

Noah - Part 6

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[0 : 0 0] Whenever you see a rainbow, whenever you see a rainbow, whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love. There's something about rainbows. In an intriguing way, they demand our attention. When you see a rainbow, you stop, and you admire, and you feel constrained, at least I do, to tell somebody that the rainbow is there, to make sure that others don't miss out on the spectacle. I don't know if that's true of everybody, but whenever I see a rainbow, I almost instinctively feel I have to say, look at the rainbow. Obviously, if there's somebody around to hear me say that, otherwise it would be a rather strange thing to do. But there is that sense in which rainbows draw us, and I wonder why that is. Clearly, they're very beautiful, and their beauty draws us. There's a sense in which they surprise us. We're maybe not expecting to see the rainbow, and then suddenly there's this rainbow, and that creates an impression. It impacts in a way that perhaps something that's expected, also beautiful, but expected, doesn't impact in the same way.

But I wonder if it's only their beauty that draws us to them, not that that in itself wouldn't be a very good reason to be drawn to them. I wonder if there is perhaps something deeper to it. Is it that somehow in our identity as human beings, we are drawn to rainbows? That may sound somewhat mystical, and I'm not claiming that that is the case, but there does seem to be in rainbows a particular drawing, a power, and fascination for us. Now, as Christians, we are, of course, influenced by our knowledge of how God has established the rainbow as a sign of His covenant with Noah and with all living creatures. And clearly, if that is something that we know to be so, and if it's something we believe to be true, then that will impact and influence us as we witness a rainbow. I wonder how it is with you when you see a rainbow. Does the biblical narrative inform your response to what you see? What first comes to your mind when you see a rainbow? What do you remember? It's a sign. Its purpose is that we would remember. What do you remember when you see a rainbow? When I see a rainbow, I don't know if I do this every time I see a rainbow, but I think pretty much every time I see a rainbow, I say a prayer. It's usually just a very wee prayer, but a wee prayer thanking God for the reality that He is a faithful God who keeps His promises. It's always good to be reminded of something that perhaps we know and are persuaded is true, and yet a rainbow is a God-given opportunity to remember that that is so and to thank Him that that is indeed the case. The somewhat surprising thing to discover in the text, in the passage that we've read, is concerning who is to remember with the appearing of a rainbow in the sky. Everything that I've said thus far in introducing the subject has been focused on ourselves as men and women. What do we see?

What is our response? What do we remember when we see a rainbow? But when we turn to the passage that we've read, we discover that the focus isn't on us and on what we remember, but rather the focus is on God and on God remembering. Let's just read again verses 14 to 16 of Genesis chapter 9. God is speaking, and what does God say? Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind.

Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind. The exclusive focus of every kind on the earth. The exclusive focus of God Himself is on God remembering. Now, it is true that as a sign of a covenant between two parties, between God on the one hand and all living creatures on the other hand, it's reasonable to assume and to conclude that the sign is intended to be seen, certainly to be seen, but also to be significant to both parties. And so, it's reasonable for us to think of the rainbow rightly provoking in us a response and provoking in us a need to remember its significance. That is true. But having recognized that that is true, it is the case that the focus in the passage, as this covenant is established by God, the focus is

on what God Himself says concerning what the rainbow will cause Him to remember. What I want to do this evening is consider that. What is it that God remembers when He sees a rainbow? Now, before we think about that and think of some of the things, suggest some of what God remembers when He sees a rainbow, we first need to clarify what is meant by God remembering. We tend to think of remembering as the opposite of forgetting. And so, it is said of us that we have remembered something. The implication is that we had, until that point, forgotten. So, to remember is to stop forgetting. That's the manner in which we tend to think of the word remember. Not that the word necessarily needs to mean that, but it's the way in which ordinarily we use the word. I think of a formal occasion when we focus on the matter of remembering, Remembrance Sunday. And of course, the fact that on that particular day we remember in a particular sense those who have fallen in the defense of our nation doesn't necessarily mean that we forget about them the rest of the year, but it is interesting, isn't it, that when we begin the service, certainly here on Remembrance Sunday, we begin with the words, lest we forget. We're going to remember now. Why? Because we're so prone to forget. And because we are prone to forget, it's important to remember. So, that's how the word is ordinarily used by ourselves and in reference to ourselves. But when the word remember is spoken of concerning God, when it is applied to God, it does not and cannot have the sense of bringing to recollection something that God had forgotten. God is the all-knowing God, is not a God who forgets, and then at some point remembers. Oh, I'd forgotten. Now I remember. That isn't something that we can conceive of as being applied or being true of God. Rather, the word remember, when applied to God, points to God, bringing to mind truth with a view to action. Perhaps what we're trying to say about the significance of the word when applied to God is best illustrated with an example of how the word is used in relation to God, an example different from the one that we have here in Genesis chapter 9.

