

September 22, 2013  
Weird Stories in the Bible

*Drunk in your Birthday Suit*  
Genesis 9:20-29

**Opening words:** Last week, I began a six part sermon series, *Weird Stories in the Bible*. There are more weird stories in the Bible than you would think. They are not the ones we visit annually, like the Nativity or the Passion of Christ. They are words that are seldom read because they don't seem to fit with the rest of the book. For example, last week's text was about bears eating teenagers (2 Kings 2:23-25). It comes from the Bible, but it does not sound like Bible. In the weeks to come, we are going to be looking at other odd stories. Let me give you a list:

1. Lot's incest
2. Enoch's eternity
3. Ezekiel's bones
4. Hosea's favorite prostitute

Today, we have this odd story about Noah's nudity. In a world that demands physical perfection, very few have perfect bodies. Does anyone here have a perfect body? There is nothing to indicate in the scripture that Noah had a perfect body. Yet, the story still speaks to us because it is not about physical perfection. The story is about human imperfection. It's about making a mistake. Has anyone one here ever made a mistake? May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Genesis 9:20-29. Let me call this message *Drunk in your Birthday Suit*.

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**Genesis 9:20-29** Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup> When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. <sup>22</sup> Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup> But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

<sup>24</sup> When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup> he said,

"Cursed be Canaan!  
The lowest of slaves  
will he be to his brothers."

<sup>26</sup> He also said,

"Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!  
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.

<sup>27</sup> May God extend Japheth's territory;  
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,  
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth."

<sup>28</sup> After the flood Noah lived 350 years. <sup>29</sup> Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

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Buddha once said, *"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting."* At the very heart of this morning's scripture lesson is a mistake. It is one that the world has been examining for years. Please do not be critical of Noah. He lived a good life, but he made a mistake on one particular day. The Bible, itself, has promoted his mistake. If it wasn't for the Bible, this mistake would have been forgotten in time. How many mistakes have you made in your life that have been forgotten in time? How many mistakes have you made in your life? How many mistakes have you made in the past year? How many mistakes have you made in the past week? How many mistakes have you made today? Making mistakes is part of life. Experts in human behavior tell us there are four different kinds of mistakes a person can make. I want to look at all four, but I really want to look at the kind of mistake Noah made in the scripture lesson for today. So if you are ready to look at the four different kinds of mistakes you can make, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Stupid Mistake**

The first kind of mistake you can make is a stupid mistake. It is just the stupid things we do. Have you ever made a stupid mistake? You can admit you make stupid mistakes because we all make stupid mistakes. Let me give you one example.

Years ago, I lived in the Cleveland area and went to the local mall. I am not a great shopper. I don't like shopping. I don't like malls. I just wanted to run in and out with my purchase. However, I ran into a friend. We talked more than a few minutes. In time, we said, "Good-bye" and I walked out the exit. It was at that moment that I discovered I had forgotten where I had parked. I stood there looking at that sea of cars. I tried to remember but I didn't have a clue. After looking for a half an hour I discovered I was looking in the wrong parking lot. I had walked out the wrong exit. I felt so stupid. Have you ever made a stupid mistake? Have ever dropped your slice of pizza on you freshly cleaned carpet? Have you have poked your eye while eating a banana? The first kind of mistake is a stupid mistake. If you have ever made a stupid mistake, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Simple Mistake**

The second kind of mistake is a simple mistake. It is the kind of mistake that is avoidable, but your sequence of decisions make it inevitable. Have you ever made a simple mistake? You can admit you make simple mistakes because we all make simple mistakes. Let me give you an example.

The other day I was at a meeting. It was one of those meetings no one wants to attend, so they promised us lunch. After several hours of intense discussion about nothing, the lunch arrived, a cold cut tray. I looked at it and thought, "that is enough for me. What is everyone else going to eat?" In time, I made my sandwich and grabbed a few chips. A few minutes later, I returned for a second sandwich, but everything was gone except a few black olives. I stood there with two other men who wanted a second sandwich. One of them looked at me and said, "Where do you want to go for lunch?" If you have ever been in charge of lunch and ran out of food, then you are guilty of committing a simple mistake. It is the kind of mistake that is avoidable, but your sequence of decisions made it inevitable. If you have ever made a simple mistake, then say, **"Amen!"**

### **Complex Mistake**

Has anyone here ever made a complex mistake? The issues around these mistakes are complex and there is no obvious answer. Have you ever made a complex mistake? I hope not, because they are so complex. Let me give you an example.

I have had this discussion more than once in my career. A woman comes into my office and wants to talk about divorce. She is wrestling with an unknown future because there is no obvious answer. The situation is complex. Is it better for the children to stay in a loveless marriage? Is it better for the children to stick it out until some magic age? There is no obvious answer. If you have ever made a complex mistake, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Involved Mistake**

The fourth and final kind of mistake is an involved mistake. It is the kind of mistake you understand, but an effort is needed to prevent them from happening again. Have you ever made an involved mistake? Noah made an involved mistake. Let's look at the text together.

