

Prayers

To God

Pray with a confident spirit. Decide to rest in the Lord's love and accept His will for your life today. Receive His blessings.

For myself

Weekly theme: Pray for joy

Thank You Jesus, for loving me! May all my days be spent in giving You the praise and glory that is Your due, and may I hold my hands up high to receive Your love, joy and peace. Thank You Jesus! AMEN

For others

Pray for people whose lives have been marred by the 'recession', in whatever form it takes in various countries. Pray against the evils that have created it.

Meditation

The things of God are immeasurable and true:

His love is more precious to us than any gift we receive;
His grace is more awesome than any experience we may have;
His faithfulness is more consistent than the seasons of the earth;
His support is more sure than the foundations of a strong tower;
His promises are more assured than any processes of law;
His healing is more complete than the circle of the globe;
His salvation is more secure than the safest of homes;
His future is more certain than an atomic clock;

And if we have problems, then it is us who must change, not He.

Bible Passage

Genesis 9:1-7

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them,

'Be fruitful and increase in number to fulfil the earth. ² Awe and terror will fall on every animal of the earth, on every bird of the air, on everything that crawls on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea.'

They are placed into your hands. ³ Everything that moves and lives will be food for you; and just as I gave you green vegetation, I give you everything.

⁴ Except you must not eat meat with its life, which means to say, with its blood. ⁵ I will also demand an account of all the lifeblood you take; of all living animals, and of the life of one person at the hand of another. ⁶ Whoever sheds human blood will have their bloodshed by someone else; for God made humanity in His own image.

⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and become great in it.'

Review

This is another extraordinary passage of scripture. The story of Noah and the Flood has come to an end, and Genesis 9 contains the 'consequences' of the whole story. Cain's murder of Abel was a sin that spread to the rest of humanity (4:26 – 6:8) through his family line (4:17-25), and eventually gave God reason to bring the Flood. Yet within the story of the Flood, God performed a second miracle of creation, perhaps, 're-creation' (8:13-22). As we read the end of chapter 8, however, it becomes obvious that what God wanted more than anything else, was a new relationship with the pinnacle of His creation, men and women.

Chapter nine begins to describe this new relationship; which it does in two ways. First, in our passage today, God deals in a new and startling way with the issue of murder and shedding blood which was a major problem for His relationship with humanity before the Flood, because of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:8, 4:23). Second, in the passage we will read tomorrow (9:8-17) God formalises the Covenant relationship with Noah and His future generations, hinted at before the Flood (6:18). This, of course, is the highlight of the chapter, and contains the story of the establishment of the rainbow as a sign of peace (9:13). Even though our passage today appears strange, it all goes together with the famous part of chapter 9, which comes next.

The first verse of this passage contains the command of God, first given in Genesis 1:28, to '*be fruitful and increase in number*' (9:1). This is clearly very important to God. The fact that it is repeated here is an important reminder to us that it is God's will for people to bear children and grow in number. Today, many question whether we have now taken this too far, because the sheer size of the population of the world seems too much, but there is still much argument about how many people the world can indeed sustain or feed, or indeed, what the significance of population size really is. The command in this passage (9:1), however, has had an important part to play in the beliefs of the Christian church. So, when some early Christians felt that because the Lord was coming again they should refrain from sex and procreation, Paul corrected them. He taught that people should get on with living as God commanded, including raising families (see 1 Cor 7)!

In verses 2 and 3, God placed all living things in fear of humanity, and granted that people could kill animals and eat the meat of living things. If you recall the first chapter of Genesis, you will remember that initially, people were only granted the right to eat vegetables (1:29), so everything we read here is a new departure. There is one condition, however, which is this. Blood was understandably equated with life, so God placed an obligation on humanity to respect life and death by refraining from consuming blood. This is the origin of the Jewish law that forbids the eating of blood (9:4); but as Christians today, this is something to remember when we drink Christ's 'blood' at the sacrament of communion, which is intended to be a unique privileged!