[8 : 25] Let's just look very quickly in Exodus chapter 2 and reading from verse 23. The context is the Israelites suffering in Egypt. And let's just read these verses and see how the word remember is used there in reference to God. This is all really just to bring us into considering what God remembers when He sees a rainbow. But I want us to do that with a clear understanding of what that actually means.

Exodus chapter 2 from verse 23. During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. And to further enrich our understanding of what it meant for God to remember, we could say, what happened next? What happened next? Well, we know what happened next. God acted on behalf of His people. God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. God redeemed His people and took them from slavery to the Promised Land. And all of that encompassed, or under the umbrella, if you wish, of God remembering. God remembering His covenant, of God remembering His people and acting on their behalf. So with that in mind, what does God remember when He sees a rainbow?

Well, He remembers His covenant. He says that very clearly there in verse 16. Whenever the rainbow appears in the cloud, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. He remembers His covenant, His covenant with Noah and with all living creatures. And I want to highlight aspects of God's covenant with Noah and all living creatures that all revolve around the theme of life and God's attitude to life, or more precisely, to living creatures. And we'll do this by referring to the material that we find in chapter 9, the verses that we've read from the beginning of the chapter right through to verse 17. Though the language of covenant first appears in this chapter, it's already appeared in chapter 6 when the covenant is promised, but in this chapter, the language of covenant only appears in verse 12, in verse 11, sorry. Nonetheless, in fact, let's go back even further to verse 9. In this chapter, it's in verse 9 that the language of covenant first appears, but I think it's reasonable to take what is said before that also as coming under the umbrella, if you wish, of the covenant that God is establishing with Noah and with all living creatures. So, we'll use this material to identify aspects of God's covenant that relate to this big theme of life and God's opinion and estimation of life.

The big message of the covenant with Noah is that God highly values life. It's sometimes called the covenant of preservation. Of course, that points in the same direction of God preserving life. And why does He preserve life? Because He highly values life. But within that big message of the value

that God places on life, there is a crucial distinction drawn by God between all living creatures and human life. So, God values life, all life, but there is, as I say, a very definite distinction within that between all living creatures and human life particularly. And we'll proceed in the basis of that distinction with two headings. God values all life, and God especially values human life. Let's just think a little bit about this. First of all, God values all life or all living creatures. What is the evidence for this in the covenant that God establishes and is recorded for us in this chapter? Well, the first thing we can say that His covenant is established with all life. In verse 17, so God said to Noah, this is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth. We might have expected it to say between me and Noah and his descendants, but no, this is the covenant that I have established between me and all life on the earth. The very fact that God would introduce and bring under the coverage, if you wish, of this covenant all life in itself is something that grants to all life great value in God's eyes.

[13 : 24] All life enjoys the covenant care of God. In verse 17, it's stated in Thinsesis, but then in verses 8 to 10 in greater detail, then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you, the bird, the livestock, and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you, every living creature on earth. All of life under the covenant care of God. All of life even falling within the scope of God's redemptive purposes. There is an echo of this in the language of Paul in Romans chapter 8, and we'll just mention it without any comment, but it echoes the truth that we're identifying here. In Romans 8, 22, we read, we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. God's inclusion of all of His creation, of all life under His care and forming part of His greater redemptive purpose.

So, God values all life, the evidence of that being, first of all, that He establishes covenant with all life, but also the promises of the covenant benefit all life. Now, you would expect that. If the covenant is with all life, then there must be benefits for all life, and that is what we find. There is, first of all, the promise not to destroy life. Verse 11, I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. Noah and his descendants, human beings, benefit from that, but so also do all living creatures. The promise not to destroy, and the other side of the coin, as it were, the promise to preserve. With that, we step back into the final verse of chapter 8 that we commented on last week.

As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease. God guaranteeing promising conditions that will allow for life to be preserved, indeed to thrive. So, the evidence that God values all life is found in the fact that His covenant is established with all life, the promises of the covenant benefit all life, but also in another somewhat more, what would we say, difficult way to understand, that the lifeblood of all living creatures is sacred. In verse 4, notice what we read, but you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. This seems something that's just very alien to us. What does that mean? What is going on there? We maybe find that this prohibition of the eating of meat with its lifeblood still in it as somewhat puzzling and bordering in our own minds, quite wrongly, but bordering on the superstitious.

