

Too Much, Too Soon

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series in Genesis we are like explorers who have traced a mighty river to its sources and who are now beginning to grasp the character of the land in which they live. We have already traced in this chapter the causes of war, crime, and prejudice to their roots in the hearts of men who refuse to be honest before God. In this story of Cain and Abel we have a kind of human cameo of history, a microscopic picture of the entire scope of human history. That, of course, is why the Bible is always so contemporary; it deals with elements of human life that never change.

Today we will take a closer look at what is called *culture* or *civilization*, and especially the part that city life plays in the shaping of human society. This is introduced for us in Verse 17 of Chapter 4:

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. {Gen 4:17 RSV}

In an earlier series we indicated that we have archaeological proof of this as an actual occurrence, for archaeologists have found that the word *enoch* is the earliest word for city in any human language. In the ancient area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the oldest inhabited cities known to man were called *enoch*. This was much as we refer to San Francisco as “the city,” so they called this first town, “the city,” *enoch*.

It is interesting that it was Cain who built the first city and generally turned the family into the state. He thus introduced the social and political problems that in this 20th century are screaming at us for solution. It is very suggestive that the first city was built by a condemned murderer.

Now, it is clear from the 21st chapter of Revelation that it was ultimately God’s intention for men to live in a city. The dream of the city which God intended for man runs throughout the whole of Scripture. Remember, we are told in the book of Hebrews that Abraham “looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” {Heb 11:10}. So, from the earliest dawn of history, men were looking forward to the coming of a city. You will find references to it in the Psalms and other places. But everywhere in Scripture there is a contrast drawn between the city of God and the cities of men.

God withholds his city and it has not come even yet. He withholds it for a very good reason: He is waiting until men are ready to live in a city. God first goes about solving the fundamental problem of humanity – its self-will and defiance of authority – and then he puts men together in the close life of a city. But we have reversed that. Man, in his arrogant pride, has assumed that he is quite able to live in close relationship with his fellow man and has clustered together in cities throughout history. The result has been all the violence, intrigue, social injustice, and long unending record of bloodshed which history records.

Here is the supreme mark of the fallen man, clearly evident in this passage: He wants everything now! That is the trouble with man as he is today; he wants everything, right now: Instant luxury, instant comfort, instant relief, everything, now! To accomplish that, man ignores the problem of evil. He treats it as though it were nonexistent, dismisses it with a wave of his hand, regards it as merely trivia – and goes ahead to build his city on the ground that is already red with the blood of his brother. That is the story of history.

Now, it is a most imposing city he builds. The technical brilliance of man is evident even this early in the history of our race:

To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe [It is from this we get our word, *jubilee*]. Zillah bore Tubalcain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. {Gen 4:18-22}

Even the names here are highly suggestive. As you study your Bible, learn to look up the meaning of Bible names. Sometimes there are differences of opinion as to what they mean, depending upon the root from which the name was taken, but these names are very significant:

- Irad, for instance, means “the city of witness,” i.e., in this context, “witness to the glory of man.” Already the idea of the exaltation of man is coming in and it will culminate soon in the tower of Babel, erected to the glory of man.
- Mehujael means “smitten of God,” which is suggestive, perhaps, of a rather defiant attitude: “God has smitten, yes, but we’re going to make a success of this anyway,” is man’s attitude.
- Methushael is most contemporary; it means “the death of God.” You can see how far back in history that idea goes!
- Lamech means “strong” or “powerful,” and again reflects clearly the boasting of man in his fallen state.
- Jabal means “traveler;”
- Jubal, “trumpeter;” and
- Tubalcain, “metalworker” – especially with regard to jewelry and ornamentation.

Now that is most remarkable. We have here all the ingredients of modern life – travel, music and the arts, the use of metals, the organized political life, and the domestication of animals. All of this is admirable and progressive, and, as we have indicated, ultimately intended for man. Nothing that fallen man longs after was to be denied him, as far as God was concerned, but it was to be when man was ready for it. The whole tragic story of civilization is that man insists on it anyway, before he is ready for it. You know how often in history we have said that the story of some human event was “too little, too late,” but here it is obviously “too much, too soon.”