We are in the ninth chapter of Genesis. The main character in the story is Noah. Yes, he is the same guy who built the ark. He is the same guy who collected the animals. He is the same guy who God spared because he was so perfect. Yet, in this story he is not so perfect. He is more like us, imperfect. You do not need an advanced degree to understand the story. According to the text, Noah was a farmer. It was a craft he learned from his father, Lamech. The Bible does not tell us everything Noah planted. However, the Bible does tell us he planted a vineyard. He does not just plant the vineyard to eat the grapes. He plants the vineyard to produce wine. He must have liked his own wine, because in verse twenty-one we are told Noah, the perfect man prior to the flood, is drunk. There is a piece of information missing that I would like to know. What were the events leading up to his drunkenness? We are told people drink because people are trying to escape something. Perhaps, he was trying to escape Mrs. Noah? Romantic love had faded years ago. Perhaps, he was trying to escape his wild adult sons. The whole world is empty. Why are they still living with him? Isn't it time to go? Perhaps, he is simply trying to escape the memories of all the people who perished in the flood. Perhaps, it was an accidental drunk. He liked the taste of his grapes too much. We don't know why he is drunk. All we know is that he is drunk. This seems to be an isolated case. There are no accounts of his drunkenness prior to this story, and we are not told he was drunk again. We do not know any actions he performed in his drunkenness, but we do know about the final scene. He is drunk in his birthday suit in his tent. Can anyone here relate to Noah? In the morning, everything was a blur. He begins to ask what he did the previous night. Like all mistakes, he is uncomfortable, but he will survive. He promises himself and proclaims to his world, "I will never do that again!" Have you ever said to your world, "I will never do that again!" It is Noah's youngest son, Ham, who rubs salt into the wound. Why is it always family members who won't let you forget your involved mistakes?

I have to admit, I made an involved mistake at the family dinner in 1983. No, I was not drunk and in my birthday suit, but I could not have felt any worse. For years, I had wrestled with going into the ministry. I had gotten no family support. My father thought it was the funniest thing he had ever heard.

He laughed even harder when I told him I was transferring to a different seminary. Earlier that year I went to Christian Theological Seminary for all the right reasons. It was a denomination school, which meant they promised more money and employment. In my brain, it made logical sense to be in Indianapolis. However, in my heart I knew it was the wrong place. I have always valued preaching and the evangelical tradition, but that school didn't. I remember praying, "God give me a sign so I know I am really supposed to leave". The next day in preaching class, the professor had a guest lecturer. He said, "Preaching is really nothing more than entertainment. It is a waste of time. It would be more beneficial for your church to take that time to write their congressman to promote their political agenda." I mailed my application that day to Asbury Theological Seminary, where I graduated. I went with one thing, God. I would receive no financial aid and no hope of employment. However, I knew I was doing the right thing. The worst part of the whole experience was telling my loved ones. My father laughed and my mother said, "Russell, I hope you are not making another mistake." I didn't make a mistake. I experienced success at Asbury and success in the local church, but my father never stopped laughing. When I came here the most encouraging thing my father could say was, "This seems like a nice place - don't mess it up."

Can I give you some pastoral advice? Somewhere along the line, I learned it doesn't really matter what other people say about you. The only thing that matters is how you feel about yourself. Don't strive for perfectionism; strive for realism. Admit it you are going to make some mistakes in life. It is called being a human being. I have found that piece of advice very liberating. Albert Einstein once said, "*A person who never made a mistake has never tried anything new.*" You are going to make some stupid mistakes. You are going to make some simple mistakes. You are going to make some involved mistakes, and in your life you are going to make one or two complex mistakes. You are going to make mistakes, but don't let those mistakes paralyze you. Keep moving forward. It is amazing how God can use your mistakes and do something really good.

In 1999, *Time* magazine named Sir Alexander Fleming one of the 100 most important People of the 20th Century, stating:

"It was a discovery that would change the course of history. The active ingredient in that mold, which Fleming named *penicillin*, turned out to be an infection-fighting agent of enormous potency. When it was finally recognized for what it was, the most efficacious life-saving drug in the world, penicillin would alter forever the treatment of bacterial infections. By the middle of the century, Fleming's discovery had spawned a huge pharmaceutical industry, churning out synthetic penicillins that would conquer some of mankind's most ancient scourges."

It is almost comical. History tells us this life saving drug was discovered by accident. As the story goes, someone made a mistake and forgot to cover a Petri dish. Exposed to the open air, it was thrown away in the trash. It was Fleming who examined that discarded dish and noticed a certain mold was eating the bacteria around it. The rest is history. Maybe mistakes aren't so bad? Maybe mistakes are just part of life? Oscar Wilde once said, "*Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"