

A Covenant to Preserve the Earth for Fruitfulness

Genesis 9:8-17

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Introduction:

Last week, we saw how God came to Noah and his household after the great flood and made it clear that He still wanted the earth to be filled with godly people.

- We have seen that this was God's intent from the beginning...
 - At creation, He made Adam and Eve in His own image (holy, righteous, good and true) and He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth with holy offspring.
 - Immediately after the fall, the LORD came to them and promised that He would still bring forth from the woman godly people—
 - people who would be at war with Satan and who would obtain victory in a particular Son that would come—the Son we know to be Jesus Christ.
 - Those few whom God called in the days before the flood, putting enmity in their heart for Satan, embraced this promise with gladness, serving the Lord in hope...
 - but the world as a whole was overrun with wickedness, and that is what moved the LORD to send the great flood...
 - They were not godly, they defiled the earth, so He wiped them off as feces.
 - But He preserved Noah and his household who were the godly seed in the earth, who were looking to God's promise.
 - And after that great judgement was complete, we saw that the LORD came to them and again commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
 - They had to start over with populating the earth.
 - And of course this is not a command simply to reproduce people!
 - It is a command to bring forth godly people who look to the promise of victory over Satan by the Son God had promised.
 - And we saw, encouragingly, that the command to be fruitful was more than a command—it was also a blessing that God would enable them to be fruitful and multiply—to bring forth godly offspring.
 - Certainly, they would need His help!
 - And I want to tell you that this is still God's calling for His people today.
 - The only change is that now, it is given to us not only to bring forth godly children for the LORD,
 - but also to call to repentance and reconciliation those who over the centuries since the flood have departed from His grace.
 - Remember that with Noah's family, everybody was, at least outwardly, among those who professed faith.
 - All who are not of faith today have, at some point in the history of their family lines, departed from the LORD, because all started out in Noah.

- Now that Christ has come, we proclaim to them the forgiveness of sin through faith in Him as crucified, and we bring our children up in the faith...
 - calling upon all to turn from their sin and embrace justification and godliness through Jesus who has gained the victory over Satan.

Last week we saw how, as Noah and his household came out the ark and looked to the LORD for His promise,

- offering a burnt offering (or a dedication offering in which the whole animal is consumed to show that God requires total dedication from us)
 - Noah offered this burnt offering to show that the promised Son who would be totally dedicated to God must come and live a life of dedication to God for the godly seed and then atone for them by shedding His blood...
- And as Noah thus looked to the Lord in faith, the LORD promised to bless him and his family with fruitfulness...
 - And the LORD assured them that He would put fear in the animals so that they would not be destroyed by them...
 - And He gave them food—both animals and plants—to nourish them and sustain them in the earth...
 - And He instituted capital punishment to restrain violence in the earth so that they would not wipe one another out.
 - God was showing them that He would provide for them in the earth so they could get on with the business of filling the earth!

But Noah and his sons needed to hear more...

- They knew that the thing they had to fear most was not violent animals, shortage of food, or violent men!
- The thing they were the most concerned about was God's wrath!
- Those other things might be threats to them, but it was the LORD who had wiped out the earth with the violent flood—and what was to say that He would not do it again?
 - Why should they go on bringing forth offspring if they would end up being wiped away anyway?
 - So Noah and his sons needed encouragement that **God** would not do this again.
- We know from Genesis 8:21 that God had purposed in His heart not to do this, but God had not yet told Noah this...
 - In Genesis 8:21, Moses (who wrote this) tells us what the LORD purposed in His heart in response to the dedication offering that Noah offered:
 - **Gen 8:21: And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease."**
 - So now in the second part of chapter 9, the part we are looking at today, God makes this known to Noah—and to us who are all his descendants!

Listen as I read to you from Genesis 9:8-17, our text today...

- This is God's holy Word, so you are advised to listen with reverence and hope:

Genesis 9:8-17: Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: ⁹ “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that *is* with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. ¹¹ Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said: “This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: ¹³ I set My rainbow

in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵ and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth.” ¹⁷ And God said to Noah, “This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth.”

May the LORD bless to us the reading of His Holy word.

I. So you see here that God establishes a covenant to declare with absolute certainty that He will not destroy mankind as He had done.