Is the Bible really suggesting, is God really suggesting that the life of a creature, animal or human, is to be found in its blood. How is blood any different in principle to any other physical organ or body part? We know that blood can be analyzed and broken up into its constituent chemical components, and at the end of the day, it's just blood. If we were of the same blood types, we could swap blood, and neither of us would change. It's not something I'm proposing we test out, but I think, you know, we agreed that I wouldn't change if I had all my blood replaced by somebody else's blood. I'd still be me. I'd still be David by the end of that transaction. A rather bizarre transaction if we were to go through with it, but I think you can see where I'm going. But the point here that I think we need to understand is that God is not attributing to physical blood any spiritual quality. What God is doing is attributing to blood a symbolic significance. Blood symbolizes life and the sanctity of life in God's estimation, and for that reason it is to be treated with respect.

[17 : 48] And in this regard, and I think there is a connection, it is significant that God chooses to attribute to blood a place in His redemptive purposes and in the sacrificial system that He institutes for His people. Blood representing, symbolizing life and the value of life in God's estimation. Now, we could say perhaps quite a lot about that, but the point that I'm simply trying to make here and for

our purposes this evening is to stress that God identifies not only human blood, but the blood of animals as enjoying this sacred quality as a symbol of life.

You know, we sometimes speak of, and rightly so, the sanctity of human life, but on the basis of what we have before us, we could rightly argue that it would be legitimate to speak of the sanctity of all life and of all living creatures. So, when God sees a rainbow, He remembers the value that He places on all life on all living creatures. He remembers His promise not to destroy all life and to provide the conditions for life to thrive and to multiply. Now, this has implications for us, and I'm going to leave you with the work of considering what the implications are. But if this is God's attitude to all life, it should also be our attitude to all life, and this attitude should inform our opinions and actions in matters such as, for example, animal welfare and conservation and environmental matters, all of these issues are impacted by what we discover here concerning God's attitude to all life, and especially all living creatures. So, God values all life, but the second thing we want to notice is that God especially values human life. Now, what is the evidence for this in the covenant that God establishes? Let's notice three pieces of evidence. First of all, His desire to see the world filled with human life. At the very beginning of chapter 9 in an echo of what we find in the first chapters of

Genesis, then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. God loves people, and His desire is to see this world filled with people. God loves individuals.

We were focusing perhaps on that this morning as we thought of Jesus addressing Zacchaeus by name. Calling Him by name, calling Him by name, that concern for the individual. But while that is true, and it's wonderfully true, it's also true that God loves the teeming multitudes. As I was thinking of this, it reminded me of what God said to Jonah concerning Nineveh. You remember Jonah was so upset about the way things had turned out concerning Nineveh's repentance and how God hadn't gone through with the judgment that He had pronounced. And how does God respond to Jonah? Well, in the very last verse of the book of Jonah, we read God speaking to Jonah and justifying, if you wish, or explaining why it is that He hasn't destroyed Nineveh. We read, But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city? God has a concern for the teeming multitudes. And just to remind us of what we've been just noticing about all life, a concern for the many cattle too. Seems a rather incongruous thing to find in that verse, but maybe what we're seeing in Genesis here would explain in a measure why that is something God says there, speaking to Jonah. Of course, his particular concern, and that's what we've moved on to now, is for the people, for human life. So, the evidence of God's particular concern for, and the particular value that He places on human life is to be found in His desire to see the world filled with human life, with people, but also in the covenant, His granting very explicitly of preeminence to human life. This is something we see, of course, in creation itself, and there's an echo of that or simply a reminder of that in this chapter. In creation, man is given a special place.

In verse 6, we're going to come on to this in the context of the matter of the protection of human life, but for the purposes of just reminding ourselves of how man has been created, notice what we read in verse 6, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, but then very particularly, for the image of God has made man. God grants to human life a preeminence on the basis, on this very fundamental basis of how we have been created. We have been created in the image and likeness of God.

[23 : 05] But He grants preeminence to human life also in the details of, or in the provisions of, this covenant. The language of chapter 9 and verse 1 echoes the cultural mandate that we read of in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28, where the priority of humans over all other living creatures is explicitly stated.

