they say, can I have a biscuit? And you say, no, you cannot have a biscuit. We're about to have dinner. But then you look at their eyes, and you see them kind of glance over and latch on to the biscuits. And they see, and it is a delight to their eyes, and they want it. And it doesn't matter. Whatever mom and dad have said, they're going to find a way. This has never happened at our house, but they're going to find a way when the time is right to take. And that's just a little, that's a microcosm, a tiny little thing, right? But it's, it is the pattern of sin. And all of you, and here, while it was just Adam and Eve in the garden, here we're talking about all the sons and daughters of humanity that are entering into this.
Now, the question here is, who are these sons of God that see and lust after and take these daughters of men? And we could be sidelined for the rest of the sermon very easily trying to answer that question. So I'm going to spend one minute on it, and then, and then I would love to talk to you about it more if you'd like to talk about it. But the earliest reading of this passage, the most common Jewish reading in the time before Jesus was born, and the most common reading in the early church from somebody like Justin Martyr in the second century, is that these sons of God are spiritual beings, angelic beings who have fallen, and they have come and lusted after the daughters of humanity, the daughters of men. And from them comes the line of the Nephilim. And the reason that they thought that is because most commonly in the Old Testament, the phrase sons of God references spiritual beings, not humans. And so you can go to Job 1 or Psalm 82 or 89 and find that sons of God is normally a reference to spiritual beings, not human beings. But then you come over to the New Testament to a place like Jude verse 6 and 7 or 1 and 2 Peter, and it talks about the fall of the angels and attaches to that fall some sort of sexual immorality. Now that's hard to comprehend. It's hard to understand. We see other instances like that in Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, as well, that there are possibilities like that being conveyed perhaps in the Bible. And some people take that reading and some don't.
But what I want to say to you is that when you read the Bible, you realize that we in the modern Western world, as people who are post-enlightenment in a scientific age, we are the strange ones. [15:36] So when you come to a passage and you say there is a world of spiritual beings and all sorts of stuff that perhaps I don't understand, that almost everybody else in world history has believed in things like that. And a plethora of spiritual realities that we can't quite understand. We're the strange ones in the modern Western world. We're the odd people out, if that strikes you as so odd.

But the other reading, and this is Augustine and Calvin and probably the majority within the tradition that we would follow here, think that this is Genesis 4's genealogy and Genesis 5 genealogy, all

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mixing together. So if you were with us the past couple of weeks, you might remember that in Genesis 4, you have the line of Cain, the family who rejected God and said no to God and refused God's mercy and descended and descended into cycle and cycle of murder and vengeance.
But then from one appointed son, Seth, there was the seed of the woman arising, a people who called upon the name of the Lord. We called that last week the beginning of the church.
But when you flip the page to Genesis 6, what you read is that the beginning of the church, the family of Seth that did worship the Lord, they have completely become mixed up with all the evil that was going on in the world. And so no matter if you read this as a fall of angels, a cosmic rebellion, or you read this as just the line of Seth and the line of Cain getting intertwined, the same outcome. And that's that there was once a people in the proto-history here that called upon the name of the Lord. And when you get to Genesis 6, there aren't any. Nobody's following the Lord.
It's descended and descended and descended, and all there is left is wickedness as the text uses it. And so no matter how you read it, the outcome ends up being exactly the same.
[17:27] The point is this, the people of God are gone, and there's no one left. And you can see how the author's pointing us to that because back in 426, it said that in that day, there were a people who called upon the name of the Lord. And then you come over to our passage, and when it talks about these mighty men that came out of, that were birthed out of this evil marriages, it says literally the men, it says the men of renown, but in Hebrew, that's the men of the name. And later on in Genesis chapter 11, the climax of this whole section, what did they say? They said, let us build a name for ourselves against God. And so you see what it's doing? It's saying in Genesis 4, 26, the line of Seth are people who called upon the name of the Lord. But here, the offspring of these marriages produced nothing but a people who said, we're men of our name. We won't look to the Lord at all. The people of God are gone. There's nothing left. And so by verse 12, we learn all flesh is corrupted. Everybody, the serpent, in other words, the beast has fully swallowed the good that was remaining.