A. Establishing covenants is God's gracious way of letting us know what He is going to do with us!

1. You can see that in these ten verses, the LORD speaks about this covenant with Noah and those with him again and again...

- He uses the word covenant seven times,
 - He says that He will remember it two or three times and
 - He speaks of establishing it three times...
- And He refers to those with whom He is establishing it in multiple ways...
 - **v. 9- with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature**
 - **v. 12- between me and you and every living being which is with you.**
 - **v. 13- between me and the earth**
 - **v. 15- between me and you and every living being among all flesh**
 - **v. 16- between God and every living being among all flesh which is on the earth**
 - **v. 17- between me and all flesh which is on the earth.**
- One commentator says that this repetition serves to underline the message, peeling out like bells reverberating into the future...
 - He makes it very clear that we are all included because we all come from Noah.
 - God wants to give Noah and all of us certainty!

2. Giving certainty to us in our weakness is what covenants are all about.

- a. It is a great condescension on God's part to confirm what He says with an oath seeing that it is impossible for God to lie...
 - But He does this in mercy because He knows how weak we are and how hard it is for us to believe some of the things He says...
 - We are told this in Hebrew 6:17:
 - **Heb 6:16-18: "For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*."**
 - So God's purpose is to give us certainty.
 - b. What a kind and merciful God He is to stoop to us in our weakness and fear.
 - When He has gone to such great lengths to assure us of what He is going to do—we should never doubt Him!
 - We can put full confidence in what He has promised, even when it means that He will have to do something so extreme as sending His Son to the cross—He will always keep His word.
- B. And just what is it that God is promising here to Noah and to all of us in this covenant?
1. God is promising in particular that He will not send another flood.
 - That was the thing that Noah and his sons were especially concerned about.
 - They had just been through the terrible ordeal of seeing all but their family wiped off the face of the earth by the great deluge...
 - And if they were going to move forward with filling the earth with godly people for the LORD,
 - they needed to know that God was not going to destroy them all and again reduce the earth to one family again...
 - It was as if they were saying,
 - "Yes, you have said that you will make us multiply, and that you will keep the animals from destroying us and that you will provide us with food and you have provided us with restraint for our violence...but how do we know that you will not destroy us in your wrath again? How can we move forward with confidence in filling the earth and know that it won't end up being wiped away by another great flood?"
 - And you see that God answers this concern with all certainty that He will not wipe out mankind and the animals out with another flood!
 - He is assuring them that the earth will be a place where they can safely bring forth children for Him...
 - He will preserve the earth as a habitation for them.

2. There is good warrant for us to read more into this promise than merely that there will not be another world wide flood...
 - a. The promise of no more devastating flood is actually a promise that God will never again wipe out mankind off the earth in any way whatsoever!
 - The flood is used to represent wiping out mankind—and God is saying that He will not do that ever again!
 - Moses makes this certain that this is the intent by revealing to us what was in God’s heart as we saw in Genesis 8:21.
 - There we are told that the LORD purposed in His heart that He would not again destroy every living thing as He has done—
 - and He will not!
 - There may be great local and national disasters, but God makes it very certain to us that He will not destroy the earth again as He did in Noah’s day, reducing the world to one family.
 - There will be no worldwide destruction on that scale of any kind.
 - b. Some have said—well He says that He won’t do it with a flood, but that does not mean that He won’t do it in some other way!
 - And they will go on and add—
 - We are told that at the last day, God will destroy the earth by fire...
 - But it is a mistake to say that the Lord will wipe out mankind from the earth by fire at the last day!
 - God never says that He will wipe out mankind by fire at the last day...
 - Far from all being wiped out in that day, all will be raised up from their graves, and those living gathered with them to be judged...
 - Some will be sent to the lake of fire and the place of outer darkness,
 - but the righteous will not be wiped out at all—and there will be huge numbers of them—all of them together who have ever lived on the earth!
 - Rather than wiping out man from the earth, the great judgement at the last day will fill up the earth with the godly seed that has been brought forth through the ages!
 - God’s promise and purpose and command to fill the earth with a godly seed will absolutely be fulfilled.

TRANS> So don’t miss the application here!

II. You can get on with the work of filling the earth with godly people (which includes being godly yourself) and leave it to God to preserve the earth!

