

Genesis 9

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[0 : 00] At the beginning of the service, when I asked you to be upstanding for the minute silence, at that moment I noticed that I didn't have my watch.

So while you were respectfully observing that minute silence, I was counting in my head. So I don't know if I got it right or not, if anybody was checking. But that is also relevant at this point, because I have no idea what the time is, and I won't have any idea what the time is as I continue through the sermon this morning.

So that could mean a very short sermon if I overcompensate, or the other extreme. So we'll see what happens. If I do go to the other extreme, feel free to cough.

I don't know. I'd prefer if you didn't walk out, but other little hints won't be resented. What comes to your mind when you see a rainbow?

I think today, in today's society, we're conscious of how the rainbow symbol has been commandeered. I think commandeered is a fair word. It's not an unfair word. Hijacked would maybe be too strong a word.

[1 : 11] But the rainbow symbol has been commandeered to represent the LGBT community or those causes connected with it, and the battle for equal rights for all.

Just in the passing, can I say that I am very much in favor of equal rights for all. More importantly, God is in favor of equal rights for all.

Strikingly, the passage we have read speaks of God's love for all without distinction. This covenant that He established with the earth, not only with men and women, but with every creature.

And so, we see this love and this commitment to the world that He has created that is without distinction. And if that is God's perspective, it certainly should be ours.

But coming back to the rainbow, what comes to your mind when you see a rainbow? You're maybe driving along the northeast side road or the A90 or wherever it is, and there from where you're seated, you see a rainbow.

[2 : 14] What comes to your mind? Well, in my mind, the sight of a rainbow triggers my recollection of the words of a fun wee chorus.

Mr. Noah built an ark. The people thought it such a lark. Mr. Noah warned them so, but into the ark they would not go. Now, the flood, of course, was neither fun nor the building of the ark a lark, but such is the world of Kitty's choruses.

But that chorus ends with the words, whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love.

Whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love.

And I think that simple lyric captures God's intention in providing the rainbow as a sign of His eternal covenant with all living creatures.

We see the rainbow and we remember God's love. We remember God's faithfulness. We remember that God is a God who keeps His promises. But the intriguing detail in the passage that we've read is that God explicitly speaks of the rainbow as a sign of remembrance for Himself, for God.

[3 : 38] There in the passage that we've read, God says, Whenever the rainbow appears, I will remember. And these words really serve as our text.

This morning at the beginning of verse 15, the words of God, I will remember. And so on this Remembrance Sunday, let's reflect on what God remembers when He sees a rainbow in the sky. What I want to do is use those words of God, I will remember, and grounded in what we discover in the Bible passage, propose different ways in which God might finish that sentence.

Now, I'm conscious that it's a somewhat precarious project to put words into God's mouth, something we really ought to be very careful not to do.

But the words that we will suggest that God might use to end that sentence, I will remember, are words that I think we find in the passage. And so we won't depart from what we find.

[4 : 45] Or certainly that's my intention, from what we find in the passage that we've read. But we'll start, and this is probably a wise place to start, we'll start with what God actually said on the occasion that He voiced these words, as we find it recorded for us there in the passage.

So let's read again verses 14 and 15. God is speaking and He says this, Whenever I bring clouds over the earth, and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember.

How does God finish the sentence? Well, I will remember my covenant between me and you, and all living creatures of every kind.

So God tells us what He remembers when He sees the rainbow in the sky. I will remember my covenant between me and you, and all living creatures of every kind.

I will remember my covenant. Now what is that? What is it that God is remembering? Well, a covenant is an instrument by which God establishes and regulates a relationship.

[5 : 57] In this case, a relationship with all living creatures. Now we'll see as we explore this covenant that men and women have a special place within the designs of the covenant.

But the covenant is with all living creatures, and God establishes the relationship. A covenant is always of God's initiative, and the terms of the covenant are always of God's making.

He is the author of the covenant. He is the one who has the prerogative to establish a covenant, and He does so. Indeed, the language here in the passage is very emphatic.

Notice in verse 8 where God speaks of establishing this covenant as He speaks to Noah and to his sons. If we were to translate in a somewhat wooden way the actual Hebrew words at the beginning of verse 9, what we would read is, Now I, behold, I establish my covenant with you.

And so, even in the language that God employs, there is this emphasis on this being of His initiative. He is the one who has determined to establish this relationship and to govern it by means of the covenant that He is going to reveal to Noah.

[7 : 22] In a covenant, God, in sovereign freedom, chooses to bind or commit Himself to those with whom He establishes the covenant.

Now, the manner in which God binds Himself and the commitments He makes will always reflect His character, and so they serve to reveal who God is and certainly what God is like.

Now, the covenant God remembers as He sees the rainbow serves to remind God, and this may seem a strange thing to say, but it serves to remind God of who He is, of what He is like, and His commitments to us.