These things look impressive, and it is desirable to have these comforts, luxuries, and advances, but what this passage so clearly brings before us is that it is all built on shaky ground. I do not think I could put that any better than to quote the words of Helmut Thielicke. In a study on this very passage, he says:

The strange thing is that the closer we come the more clearly we see the red thread that runs like a pulsing, bloody artery through the myriad figures of the world. This motherly earth, on which even the greatest of men walked, on which they erected cities and cathedrals and monuments, has drunk the blood of Abel. And this blood of the murdered and abused appears in stains and rivulets everywhere, including the greatest figures. Cain, the “great brother” and progenitor of mankind, betrays his mysterious presence.

Somewhere in every symphony the tone-figure of death is traceable. Somewhere on every Doric column this mark is to be found. And in every tragedy the lament over injustice and violence rings out.

That is what we are trying to forget. We point boastfully at our great skyscrapers, our manicured gardens, our beautifully public avenues and parks and say all this is the mark of human ingenuity, human ability. But we cover up and try to ignore the tragic areas of abuse and privation, of darkness and injustice, of violence and intrigue that go along with man’s accomplishments. But see how honest, upright and frank the Scriptures are. They make us face right up to this. The account goes right on to interject two more elements that must be included in an evaluation of human culture.

**Lamech said to his wives:
“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, hearken to
what I say:
I have slain a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-seven fold.”
{Gen 4:23-24 RSV}**

In this passage you have the first mention of polygamy in the Bible. Someone has said that polygamy has its own punishment – it means more than one mother-in-law! But perhaps there is not even that here, for we know from the story of Cain that Lamech may have actually married sisters who had the same mother. Whatever the case was, at least here is the beginning of polygamy.

It occurred to me that perhaps he was simply trying to do research into the nature and character of womanhood, studying it from A to Z, from Adah to Zillah!

If you will forgive me that, we’ll come back to the text and note that, whatever this is, it marks the unflinching accompaniment of civilization – a sexual excess coming in which is openly tolerated. It traces back to this early Cainite civilization.

The second element that is always present and necessary to properly evaluate culture is reflected in this oldest song in the world. Notice that these verses about Lamech are put into poetic form. They represent an early song, a kind of taunt on Lamech’s part, in which he is justifying his violence. He boasts to his wives, “Listen to what I have to say: I have slain a man for wounding me.” Evidently, a young man had assaulted him and, in self-defense, he says, “I slew him.” He boasts of this to his wives and justifies it, saying that if God avenged Cain sevenfold for taking the life of his brother without any justification whatever, then, surely, “I will be avenged seventy-seven fold for having acted in self-defense.”

Here we have the first clear instance of a pattern that has repeated itself a thousand times over in human history – the justifying of violence on the ground of protection of rights.

Now there is a picture of civilization:

- Technical brilliance, producing comforts and luxuries;

- The substitution of the state for the family;
- The trend toward urban over rural life;
- The increasing toleration of sexual excess; and
- The passionate vindication of violence on the grounds of the protection of rights.

Sound familiar?

Has human nature changed in the thousands of years of history recorded since Cain? Not a bit.

Does this sound familiar?

Our youth now loves luxuries. They have bad manners, contempt for authority. They show disrespect for elders and they love to chatter instead of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants, of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food, and tyrannize their teachers.

So said Socrates, 425 BC!

Well, what is the problem? It reduces to the clamant cry of the human heart for everything, now! Men do not want to get ready for anything. They do not want to face the fact that perhaps they are not ready yet, that they need certain changes in themselves first before they are ready to move into close companionship with one another and live together. It is a refusal to acknowledge the glaring problems of human life.

It is manifest in the superficiality of our lives, the fact that we make trivial things sound like they are horribly important. Have you been listening to the toothpaste ads on the TV recently? If you believed the ads, you would think that a certain brand of toothpaste could change your whole life. Those ads are intended to be taken at least in a quasi-serious way. The things that do change life we treat as mere trivia, only for religious people, those few people who can’t keep their minds off the mystical. They are the ones to whom this change of life, this born again experience, makes its appeal.

How clearly the Scripture puts its finger on the problem of human life – this refusal of human beings to be healed first before they begin to claim the blessings God intends for the race. The cleansing of grace must come first, and then the seeking of

God's city. This is why man has never been able to find what he has sought for in city life, because he is forever building his cities upon ground that is red with the blood of his brother.

