

“There Shall Be Always A Church On Earth”

Genesis 5:1-32

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6th Sunday Before Easter

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Our sermon text today through the earliest chapters of the Scriptures is the entirety of Genesis 5, which gives us the genealogy, or the line of fathers and sons between Adam, the first man, and Noah, the tenth generation of his descendants.

Before I read Genesis 5 this morning, I’m going to read for us the genealogy of Cain in Genesis 4:17-24, because I think the differences between these two genealogies are significant for us to understand the meaning of Genesis 5. So as you listen now, listen for those differences between the line of Cain and the line of Adam and Seth.

Listen now to God’s holy and inerrant word. It is more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold. It is sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

4:17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. 19 And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. 20 Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21 His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 Zillah also bore Tubalcain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.

23 Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:

*I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
24 If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."*

1 This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. 3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. 4 The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. 5 Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. 7 Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. 10 Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalel. 13 Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died.

15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he fathered Jared. 16 Mahalalel lived after he fathered Jared 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Thus all the days of Mahalalel were 895 years, and he died.

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. 19 Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. 26 Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." 30 Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

32 After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Prayer...

What lasts in this world? I mean, what really lasts?

Fifty years ago, this neighborhood was nothing but empty fields. Who knows that it will look like in another half-century?

Nations rise and fall. Civilizations that were once dominant, whose collapse was unimaginable, are now lost to sands of time.

Glorious buildings fall into ruins.

Languages constantly change.

An artist or a musician or a writer beloved by one generation is absolutely forgotten by the next.

In fact, the only thing that doesn't change, that doesn't grow old, that doesn't wear out, is the resurrected and indestructible body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is, as the Apostle tells us: the Same, yesterday, today and forever.

All other things perish, but he remains. They wear out like a garment, but Jesus is the same, his years have no end.

And this same Lord Jesus has made this promise — he has said, as our Westminster Confession states: "There shall always be a church on earth."

To be clear, the permanence, the strength of the church is not founded in its own cleverness, its own capacity — rather its life is perpetually shaped and sustained by the one who lives forever, the one who never grows weary, the one whose strength is renewed continually as he lives before his Father in heaven — for our Lord Christ is the one who builds his church, and has promised that the gates of hell will not stand against it.

If we're going to live with wisdom as God's people in this world, we must grasp this reality.

All is vapor in this world, apart from this alone — Christ and his body — and those who participate in the life of the church participate in something that will last, something that will never be wasted, something that will never disappear.

And if we can live that kind of holy confidence, we can know — we can really know what it is to have peace and contentment and joy — for we will not be afraid.

But if we're going to live with this kind of wisdom and judgment, we can't trust our eyes, because the contrary will often appear to be true.

The wicked, as the Psalms remind us, often seem to be strong and unshakable, and we will be tempted to envy them. And the church will often seem to be isolated and weak.

But in this, as in so many things, we need the word of God to shatter our illusions and bring us back to reality—and our Scripture passage this morning does just that.

The contrast between the genealogy of Cain at the end of the Genesis 4 and the genealogy of Adam and Seth and their righteous line in Genesis 5 is striking.

Cain's line is full of cultural and technological developments, full of boasting about its strength and power and vigor. Cain builds a city. He populates it with his descendants. They defend their city and their civilization with violence and threats.

But when you read Cain's genealogy more closely, some things stand out.

There's no mention of years.

There's no apparent passing of time.

No one's death is recorded.

It's just people living in some amorphous way, doing things that are initially impressive, but don't last.

And at the end, it just kind of trails off. What happened to the descendants of Lamech, the one who boasted of his violent strength and murderous power?

We know that his sons developed animal husbandry and musical instruments and tools of bronze and iron. But after that, what?

We find out in Genesis 7, of course, that all of Cain's descendants eventually perished in the flood that God sent upon the earth.

But what happened in the hundreds of years between the sons of Lamech and the coming of the floodwaters?

We're not told. Cain's genealogy just comes to an end.

For, beloved, the wicked are vapor. They are like chaff, driven by the wind.

They build their house on the sand, and when the rain falls, and the winds blow and the flood comes, great is the fall of it.

Contrast this to the genealogy of Adam and Seth.

On first glance, this genealogy lacks the impressiveness of Cain's.

There are no technological inventions mentioned. No city building is recorded. Nothing is given to indicate power or strength. There are no boasts.

Each generation in this genealogy follows a regular pattern, exemplified in verses 6-11, which reads like this:

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. 7 Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. 10 Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

A couple of things jump out here.

One is there is a detailed accounting of time. We are given the age each man's father was when he himself was born. We are then given how long each man lived until he fathered his son. Then we are given how many years he lived until his death. Then we are given, as a summary, the total of each man's years.

It doesn't take much work to take the information here and build out a specific chronology of all the years from the creation of Adam up to the birth of Noah.

You can see this in detail on the chart that I've put in the foyer, which was created by a fellow PCA pastor and friend of mine.

But the genealogy of Adam and Seth does not only include the specifics of time. They also record the fact of each man's death. As Genesis 5:8 puts it: *"Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died."*

Now, on the one hand, this constant repetition: "And he died...and he died..." is a vivid reminder of the consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve, and God's just sentence of death for them and all their descendants.