Now, I said that may sound a strange thing to get our heads around the idea of God remembering, and that very concept can generate a difficulty for us.

We might call it a conceptual difficulty, and maybe the difficulty becomes clearer when we express it in terms of a question. Why does God need to be reminded of anything?

[8 : 28] Is that not a rather strange thing to suggest, that God needs to be reminded of anything? And, of course, He doesn't. He doesn't need to be reminded of anything.

He doesn't forget the promises that He makes. He doesn't forget the covenant that He has established. His remembering is for our benefit. Now, let me explain what I mean by that.

How does that work, this claim that I'm making, that this remembering on the part of God is for our benefit? Well, follow with me these steps that I think are logical steps in the mind of a believer.

In your mind, as you see a rainbow. So you see a rainbow. Maybe, I don't know, is it raining this morning? I think it is. Maybe even today, as you head home, you may see a rainbow.

Wouldn't that be an amazing thing if you saw a rainbow today? I'm not promising you one, but it would be pretty amazing if you did. But imagine you do. You're heading home, and you see a rainbow. Now, when you see that rainbow, I hope that one of the thoughts that comes to your mind is that God is also seeing that rainbow.

[9 : 35] You're seeing it, and God is also seeing that rainbow. And when God sees that rainbow, He is mindful of, He is remembering, to use the language, His covenant.

He's remembering, He's mindful of His gracious character, His wonderful promises, His unwavering commitment to us. And the very thought that this is what is occupying God's mind and attention is for us a source of comfort, encouragement, and delight.

So, what does God remember when He sees a rainbow and remembers His covenant with or through Noah with all living creatures?

Well, let me suggest a few things that God remembers. He remembers His covenant, but of course, in that one word, there's so much packed in. And as we explore the covenant, I think we can legitimately draw out different truths or different realities that God remembers as He remembers His covenant.

Let me suggest, first of all, one way in which that sentence could continue. I will remember that I am the God of second chances.

[10:53] Now, I don't know how many of you were able to be at the services last weekend when we had David Gibson preaching, and I don't know, I can't remember which of the services it was, but he drew our attention to the words that we have, I think, at the beginning of chapter 3 of Jonah, and God came to Jonah a second time and drew out from those very simple words that simply describe something that happened, this wonderful reality that our God is a God of second chances.

Maybe I had that in my mind as I, you know, read this chapter and thought about this chapter, but it struck me that this very chapter and certainly the circumstances that are being described, the circumstances in which this covenant is established, provides us with this big picture of God giving a second chance, not just to an individual, but to humanity.

humanity. This covenant is God giving humanity, the human race, a second chance. Humanity messed up big time.

Adam and Eve, our representatives, messed up in the garden. They did their own thing. They went their own way. They disobeyed God. As I was hearing in the Life Explored course, it was expressed rather, for me, quite strikingly, in paradise.

In the garden, they had a paradise of yes and one tree of no, and they went for the one tree of no. And so Adam and Eve messed up.

[12:29] But of course, things went from bad to worse. Indeed, just immediately prior to this quite horrendous, cataclysmic flood that destroyed the earth, we have described humanity.

In chapter 6 and verses 5 to 8, let me just read those verses to give you a flavor of how things had indeed gone from bad to worse and beyond. Chapter 6 and verse 5 of Genesis, the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

You really couldn't have a more damning description. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. This is not an indifferent God who is going to strike down humanity, but rather a God who is filled with pain.

So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind whom I have created from the face of the earth, men and animals and creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air, for I am grieved that I have made them.

And the passage continues, but now God gives humanity a second chance, a fresh start. And this big picture second chance tells us a great deal about God and reminds us that he is a God of second chances in our own lives and in our own experience.

[13:56] He will give you a second chance, even a third or a fourth chance. He is a God who delights in restoring and recreating that which is messed up.

So God sees the rainbow. He remembers his covenant. He remembers the circumstances in which he established the covenant and he remembers that he is a God of second chances.

Where might there be a rainbow? Right now. I don't know what the time is. I don't have my watch. I've already told you that. But right now, I wonder where there's a rainbow. Maybe in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro or maybe a rainbow bringing color to the Grand Canyon.

Wherever that kaleidoscope of color appears, God remembers that he is a God of second chances. But let's think of another way how God might complete that sentence beginning with the words, I will remember.

Perhaps in this way, I will remember that my love extends to all whom I have created. The covenant that God made with, or rather through Noah, is, as the passage makes very clear, is with all living creatures.

[15:17] God made promises that extend to every man, woman, and child that has lived since Noah and indeed promises that extend to every living creature.