- God will provide the earth as a safe place for you to do this.
 - That is the message to Noah and that is the message to us!

- Your labour for God's kingdom will not be wasted—all will be accomplished—it will not be wiped out by some world-wide disaster.
- Jesus put it like this in Matthew 6:
 - **Matthew 6:31-33: “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”**
 - You worry about bringing forth fruit for the LORD and leave it to Him to take care of you.

A. Christian, do not be paralysed by fear—trust God's promise!

1. There are so many things that people are afraid of today...
 - Back in the seventies, they were sure that there would be another ice age that would wipe us all out...
 - Then at the beginning of this century, all the talk was of global warming that would melt all the ice and flood out our coastlands...
 - And now they are not so sure about that and it is all talk about climate change and we are told to vote for the right people who will save us from these things...
 - And there is fear of terrorism and war and things like biological warfare that could destroy us all...
 - or the threat of destructive solar flares that would wipe out our computers and our electricity...
 - there is the threat of some plague like Ebola that will kill all of mankind...
 - And all these things make people afraid to have children.
 - And for years there has been talk of a great melt down in the economy, and it is pretty likely to happen sometime I suppose...
 - And there is worry of alien attacks or of comets striking the earth...
 - And yes, we can't forget about running out of food or running out of oil...
- Look, I am not calling you to be irresponsible—if a hail storm is coming, you can cover up your flowers or put your car in the garage...
 - And if you see the economy failing, you can buy gold or move your savings down to a bank in Chili or something...
 - The prudent man sees danger coming and hides himself...that is fine...
2. But the problem is that a lot of these fears paralyse people and so that they do not even try to bear fruit...
 - a. They don't want to bring forth children into a world that is about to be destroyed—
 - and many are afraid of overpopulating the earth and hold back for that reason, even though God says to be fruitful and multiply...

- Of course all of this is not new...
 - Back in the 1800s it was declared that we could not sustain ourselves into the future because we would run out of things like timber and whale oil...
 - And today there are many people who honestly believe that we will not be able to sustain more people on the earth for the next 200 years.
 - They do not see how God keeps on providing for us in new and even better ways...
 - When we were about to run out of whale oil for lanterns, God provided light bulbs...
 - Before we ran out of timber we learned to use coal and petroleum...to heat our homes and we learnt to make plastic and aluminum products
 - And when petroleum seemed to be running low, we learned to extract oil from the oil sands...
 - And when we run out of that which probably won't be in our lifetime, there will be some other way...
 - The point is, God in His providence continues to provide for us and we need to trust Him instead of becoming paralysed.
 - Of course if the ungodly are afraid and do not want to have children, that may not be such a bad thing—God does not call us to multiply idolaters and as they have no hope, it only makes sense that they would not want children.
 - But it should not be so with believers!
- b. Not only should we refuse to allow our fears to keep us from having children—we should also guard against them hindering our evangelism.
 - Some people are so concerned with protecting themselves from the various threats of the day, that they do not reach out to the lost...
 - Some of them are so busy sounding the alarm that instead of hearing the gospel from them, their neighbours only hear about the next disaster that is going to do us in.
 - If people associate you with doomsday warnings rather than with the kingdom of Christ, something is not right.
 - And indeed, it is true that hard times do come—there have been periods of global warming and global cooling...
 - and terrible wars that have destroyed many people...and economic collapses that have brought nations into poverty...
 - God has sent such things on His own covenant people when they have been unfaithful to Him...
 - And we should acknowledge His hand of judgement and be humbled by these things—but the focus now that Jesus has

come is not on prophets predicting these things to confirm the word of God.

- The focus is on preaching the gospel of the kingdom.
- Various disasters will come,
 - But we can be sure that none of these will reduce the earth to one family as was done in Noah's day...
 - We can be sure because we are told in Gen 8:21 that the LORD said in His heart:
 - **Gen 8:21: "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done."**

TRANS> And there is another related concern...not everyone is afraid...some people have a worldly optimism...

B. When people are not distracted from bearing fruit by their fears, they are distracted from it by their covetousness...