A father told me recently of the struggles of his son. It was the old, old story of the prodigal son who felt that what his father taught and believed was boring, uninteresting, and useless. Life made its adventurous appeal to him and he succumbed to the lure of new things and exciting adventures and relationships and refused to stay with his family. He got involved with drugs, women, and evil friends, and, finally – almost wrecked in health and broken in spirit, so tortured and tormented within he was on the verge of suicide – he realized what was happening to him, and, at the last moment, repented, came back, and found peace of heart and grace in the father's house. The father said to me, "I don't know why it is that he had to learn the hard way."

Well, why is it?

It is because men refuse to face the facts about life. For those who refuse to face the facts, there is no other way to learn than by hard experience, the grinding tribulation and tumult of having to live with facts we will not recognize. But it is not necessary. Even this early in the human race it was not necessary.

Notice Verses 25 and 26 here, which close this chapter:

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD. {Gen 4:25-26 RSV}

Once again these names are most suggestive:

- Seth means "appointed." Eve said, "I will call him 'Appointed' because God has appointed another son to take the place of Abel."

When the man of faith is taken out of the world, God's work does not end; he raises up another. I have been so impressed by the epitaph on the tomb of John Wesley, in Westminster Abbey in London. I stood before it some years ago, and I have never forgotten it: "God

buries His workman, but He carries on His work."

And here too the work of God is going forward. He appoints another son, another man.

- The name of Seth's son was Enosh, which means "mortal."

Here is suggested very clearly the idea that in the midst of this Cainite civilization, with its proud refusal to recognize the canker eating away at the heart of humanity, and its desire to achieve the luxuries and comforts that God designs, but on a false basis, there were yet those who recognized their mortality, and, thus, their dependence upon God.

There were those who took God's appointed way, and, as the account goes on to say, "they began to call upon the name of the LORD." They recognized that God must heal our hearts before we can have all the things that our urges cry out for, that the cancer within us must be dealt with before we can begin to live.

This has been the story of the Scriptures from beginning to end. All the way through, the Scriptures have been at pains to point out to us that there are only two ways to live. Jesus said so. There is the broad way, which many are taking, which looks so logical but which leads to destruction; and there is the narrow way, which begins at the point where an individual stands alone before God and must make a decision, the narrow way that leads unto life, as God intended life to be lived {cf, Matt 7:13-14}.

Which way are you taking?

You young people here, you are facing the siren call of the world, with its appeal to luxury, comfort, ease, achievement, and acquisitiveness. It is not that Christians cannot use these things. The Apostle Paul tells us we are to use but not abuse the things of the world {cf, 1 Cor 9}. But throughout the Scriptures we are warned "Love not the things of the world, neither the things that are in the world," {cf, 1 Jn 2:15 KJV}. Do not make these the center around which you build your life. If this is all-important to you, you are doomed. You will not find life. Jesus said, if you try to save it on these terms, you will lose it, but if you lose your

life for his sake, you will save it, {cf, Matt 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-45, Luke 9:23-24}.

Let God heal the sickness of the human heart with its hunger for self-centeredness, self-exaltation, its desire always to be in the center of attention; let God heal that through the working of the gospel, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can begin to live. It is the way that leads to life – life as God intended it. It may be that this life will not include in it luxuries and comforts, but they are down the line somewhere. God has these in mind for all his people. All that the heart hungers after will ultimately be supplied in Jesus Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul cries out,

For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all [things] are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's, {1 Cor 3:21b-23 RSV}.

But it is only available to those who begin with the healing of the heart and the cleansing of the life in Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

How foolish we have been, our Father, to try to satisfy our hearts with these empty things of culture and civilization. How foolish we have been to think that a man who is made to be satisfied by nothing but God shall ever find heart satisfaction in anything else. How often history has taught us the lesson that those who try to satisfy themselves with something less will end up by repudiating that thing itself, and finding life nothing but a weary desolation of spirit. How long, Father, before we begin to believe you. How long before we begin to take seriously the truth you have told us out of love for us, and turn from setting these secondary things first in our lives to make life count, not now but for eternity, that we might enter into life as you intended it to be lived. We pray in your name, Amen.

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