And that is why God says, I'm going to reduce the age of their life to 120 years. What's going on there? People were living so long in Genesis 5, but now just 120 years, why? What is he saying? He's saying the longer humanity lives, the worse it tends to get. And so the years of my patience, I'm going to give them 120 years of patience. A shorter lifespan. You just think about the story of Solomon.
The longer he went, the worse it got. And in the same way, God reduces their age because he's saying, I have exhibited patience after patience after patience, but it keeps getting worse. And so here, the judge sees, and he sees that only the intention of every heart is evil and wickedness. And so thirdly, this leads us to understand something of the direction of sin, the direction it tends to go. So we've seen the potential that there is potential of the beast, the power of sin in us to draw us all the way into utter depravity. Think of the world of Hitler or Paul Potts. That's the world we're talking about here. And the pattern of sin that we all have that beast within us to see and to lust, to want something disordered that we shouldn't want, and to reach out and take it. But here we learn in the third point how that tends to go. And that's the direction of sin. So what does this movement look like? Look, think about it. Sin moves from the inside out. First, it was the serpent outside of us in Genesis 3. Then it became the serpent within us in Genesis 4. And now the beast moves from the inside out. It first captures your heart, disorders your desires, and then eventually comes out into the hand and you take, right? And in this passage, Genesis 4 to 11 as a whole, we're being told the two primary ways that takes place. And we'll see these several more times in this series, so I'm not going to touch on the first one. I'm just going to mention that. But that's the two-fold pattern that sin develops into in Genesis 4 to 11. It's typically sexual sin and violence. And that happens in cycles over and over again in this section. And there's a hint at the sexual sin when the sons of God take the daughters of men. And we don't know all that that means, but it's being hinted at, and it's going to develop more and more in Genesis 9 and 10. But here, what's really accented in verse 11 and 13, two different times in verse 11 and 13, now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was, what do you mean? Filled with violence. And then verse 13, he says it again, for the earth is filled with violence because of humanity. And so the Bible's telling us that when sin really takes over in our lives, the direction tends in that way, eventually in a progression towards violence. And that's exactly what's happened here in Genesis chapter 6. And then again, I mentioned earlier that there's so many puns in the original language here, but down in verse 11, there's one that's really important.

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It says, now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the world was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on earth. And the word that God uses to pronounce judgment in this passage over the earth is the same word, corrupt. So when he says, I will blot them out, it's like saying, I will corrupt them. In other words, you could read it the other way.
[22:31] You could say, it's saying, all of humanity has destroyed themselves on the inside. And so they're destroying each other on the outside. And so God says, so I will destroy them. And you see that even the way the judgment comes through here is God saying, I'm going to give them what they've chosen.

After so many generations of patience in this post-apocalyptic, I can say it, scene, I'm going to give them what they've chosen. They've chosen nothing but murder. And in other words, he's saying that humanity, society, creation, it's not possible under these conditions.
After so many years of patience, this is what humanity has come to. And as soon as that steps in, as soon as that reality comes, while you can see the reasonableness of that in the logic of the text, at the same time, of course, we still, as modern people, push against it. And we say, I still do not like to read about a God of judgment. I want to read stories of the God of love. I want to read the stories of Christ's miraculous deeds in the gospels. But when you start your Genesis reading and you come to the passages of judgment, it can become quite hard for us as modern people. And let me say this to you. It's been said by so many others so much better than I'm going to say it now. In lengthy treatises that can be checked or looked at, but I'll just say it like this for now. Without a just judge over all the earth, in the end, violence will win.
And here's why, you know, think about it intellectually. If you don't have a just judge that transcends nature, that transcends the natural order, then you look out at the world and you see what in nature. Talk to the sociologists, talk to the biologists, talk to the historians. And just like nature is oriented towards violence, so humanity is oriented towards violence.
[24:33] Annie Dillard, you might have seen, died two weeks ago. The famous author, Pulitzer Prize winner, she wrote the famous book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. And she went out into the woods and she wanted to live sort of a Henry Thoreau style life of building her own cabin and peace next to the creek and a pre-modern sort of life. And in the very first chapter of her chronicle, her journal of this, she talks about a frog at the edge of a pond. She said, I crept up upon a frog at the edge of a pond and it was perfectly still. And she couldn't believe how still it remained. And she said, but as I got closer, I realized that something was happening. And she says that all of a sudden the frog seemed to almost melt.