1. You meet professing Christians who are so concerned about having enough for retirement and about wanting their children to prosper in life,
 - that they emphasis education and worldly success more than godliness!
 - They want them to have a good job more than godly homes...
 - They groom them to fear poverty more than to fear God.
 - This is, as Jesus says, what the Gentiles seek!
 - They have forgotten about the kingdom of God.
 - They have forgotten about preparing for eternal life—about bringing forth fruit for eternal life and for God...
 - These persons do not want to have children because it will interfere with their worldly success...
 - Jesus tells such people that they have their reward—let them enjoy their retirement and their ease while they can because the day will come when they must give an account to God.
 - And then all will be taken from them.
2. Do you pray more for godliness, or for health, wealth, and prosperity? or perhaps you don't even pray at all...
 - Where is your heart—is it in seeing the advance of God's kingdom or in seeing your bank account grow?
 - There is nothing wrong with having a lot—
 - The believer more than the unbeliever is able to enjoy the things of this world because he receives them with thanksgiving from God...
 - The problem is not with having a lot; the problem is with coveting a lot instead of seeking God's kingdom...

- The problem is with laying up for your retirement when you are neglecting your tithe.
 - Put God's kingdom first—He will take care of the rest.
- The problem is with putting your career above the Lord's Day...
 - The problem is with neglecting family worship and private worship so you can watch your television or engage in your hobby...
 - The problem is with surfing the internet when you have not even said your prayers.
 - The problem is with dreaming about your recreation as you sit in church to worship God.

TRANS> My brothers and sisters,

- Are you prepared to pursue God's kingdom first and leave it to Him to take care of you in the world? to give you your daily portion?
- It is hard to trust Him in the real world—isn't it—
 - when you have to leave a job because of your convictions—or to tithe rather than pump up your retirement fund...
 - The LORD knows that it is hard for you to trust Him

III. The LORD knows that it is hard for us to trust Him, so He not only establishes His covenant with us, but He also gives us a sign to confirm it.

A. Here He establishes the rainbow to be a sign of His covenant promise that He will never again destroy man from the earth.

- Gen 9:12-13 says: **And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: ¹³ I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth."**

1. It is possible that there had not been any rainbows until now...
 - especially if we understand the language in Genesis 2:5 that God had not caused it to rain on the earth, to refer to the time from creation until the time of Noah—which is possible...
 - We are told that God watered the earth from moisture coming up out of the ground, and it may be that there was a radical change in the whole hydrological system once the flood came.
 - If that is so, then the rainbow did not appear until after the flood when the system was changed.
 - But the language does not necessarily require this interpretation...
 - God often uses ordinary things for signs of His covenants—like eating bread and drinking the wine to represent Christ's body crucified and His blood shed for the remission of our sins...
 - These are ordinary things that are given a special meaning by the word of God—by His promise!

2. The word that God attaches to the rainbow or the bread and the wine is what gives it its meaning to us as a pledge and a sign...
 - The word is not an incantation (as it is wrongly made to be in the mass),
 - It is rather a declaration concerning the sign that we are to receive with faith...
 - and when we do, the sign then becomes meaningful and helpful to us and God brings about what He promises in connection with the sign...
 - We receive cleansing by Christ in baptism and we receive nourishment from Christ at the Lord's Table...
 - not by magic, but by faith in Him who then blesses His ordinances.
 - So you see, God's signs are neither empty ceremonies that do not do anything, nor are they magical formulas that work in a mechanical way.
 3. The rainbow is a helpful symbol for many reasons...
 - It typically appears after a storm—it reminds us that God is committed to always end rain and to never let it wipe man off the face of the earth...
 - It picks up the light of the sun that is a welcome sight after a storm.
 - It is vast and majestic, it appears in the heavens and so has a way of lifting our eyes up to God who reigns above.
 - It is beautiful, reminding us that God's mercy is beautiful.
- B. So you should look at this sign and the signs of the sacraments and be secure in what God has promised!
1. Put away your fears and remember that God's wrath is turned away...
 - a. The rainbow is the pledge that *never again will I destroy the earth with a flood*.
 - How great are those words, *never again*, from our faithful covenant keeping God.
 - You can trust Him to preserve the earth as a safe place for you to bear fruit—trust Him and be fruitful for Him.
 - b. The water of baptism is a sign of cleansing—it too has a *never again* promise...
 - God says, *never again* will I charge your sins against you when you are cleansed by faith in my Son—
 - You are washed from all your guilt by His blood and there is now no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus—see it in baptism!
 - And besides that, *never again* will sin have dominion over you.
 - Not only are you forgiven, but you are also set free from bondage to sin and made a servant to God...
 - Baptism signifies the baptism of the Holy Spirit who causes you to die to sin and to live to Christ...
 - never again will sin have you—you are sanctified by God's Spirit.