But on the other hand, this recording of each of these men's death gives this genealogy a weightiness that is lacking in the genealogy of Cain.

Cain and his descendants are insubstantial — they are born and live, but it seems that the end of their days is not significant enough to record.

But for Adam and Seth and their descendants, these lives have a beginning and an end. Yes, they die, but we know when they die, and their bodies are laid to rest, to wait for the resurrection to come.

They die, but, as Hebrews 11 tells us, by faith, they still speak.

But not all of the persons in the line of Adam and Seth die, of course — at least not in the way that all other humans experience death. In verses 21-25, we read this:

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

The story of Enoch is mysterious. We know that he was a righteous man, that he walked with God, that he pleased God, and that God took him to himself.

Hebrews 11 explains: *“By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.”*

In his epistle Jude gives us further detail on Enoch’s life, writing:

14 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” 16 These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

Jude describes Enoch as a prophet, and says that he prophesied that God would come with his holy angels in judgment against those who ungodly sinners who spoke against him and boasted of their sin.

Interestingly, Jude also notes that Enoch was the seventh from Adam in the line of Seth - that is, the line of the church.

A quick glance at Cain's genealogy will show that the ungodly Lamech, whose violent boast is recorded in Genesis 4 was the seventh from Adam in the line of the wicked.

It seems very likely that Enoch and Lamech were contemporaries, and Enoch spoke as a righteous prophet to his cousin Lamech and rebuked him for his sin.

And so, it is quite possible that before Lamech could put Enoch to death as his father Cain had murdered Abel, God took Enoch to himself.

The genealogy of Adam and Seth in Genesis 5 is also differentiated by this contrast to the line of Cain in Genesis 4.

Their line does not just end, as Cain's does.

No, there is a future for God's people. For there will be always a church on earth, and the gates of hell will not stand against it.

As Genesis 5:28-31 tells us:

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." 30 Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

There is a Lamech in Cain's line too, of course. But the godly Lamech here in Genesis 5 does not boast of his power and strength.

Rather, he acknowledges the curse that God has brought against the ground because of his sin, and he looks forward in faith to the future that God will bring through the son he has been given.

And indeed, Lamech dies just five years before God sends the flood on the world to judge all mankind.

But before the godly Lamech died, he would have seen the Ark that his son Noah and his grandsons Shem, Ham and Japheth had begun to build, and he would have known that yes - yes, I will die, but the story that I am a part of will continue on after me.

He would have known — there is a future for the people of God, for there will be always a church on earth.

Beloved, as we close this morning, I just want to point out this final lesson from this genealogy in Genesis 5.

I know that many of us struggle with the apparent inconsequence of our lives.

We know well the truth of Psalm 90, where Moses writes: *“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”*

I mean we *know* that. We know it in our bones.

The older I get, the more I feel weight and truth of those words, and I suspect you do, too.

It doesn't matter how many books we write. It doesn't matter how much money we make. It doesn't matter how successful, or even how loved we are.

Our span is but toil and trouble, our years are few, they are soon gone, and we fly away.

In the end, the only thing that can give our lives weight and consequence and meaning is the fact that Lord loves us, the hope that the Lord will cover up our sins and establish the fleeting work of our hands, the promise that in the Lord's eyes we are not insignificant, but precious, the very crown and jewel of his creation.

And it is in this light that something interesting is found in this genealogy.

Beloved, with all its dates and years, this genealogy is given to us not just so that we would know the names of the descendants of Adam and Seth and a little bit about their lives, but so that we know, with confidence, the history of the world.

We were given this genealogy so that we would know that it was 1,656 years after God made the world that he judged it with a global flood.

We were given this genealogy so that we could connect it to the genealogy in Genesis 11 and discern that it was 2,083 years after creation that God called Abram and told him to go to the land of Canaan.

We were given this genealogy so that we could know it was 2,513 years after God made Adam when God brought Israel out of Egypt.

In other words, in this genealogy, we see God keeping time and marking the years of the world's history for us.

But do you know how God marks time for us beloved?

He doesn't do it by telling us about great cultural achievements.

God doesn't mark time by telling us when the cities were built, or when the canals were dug, or when the great battles were fought.

No, the God who made the heavens and the earth marks time in this way, beloved.

He marks time by telling us the life spans of those men and women who are part of his people, who belong to his church.

He measures out the history and chronology of the world by telling us when the people whom he loves were born and when they begat children, and when they died.

Because that's what he cares about.

For our God, the people of God is what history is fundamentally all about. It's not really about the pyramids. It's not about the great battles. It's not about the development of philosophy or economics or culture.

History, as God reckons it, is about the days and weeks and months and years of those men and women whom he loves, that church that he has established in his Son, that people of God who are always, for him, the apple of his eye.

Indeed, if I can paraphrase Psalm 116, we can say with confidence that God gives us this genealogy and others in the Scriptures like it that we might know and believe that indeed:

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the birth and life and death of his saints."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.