It shrunk down like a canvas bag, I believe she puts it, shrunk. And that's because underneath the frog there was a poisonous water bug that had injected the frog with a venom, a very rare water bug, that basically melts the insides of an animal. And the frog had shrunk down to nothing. And she said, I realized in that moment that my role in this book would not just be the witness to nature's beauty, but the witness of nature's brutality. And it doesn't take very long to know that nature is red and tooth and claw and that humanity tends towards the same direction. When there is no law, there is no rule. We tend towards chaos. And as one writer puts it, you cannot draw a straight line. You cannot call a line crooked, I should say, without a straight edge. In other words, look, if you look out and you study nature, if you use the tools of science, you will see that nature is violent and humans tend to be violent. And if there is no God above, there is no judge that transcends the natural order, then on what basis can you say that what you observe is actually bad?
And you see, we need a judge of all the earth. We need a straight line to measure crooked lines by. We need a God who transcends everything, or we cannot call violence bad. Miroslav Volf, the Yugoslavian theologian who was present for so much of the turmoil in Yugoslavia in the 20th century. He grew up under communist Yugoslavia, and he wrote a famous book called Exclusion and Embrace. And in it, I'll just paraphrase him here. He says, people who have suffered real violence in their lives do not break the cycle by believing in a God who does not judge.
The only way to break the cycle of violence in a society is by believing that there is a God who will judge violence. And this is what he writes. He says, when your home has been burned down and your family has been murdered, what stops you from taking revenge? And he writes this, only this, that I believe there is a judge who will do right. And you see, the judge here sees and he does what is right. And the judge of all the earth means that this world will not be lost to violence.

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No, the Bible tells you, look, the Bible tells you why you know in your heart that violence is so existentially wrong, because it is. Because we have been corrupted by sin, and because of the beast within us, it moves us in that direction when we let it win. And that means for us today, judgment is not the enemy of love. No, no. Judgment is not the enemy of love. A court, a court that does not judge is not loving. It is moving society towards chaos. And the reason a court that judges exist is because there is a judge of all the earth who does right. And thanks be to God, because we are not impartial enough. It can't be us. There has to be a judge of all the earth. And so lastly, let's finish by looking at this judge, the judge of sin. What does it say about him? In verse 6, it says, the Lord regretted that he had made humanity, and it grieved him to his heart. Now, this looks like it's saying God looked up at what had happened and said, you know, I made a big mistake, and I shouldn't have ever made people at all, and I'm going to have to go with plan B, because plan A did not work. And again, this is an issue like who are the sons of God that could take us into a long reflection, and I'll spare you that now, but would love to talk to you about it more if you're interested. But what are we reading here? This is how the Bible readers of old talk about it. They say, Scripture interprets Scripture. And so you've got to go to other passages in the
[29:33] Bible to understand what is meant here. Is it saying God was so sorry and made such a big mistake and wished that he would have done it differently? It's not saying that. And we know that because in Numbers 23, 19, we read, God is not a man that he should repent. And it's the same verb as this verb.

It says God repented that he had made humanity. But then Numbers 23 says, God is not a human that he should repent or ever change his mind. And instead, the theologians of old say that what we're reading here is accommodation language, that God is speaking to us in such a way that we humans can understand it, that we can sense something of his emotional life, his affections, that he hates sin but loves humanity, that he set his heart against sin but for humanity. That's really what's being said. And because life together now in this awful world of Genesis 6 is not possible any longer, he is going to judge the world and he's going to send a flood. And we will dig into the flood in detail next week.

But I'll finish by saying this about it. In Genesis chapter 1, God separated the waters from the waters. He separated the water from the land. He made the world by putting water in the right place.