Lastly, God dealt with the issue of murder, of one life taken for another (9:5f.). People often think of the Ten Commandments as being the source of the commandment '*You shall not kill*', but the command goes back much further, to this very point in the book of Genesis. After the 'Fall' of Adam and Eve, murder was the first 'sin' committed, and God's sanction against it reflected His abiding concern at this affront to the dignity of life. The penalty given against this sin was severe (9:6), and although it seems almost barbaric to us, we cannot judge the importance of it to such an early time in history as this; the penalty for murder was the cost of the murderer's life (9:6).

This form of 'capital punishment' was God's ultimate sanction reflecting the sanctity of life. But today, in an age in which Christ has died for all and the mercy of God prevails wherever His Kingdom is to be found, things have changed. It is perhaps right that now Jesus' death has taken away the penalty of sin for all who have faith in Him, that the death penalty seems more to us like state sanctioned murder than justice before God. It is time we considered removing it from the statute books of civilised societies.

Today's reading is odd. It contains the commands of God about eating, blood and murder, which are intended to set limits defining the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in society. Certainly in respect of killing things, whether for food, or unpleasantly, for murder. The commands are to do with life and its ultimate sacredness, as when the text talks of giving an account to God for all life (9:2,3). Lastly, at the beginning and the end of this passage, the identical blessing of God is given to the whole family line of Noah; the blessing of fruitfulness and abundance (9:1,7). This is a blessing that has been fulfilled, for despite wars between people and nations over the centuries combined with the difficulties and hazards of the natural world, people are indeed spread throughout the earth, and on every part of its habitable land.

Discipleship

Application

What do these laws say to us today?

Whilst we might follow the logic of what God is doing in this passage of scripture, by which the spiral of sin that caused the corruption of the world before the Flood is prevented, should we read in these elementary 'laws' the purposes of God for us today? Some would say 'Yes' because it is written here, chapter and verse. But I would suggest caution; things are not always that simple.

For example, the Old Testament is full of statements about 'clean' and 'unclean' animals, and what should or should not be eaten (Lev 7:19, 10:10 etc.). When considering the issue of eating meat, the teaching of Christ is such that we can go back to Genesis 2&3 and find teaching agreeing that all food is clean (Gen 1:28f.). Jesus made it plain that the Old Testament teaching about 'clean' and 'unclean' animals within sacrificial law was given to tell us something about our purity before God. However, what was important was that we should be pure and honest before God, not whether we have kept the details of a religious system.

The eating of meat and blood

The second part, however, is only indirectly helpful. If we were to accept verses 4,5&6 as they are, then we would drain all meat of its blood before eating it, and we would believe in capital punishment. The reason the teaching of the Church does not require this is because these verses are part of the background to our understanding of the work of Jesus on the Cross.

We do not need to travel a long journey interpreting all this from the Laws of Moses through the Prophets to the life and death of Jesus, to the writing of Paul and the teaching of the Church today. Verse 6 is God's demand of a life for a life, or 'blood for blood', a command that has been fulfilled in Jesus in His death for our sins; and when we say 'sins', we mean the sins of humanity in which we are all caught up, including murder. Jesus' own 'blood' now sets us free from these consequences, and the mercy of God in allowing Jesus to fulfil this text (and other texts), is why the majority of Christians have difficulty accepting the principle of capital punishment.

Ideas for what to do

- *What does 'life' mean to you? What does 'life' mean to people in this world and society at large? Think about what happens to you in a day, and what issues of life and death are reflected in everyday matters – eating, being aware of the news, politics, etc. Ask the Lord to help you value life in your words and deeds.*
- *Pray about the issue of the world's population. Ask the Lord to help you understand what His will can be for such a vast number of people in this world. Discuss this if you can, with someone else.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what sense does this passage of scripture represent a 'blessing' to humanity?
2. How does this passage of scripture describe our relationship with animals today? In what ways is it different from before the Flood and why?
3. In what ways can we respect the very close relationship that exists to this day between 'blood' and 'life'?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, take the time I have spent this 24 hours doing my daily work. Whether it will prove to be of great importance, or whether it will prove to be of little, bless what I have done. Lead me on in the power of Your Holy Spirit, with confidence that You will make everything work together, for 'good'. **AMEN**