And this is both evidence of and an expression of his love for all. As that same truth is expressed in another part of the Bible, he causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

And this covenant through Noah is an expression of God's common grace, to use the theological terminology that is sometimes employed. the grace of God as it extends to all without distinction or favor.

I will remember that my love extends to all whom I have created. I wonder where God will see a rainbow today.

When he does, he will remember that his love extends to all his creatures. But let's try and think of another way in which God might answer or rather complete that sentence.

[16:31] I will remember that it is my delight to bless. Chapter 9, the chapter that we read, begins with these words, Then God blessed Noah and his sons saying to them.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons. And what follows is the description of the terms and promises of the covenant. The covenant that God establishes was the means whereby God blessed Noah and his sons and descendants.

So, this declaration that God blessed Noah has content. And the content is the covenant. That is the way that God blessed Noah and his sons and then all descendants after them.

This is what God does. This is how God rolls. God delights to bless. And when God blesses, He isn't just wishing us well, but He is doing us good.

When God blesses, He does something for us. God is not just a well-wisher, but a do-gooder in the very best sense of that expression.

[17:52] God blessed Noah. And it is the same God who, we are told, blessed Noah on the occasion of establishing the covenant. It is the same God who sees rainbows at every moment of the day across our spinning planet.

And when He does, He can be heard to whisper, I will remember that it is my delight to bless. But how else might God conclude that sentence that begins with the words, I will remember?

Well, perhaps in this way, I will remember that it is my desire that humanity should flourish. There's a command in this chapter that's repeated on two occasions in verse 1 and in verse 7.

Let's notice the two times when we find very similar language. In verse 1, then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

It's a command to be fruitful. Then in verse 7, very similar language. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth, or team on the earth, as it is sometimes translated, and increase upon it.

[19:16] This command, it's a command directed to Noah, it's a command directed to us, is a command to flourish. If we had to summarize it in one word, I think we could, I think, fairly describe it in that way.

This is a command to flourish. God is the giver of life and he loves life. God loves all the people, and I think we can say, the more, the better.

Again, I was, in my mind, I went back to Jonah that we were being given the opportunity to think about last weekend and God's words at the end of the book of Jonah. Nineveh has more than 120,000 people.

Should I not be concerned about that great city? And the logic that we seem to be finding there, God's logic, is there's so many people. Of course I'm concerned about it because I love people. And if there is a city with all those teeming masses, obviously I will be concerned about it. How could I not be concerned about a city with so many people?

[20:17] That seems to be what God is saying. That seems to be the force of what he is saying. God loves people. He wants humanity to flourish. Now maybe we could pause there for a moment and say, well, what does that tell us or how does that inform our thinking on the matter of population growth and the consequences of population growth?

Sometimes as a society we can be concerned, maybe rightly so, sometimes maybe traumatized by the scepter of uncontrollable population growth.

And I'm sure that's an issue that we need to grapple with carefully and wisely. But as we do, let's not lose sight of God's delight in a flourishing humanity, multiplying and filling the earth.

God does not see that as a bad thing. He sees that as a good thing. As I was preparing the sermon, I was just looking online at the BBC news site, and on Friday, just two days ago, there was a report on the BBC about research that points to what has been called a baby bust.

I don't know if you've come across that expression before. I hadn't until Friday, and the expression is intended to be in distinction to a baby boom, a baby bust.

[21 : 37] And this baby bust is the term coined to describe the phenomenon where birth rates are not able to maintain population size in a given country, a reality that is true for a number of Western countries, if that's the right terminology, and perhaps one or two others.

And the report was indicating the profound consequences, economic, social consequences for countries where that is the case, where their population growth isn't sufficient to replace those who are dying, countries with more grandparents than grandchildren.

children. Well, we can ponder on those issues and try and come to our own views on it, but we can certainly say this, that God's desire is for humanity, that humanity of which we form a part.

God's desire is for humanity to flourish. And that isn't just about numbers, of course, but includes God's desire that the earth be filled with men and women and boys and girls of all colors and races, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.

And when God sees a rainbow today, He remembers His desire for humanity, for us, that we would flourish. But there's a couple of other final things I want to say in terms of taking these words of God, I will remember, and seeing how God might complete that sentence.

[23 : 10] The next one is this, I will remember my commitment to provide and protect. In some ways, this takes us to the heart of the covenant or certainly some of the details of the covenant.

God's covenant through Noah, though extending to all living creatures, places men and women in a special place in God's purposes and favor.

God makes particular provision for our sustenance and our protection as human beings, as men and women. There is, in the terms of the covenant, a commitment to provide.

Indeed, provision is made, not just a commitment, but an actual act of provision is embedded in the covenant. Notice what is said in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 9.

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, upon all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hands.

[24 : 15] And then, you know, you couldn't get more inclusive language in verse 3. And everything that lives and moves will be food for you.

Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. This is God speaking to Noah in representation of human beings, of men and women, you and me.

And God is saying, I am providing for you. This covenant that I'm establishing includes within it this commitment on my part to provide for your sustenance.

Now, this is not, let us be very clear, this provision is not a license to squander God-given resources, something that as a race we have been very prone to.

It's not a license to squander. That's very clear. But nonetheless, it does establish a clear priority for human beings. We are more valuable than animals, however cute, however majestic they might be.

[25 : 21] A malnourished child clinging to life in the Yemen is of more volume in God's sight than a Siberian tiger or a golden eagle or whatever other creature you care to imagine.

And on that, we need to be very clear because that is not a view that is held by many. But it is the biblical view. It is God's view. We're not lauding ourselves.

We're simply grateful to acknowledge what God declares so clearly in His Word. Plants and animals are provided for our sustenance.

Now, you start thinking about that and saying, well, what does that mean? What are the implications of that? Does that mean that you shouldn't be a vegetarian? Not at all. If you want to be a vegetarian, that's your prerogative and it's entirely up to you if that's the way you wish to live.

But it certainly does mean that meat-eating cannot be demonized with facile chants of meat is murder. The Bible is clear. Every moving thing has been provided to us for our sustenance.

[26 : 25] That is what God did. And we happily bow to His greater wisdom in these matters. So there is a commitment to provide within the covenant, embedded in the covenant, but there's also a commitment to protect.

Notice what it said in verses 5 and 6. And for your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting. So if a man or woman is killed, God says that He will demand an accounting for that.

I will demand an accounting from every animal, if the animal was the perpetrator of that death, and from each man too. So if another human being kills, well, account will be demanded from him.

I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man.

It's not my intention this morning, largely for reasons of time, to explore in any detail the whole question of the implications of this for our legal establishment and the application or otherwise of the death penalty.

[27 : 33] But what I do simply want to note is the great value that God places on human life and his abhorrence of the violence that sheds human blood.

And notice the reason given for our inestimable value. For in the image of God has God made man. That is why we are of such great value.

That is what distinguishes us from the other creatures. We alone have been made in the image and likeness of God. This is God's logic if we can use that expression because life is so valuable the only appropriate punishment for shedding blood is that the perpetrators suffer the same fate.

In this covenant God implicitly delegates to human authorities the responsibility to protect human life and to punish those who shed human blood.

That is why it was right and proper for us as a nation to defend ourselves in the face of violent attack that we might protect our fellow citizens.

[28 : 43] Something that we remember particularly this morning. And so when God remembers his covenant he remembers his commitment to provide and protect.

When we think of the responsibility that we have that delegated responsibility to protect human life to do all that is within our powers to prevent the shedding of innocent blood it is a tragedy of immeasurable proportions that we live in a society that has in great measure abdicated this responsibility and sanctions the shedding of the blood of the most vulnerable in a mother's womb. We have said to God we are not interested in this responsibility that you have given us. We know better. When God sees a rainbow bridging the River D or River Don he remembers his commitment to provide and protect those he has created in his image and likeness.

Let me say one more thing and it's a little bit more wordy so bear with me as I suggest this sentence that begins with the words I will remember and the intention is to take this beyond the covenant of Noah into a far greater in many ways covenant.

I will remember. God sees the rainbow. God remembers his covenant and might he not say this or think this I will remember that my love that finds expression in my covenant through Noah with all living creatures also even more wonderfully more intimately finds expression in my covenant through Jesus with all my sons and daughters.

[30 : 42] You see God's covenant with Noah was both extensive and restrictive. It was extensive in its spread we've noticed that it included all living creatures and indeed extensive in the time scale forever.

So in many ways it was very extensive as a covenant but it was restrictive in its scope. You see in the covenant that God makes with Noah he does not deal with the problem of human sin and guilt. There's an acknowledgement that we are sinners and there are provisions put in place to contend with that reality but it does not deal with the core problem of our sin and guilt.

In order to deal with the problem of our sin and guilt God's love found expression in another covenant a covenant of redemption in and through his own son our Savior Jesus Christ.

As Noah represented all living creatures so Jesus represents all God's sons and daughters and as our representative head he lived a perfect life in our place the life that we cannot live and he died a sinner's death in our stead the death that we deserved.

[32 : 04] How can you benefit from what Jesus has done? Well by trusting in him as your Savior by following him as your Lord that is how you come under the wings of that covenant of redemption and enjoy the benefits of it sins forgiven and a welcome into the family of God.

Are you trusting in Jesus as your Savior? Will you follow him and obey him as your Lord? I wonder how does God the Father remember his covenant of redemption?

What visible sign reminds him? Well all he needs to do is look to the one seated at his right hand in glory and see the nail marks in his hands and feet and he remembers.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.