And this is then also made clear in the verses that follow in chapter 9. From verse 2, 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, and upon all the fish of the sea, they are given into your hands. So, God values all of these living creatures. He enters into covenant with them, but He gives them into the hands of men and women. Verse 3, everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. So, very clearly, within the covenant, man, men and women, human beings are given a place of priority and of honor and of particular privilege. Man has authority over all other living creatures. Indeed, all other living creatures are provided for

the use and benefit of human beings. But then also, as a piece of evidence concerning that the special volume that God affords to human beings is the protection that God grants to human life. In verses 5 and 6, this is dealt with, and for your lifeblood, that is the lifeblood of men and women, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal, even an animal who is responsible for the death of a human being, needs to be dealt with on the basis of the value of that human being. And then He goes on, and from each man too, 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. In these verses, God establishes that human life merits special protection. Now, this translates into a requirement that a man, or indeed a beast, who takes human life should pay with his own life for that action, in the case of a man for that kind.

And the duty to fulfill this requirement is delegated to man. Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed. God is determining that this is the thing to do, but He delegates the responsibility to carry it out to man. Now, in the debate that can be had concerning capital punishment, in the place of capital punishment today, it's often rather, in my view, lazily suggested that capital punishment, or support for capital punishment, implies a low view of the value of human life, when precisely the opposite is the case. The argument that God is making here is that human life is so precious and is of such great value that the only appropriate punishment for the one who takes a human life is that human life takes a human life is that his own life be forfeited. Now, you may agree or disagree with that, but the logic of it is on the grounds of the value of human life. Not that human life is of no value, but rather it is of such great value that death is the only appropriate penalty for one who takes human life. Now, we could consider how this theme is developed, and going into the New

Testament, we're not going to do that. If you're at all interested, this is something we did talk about a while back in the context of the Ten Commandments, and as I say, if you're very interested, you could go back and try and see what was said at that time. But the point here is that in this provision, we have further evidence of the very high value that God places on human life. When God sees a rainbow, He remembers the special value in His own eyes of human life. And again, as we were suggesting regarding all of life, if this is God's attitude to human life, then it should also be our attitude. And this attitude should inform our opinions and our actions in matters such as debates on the value of the unborn, on abortion, on euthanasia, on assisted suicide, on the priority of human life over animal life, something that in the past we just assumed as a given, but now we can't just take as a given in what others might believe or think. Our opinions on this must be informed by God's Word, and very particularly by this covenant that God makes with Noah and all living creatures. But as we draw things to a close, we do need to go further, one step further in our consideration of the special place of human life in God's eyes. In the provisions of God's covenant with Noah and with all living creatures, this special place, the special place of man, of men and women, extends to all human life without exception. All human beings created in the image and likeness of God, all human beings meriting special protection, all human beings enjoying that place of preeminence over other living creatures. Within human beings, no distinction in the provisions of this covenant. And in the provisions of this covenant, no explicit mention of a people within the people, of a people chosen from amongst the people.

And the question really that I'm leading into is, has God's covenant with Noah anything to say in regard to God's own people and God's purposes for them? Perhaps in what we've read here in Genesis, we find very little in that regard. But listen to what God says through the prophet Isaiah as he speaks of the future glory of Zion, of God's own special people. And let's just read what God says in Isaiah in chapter 54 and verses 7 to 10. We're not going to dwell on this or give it any further thought other than simply reading it. And I leave it to you to take away and ponder on. Isaiah chapter 54, reading from verse 7. Notice how the chapter is entitled, The Future Glory of Zion. It is a prophetic vision of God's purposes for His people. And we'll just step into this and read a couple of verses from verse 7. God is speaking, He says, for a brief moment I abandoned you. He's speaking to His own people, not to all human life, but to His own people. For a brief moment I abandoned you. But with deep compassion

[30 : 30] I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. And then notice what God says, To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not

be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you. In the light of how God Himself interprets, if you wish, His covenant with Noah in these words of the prophet, we can also say that when God sees a rainbow, He remembers His unfailing love. He remembers His covenant of peace. He remembers His deep compassion, and He remembers His everlasting kindness. And so the next time you see a rainbow, you might want to do the same. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for who You are. We thank You for the manner in which You reveal Yourself to us. We thank You for what we learn concerning Your attitude to life, the great value, the great value in Your estimation of all living creatures. But very especially, we thank You for the place of particular honor and privilege and blessing that You grant to us as men and women, as human beings created in Your image and likeness. Lord, we do pray that having given some time to consider these matters, our minds would be molded, our opinions would be informed, our actions would be determined, not by the wisdom of the world that is passing, but rather by the wisdom that we find in Your Word that is unchanging. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's sing now as we close our service this evening in Psalm 93, or singing Psalm 93. We'll sing the whole of the Psalm.

In Sing Psalms, it's on page 123. Psalm 93, we'll sing the whole of the Psalm. We'll sing to the tune, Denfield. The Lord is King.

His throne endures, majestic in His height. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength and might. Psalm 93, singing the whole of the Psalm. And we'll stand to sing.