- c. And the Lord's Supper—it has a *never again* as well...
 - Christ is our Passover who has been sacrificed for us, and at the LORD's Table we see that *never again* will we be without provision for eternal life...
 - Jesus crucified is forever sufficient to give us both remission of sin and fullness of eternal life...
 - We feed upon Him, and never again will we hunger and thirst.
 - He has all that we need.

- 2. There is a wonderful lesson in the way that God speaks about the sign of the rainbow that is true in the sacraments as well...
 - In talking about the rainbow, the LORD describes it as a sign for Him...
 - We are familiar with the Lord's Supper where Jesus tells us to remember—**Do this as often as you eat it in remembrance of Me...**
 - but with the rainbow God stresses that **He** remembers!
 - Look at verses 14-16 to see this...
 - **Gen 9:14-16: “It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵ and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth.”**
 - God is encouraging us that when we look at the signs of His covenants, we must not only remember what He has promised,
 - but we must also consider that *He* remembers what He has promised!
 - That is very comforting!
 - At baptism, He remembers that you have been cleansed by His Son—He looks upon you as having been washed and forgiven by Him...
 - Christ has bled—God remembers—His wrath is turned away—He cannot be angry with you ever again because He remembers—His Son has cleansed you by His blood and Spirit.
 - At the Lord's Supper, He sees you resting in His Son and receiving Him as represented in the bread and wine—
 - and He remembers that His Son was crucified for you—and He remembers that you are nourished up to eternal life in Him.
 - And so when you see the rainbow...
 - Keep in mind that God remembers His promise that He will never again wipe us off the face of the earth—never again!
 - He remembers His promise and you can be sure of it.
 - Your labour is not in vain in the Lord.
 - The fruit you bring forth for His kingdom will never be destroyed—it will be raised up—God has promised.
 - We will be raised up both body and soul to inherit the earth.

3. So you see, God is assuring you here that you can live before Him in the earth without fear...
 - He was angry, but His anger is turned away and He comforts you.
 - You can serve Him with abandonment, leaving it to Him to take care of you in the earth as long as He has need of you.

Conclusion: In closing, let me leave you with an incentive to not allow yourself to get distracted from pursuing fruitfulness...

- Consider that it is in this life that we are called to bear fruit.
- Now is the time for you to bear fruit for eternity...
 - This fallen world is the place where you bring forth fruit for eternal life...
 - You will not have a chance to serve God in the face of trial and persecution and hardship in glory—it is only now in this life...
 - It is here that you have opportunity to love your enemies, to press on for Christ in sickness or in poverty, to walk with Him in famines and floods.
 - Nothing you do here will be forgotten—nothing will be lost.
 - You are bringing forth fruit for eternity...
 - Make the most of it...
 - Don't be distracted by your fears of what might happen here in this world—leave that to God—you focus on fruitfulness and God will take care of the rest.
 - Nothing will harm you until your work on earth is done—then you will go to Him and at the last day you will be raised up to enjoy the fruit that you brought forth for Him.
- What a gracious God we serve...How great His love is to us! How secure we can be!
 - How faithful He has been to preserve the earth all these centuries since the flood...we deserve to be destroyed, but instead He sustains us.
 - You do not need to be anxious about His provision!
 - He will provide all that we need to be truly fruitful for Him.
 - How faithful He has been despite our sin to preserve us in the earth...a people for Him, repentant and trusting in Christ!
 - How faithful He has been to bring forth a multitude to follow Him—our labour is not in vain!
 - Thanks be to His name.
- I might add, He will not destroy the earth until the day of final judgement when all of the sheep that the Father has given to Christ have been gathered in to Him.
 - We are called in scripture to concentrate on doing our part in filling the earth with godly people—God will do His part in looking after us.
 - Is that not what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6 when He said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you?”