But when you come to the flood story in Genesis chapter 6, he lets the waters go back to where they used to be. And so the commentators will say that the flood story is God taking creation and decreating it. He's undoing what he had made beautiful in Genesis chapter 1. But why is he doing it? Why is he doing it? He's doing it. Why? Because he loves the world and he loves humanity. And he's saying, if I let things go on the way they are, then there will be nothing left, no humans left. And in other words, what we see here in the flood story is salvation by judgment, that he's judging in order to save.

He's decreating so that he can recreate. He's taking things back to Genesis 1 so that he can start over again. And that comes through in this one man that gets mentioned, Noah. Notice verse 8. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. That's the word grace. And you see, verse 9 says, Noah was a righteous man, blameless, and Noah walked with God. But verse 8 comes before verse 9. Noah was also a sinner.

[32:10] And it says that Noah received God's grace. And therefore, verse 9, he was a righteous man, blameless, who walked with God. And if you think about it for just a second, there's going to be no humans left. This is going to be an utter decreation except for one chosen man who was pulled out of the chaos. He and his wife. And when the floodwaters come, they're going to be in a bounded space, a safe space. And in that safe space, there's going to be animals, right? What is this?

Noah is a second Adam. This is Adam and Eve. And the ark is a garden. And there are animals all around them. And in the midst of the chaos waters, there is one floating little Eden. Why? Because God is saying, I'm going to recreate this world. I'm going to save it through judgment. I'm going to bring judgment so that I can bring life to you, to this people that are sitting here today. Adam had three sons. How many sons does Noah have? Three sons. He is the second Adam. But if you keep reading Genesis 4 to 11, and you will, because we will, you will find out that Noah also commits a great fall.

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And you say, it's not him. See the pattern? Salvation by judgment through a second Adam. But it's not him. And who's it going to be? Noah's name means rest, but he didn't bring it.
But Jesus Christ is the one who said, come unto me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest. Jesus Christ, just think about it. Salvation by judgment? Noah got to float in the Garden of Eden upon the waters, but Jesus Christ drowned in the water. At the cross, Jesus Christ was decreated. He was immersed in the floodwaters. So what we did today in baptism could be pronounced waters of cleansing.
Jesus Christ is the true second Adam, and the true and better Noah, and the one by which salvation would come through judgment. He was judged so that you don't have to drown. He was judged so that you don't have to be judged by the judge. And let me say a last word. That means today you can say that the gospel of Jesus gives you the freedom to say the flood has already happened. [34:42] God's judgment has already come fully upon him for me. Therefore, you are okay. You are safe. When you, look, let me invite you. When you trust in him, when you follow Jesus, there is no condemnation for you. The flood already came upon him. The gospel means you can be safe today to say something like, there is a beast within me. I do have a sinful inclination. There is a predator.

There is a serpent coiled up on my doorstep, and I can tell a story where I used to let it win. But in the power of Jesus Christ now, I am trying, trying, trying to not let it rule over me anymore.
So you can say, yeah, I am totally depraved, but by the grace of God, I am fighting every sense to become utterly depraved in this way or this way or this way. And that is what the gospel breaks through and gives you the freedom to grow in that way. The gospel gives you the power to say, when you have been wronged, when you have had violence committed against you, that you can say, Isaiah 53, though he did no violence, all violence was done to him.
Therefore, I can say the Lord is the judge of all the earth. I will not return violence for vengeance. I will let God be judged. The gospel gives you the power to do that. And so the same Lord who saw Noah with delight and grace, who saw the wickedness upon the earth, he sees you in both, he sees the truth about you, yet he sees you the way he saw Noah in Christ with delight and favor. And that gives you the freedom to live beyond the bounds of the flood. Let us pray. Father, teach us to live as if the flood of judgment has already come. We thank you that Jesus Christ was decreated, he was undone, he was drowned, so that we could have the garden of delight. So teach us that. I pray that someone today would be moved by the power of your spirit to trust in Jesus and that you would renew the faith of many. And I pray that in Christ's name. Amen.

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