

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [4th Sunday in Lent]
March 19, 2023
Rev. YoungMin Kim

Sermon Series (4): The Wages of Sin
Romans 6:19-23

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Last Sunday, I gave the third sermon in a series with the movie, "Noah (2014)." With the theme, "Sinful Nature," we focused on the serpent skin. The serpent that appeared in the creation account in the Book of Genesis and in the movie was a symbol of the evil that made Adam and Eve break the covenant with God. As a result, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden, which means they came to be separated from God. In this story, the director of the movie added his creativity that the serpent molted and left its skin on earth. Adam picked up the skin, treasured it, and handed it over to his son Seth, Seth to his son, and that son to his son...and so on to Lamech, who was Noah's father. In the beginning of the movie, when Lamech gave a blessing to his son Noah, he wrapped the serpent skin on his hand and arm and gave a blessing to Noah with the hand. And at the end of the movie, on the new land, Noah, just as his father did, wrapped the serpent skin on his hand and arm and gave blessings to his son Shem's two babies.

Here, we interpreted the serpent skin as human beings' sinful nature. When Adam picked up the skin, he turned his eyes from God to the prohibited tree. Being cast out of Eden, Tubal-Cain plundered the skin from Lamech and might have blessed his people with it. Consequently, they became faithful to satisfy their physical desires. And even the world became cleansed with the flood and began anew with Noah and his family. But we know that human beings' sinful nature would never disappear. Thus, the director may want to tell us that we cannot be free from our sinful nature for evermore. Yes, as Romans 5:12 says, due to our sinful nature, in other words separation from God, we are going to die. But we have good news, as Romans 5:17 says, that we are given salvation through Jesus Christ. Through His crucifixion on the cross, our separated relationship with God became restored, and we come to be reconciled to God. And we come to have new life on earth and after life. This is what we know to be true, but the director of the movie doesn't.

Today, I want to invite you to focus on Noah. As an extension of human beings' sinful nature, we will come to see Noah's determination in relation to today's theme, "the wages of sin." And then, we will approach it with the Apostle Paul's explanation about it.

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Noah had three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth. When the ark was almost completed, they knew that the time of God's punishment with a flood was coming. So, they prepared for the time, and it seemed everything went as planned. But there was one complaint among the sons. Shem already had his wife, and Japheth was too young. But Ham began to take an interest in the opposite sex. So, he urged his father Noah to find his wife among the people. Noah first rejected his request, but he might have thought about post-flood and of being fruitful and multiplying on the new land. So, Noah snuck in among the people of Tubal-Cain and tried to find a girl for Ham. But there, he witnessed a horrifying sight. (video)

In Noah's sight, there seemed to be no righteousness, justice, or peace among the people of Tubal-Cain. Only wickedness and physical desires devoured them. We could see his frustration, anger, and abhorrence in his eyes. Up to this point, Noah must have believed that he was different from the people of Tubal-Cain—he was more righteous than the people; he was clean, but they were sinful; and he was a man of God, but they were men of evil. At that moment, Noah paid attention to a thief who stole something, ran away, and crouched in the distance. While staring at him, the thief all of the sudden turned to Noah and turned into a face of the serpent (or evil), and then the temptation in the Garden of Eden was overlapped. This moment



A thief among the people of Tubal-Cain
from the movie "Noah"

shook everything for Noah and all his beliefs. He came to believe that he could be wicked, could be full of sin, and could be a man of evil. He could be one of the people of Tubal-Cain and one of those who should be punished.

After the flood began and all men of Tubal-Cain were buried under the sea, Noah and his family sat around in the ark. And Noah began to tell his sons how God created the world, how the first man and woman disobeyed God, and what the price of that disobedience was. But this was not the end. Noah told his sons what would happen to them on the new land. (video)

Noah said that when the flood ends, paradise would return with the animals that Noah and his family took care of in the ark. But there would be no place for men, because if Noah's descendants would be fruitful on the new land, again it would be full of wickedness and evil, and they would devour the new land. And God would need to cleanse the world again. Thus, Noah and his family should perish on earth. In his belief, there would be no men on God's creation in the new land. Noah kept saying that Shem should bury his father and mother; Ham should bury his brother Shem and sister-in-law; Japheth should bury his brother Ham, and he would be the last man on earth and return to the dust. After all, Noah's belief that he also was full of sin and that there was no difference between him and the people of Tubal-Cain brought the conclusion that he and his family should disappear on the new land, and that is what God commanded to Noah and his family. It seems pessimistic again.

What do you think? Do you agree with Noah's determination? Throughout history, the only thing that has destroyed God's creation was human beings. Due to our sinfulness in forms of greed or selfishness, people killed and plundered each other. We still witness countless daily accidents, gun violence, depredation, war, discrimination, and more in the nation and the world. We sometimes destroy nature in order to satisfy our needs. So, nature writhes in agony, and we see its after-effects.

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The background of today's Scripture passage is the church in Rome. The Apostle Paul wrote some instructions in the faith to the Gentile Christians in the church who were accustomed to their own religions, cultures, and philosophies. Due to their religions, cultures, or social convention, worshiping the emperors or idols, sexual depravity, or oppressing the weak or the powerless was tolerated in the society. For this, Paul said, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what fruit did you then gain from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death" (vv. 20-21). And again, he said, "For the wages of sin is death..." (v. 23a). Just like Noah believed in the movie, the wages of sin is death, disappearing in the new land.

But now, they were in the light of Jesus Christ. Since they decided to accept Jesus as their Lord, throw their old lives out with their religions, cultures, and social convention, and follow Jesus's teachings, they were slaves of sin no longer but "slaves of righteousness leading to sanctification" (v. 19b). Paul said, "But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the fruit you have leads to sanctification, and the end is eternal life" (v. 22). And this is possible because "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 23b).

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If we are still slaves of sin, as Noah and the Apostle Paul said, we would perish, which means separation from God in this life and for eternity. We know that due to our fallen nature, we still have our sinfulness, come to be tempted by the evil spirit, and eventually pursue our desires.

But know the good news that since we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we have been set free from sin, reconciled to God, and become children of God. Thus, we are not the ones who would perish in the kingdom of God but the ones who spread God's love and grace in His kingdom. As children of God, not slaves of sin, let us purify ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit and practice Jesus's teachings here on earth. Amen.