



The Sermon

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Genesis 9:8-17

"God's Promised Sign"

October 3, 2021

TRANSCRIPT

So I 'm very eager to open the Word with you today, Genesis chapter 9; I'll read from verse 8 through verse 17. Let's read the Word of God.

"Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish My covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember My covenant that is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.'" Let's ask for God's help in illuminating this text for us.

[Prayer] Father, thank You that Your Spirit is our teacher, and that Your Bible is perfect revelation from You. We trust Your Word, and we ask that You would write it on our hearts even now. And as we look to Your Word, I pray that we would see the glory of Jesus Christ brighter and more vibrant than perhaps we've ever seen Him before, as a result of your illuminating power, by Your Spirit, and through Your Word. We ask this in faith, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Promises are made to be broken – that's what they say anyway – and unfaithfulness is one of the most common sins in human experience. It was early in your life on the playground that you learned that covenantal vow of pinky swear; and the reason you had to learn that is because people are liars. That solemn grade school covenant intended to ensure truth-telling in the schoolyard full of liars accompanied by powerful poetry, "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye," I mean all that is just to assure that you've spoken the truth, right? And that's because as you grew older in this fallen world you saw deceit and disloyalty, unfaithfulness everywhere.

No one is perfectly reliable. No one is completely dependable. And just because somebody solemnly swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, doesn't make it so. In business, employers and employees cheat each other, selling company secrets, stealing from one another in politics – you don't even need to talk about that. Compromise, broken promises, commitments not delivered.

Marriages: the landscape is littered with broken marriages, wedding vows that have been discarded, commitments unfulfilled, unfaithful spouses, shipwrecked families. Even in the church, unfaithfulness among ministers of the gospel is rampant. Those who preach for all the wrong reasons and are not faithful to the charge that God gives to ministers. Unfaithfulness is everywhere. And in contrast to all of this, God is utterly faithful. What He promises, He performs. His word is sure, it never fails; He always remains true to Himself.

You see, faithfulness is in short supply today, wherever you look. But when you look to the Scripture and you look to the history of God's redemption and His work among His people, what we find is a direct contrast. We find a promise-keeping God who never breaks His Word. Spurgeon says it this way: "How refreshing then to lift our eyes above this scene of ruin and behold One who is faithful, faithful in all things, faithful at all time." I think this is one of the great benefits that we find when we study Genesis chapter 9 and the Noahic covenant. The covenant that God made with Noah is a covenant that is with all creation; and as we explore some of its details and its depth, I hope you'll see the overarching truth and how that relates to our lives in an unfaithful world, to know that our God is always and forever faithful.

This passage, really starting back in chapter 6, verse 18, as God promises to make a covenant, unfolds all the way through, especially in chapter 8 and chapter 9, trying to show us the nature of this covenant, a word that's so important in the Bible, a word that means a binding agreement, a basic and elemental word in the ancient world, one that we would maybe substitute a word like a bargain or a deal, to broker an arrangement; we would use words like "vow" or "promise." And this here in this passage is the first time a covenant is explicitly mentioned in the Bible. And lots can be said about God's covenant or agreement or promise He made to Adam; but the promise, the covenant, that word is first only used in Genesis 6:18, referring to the covenant that unfolds in the subsequent chapters. It will become so a part of Hebrew thought and life that you won't be able to understand the story of Abraham or Israel apart from the concept of covenant; and that becomes so ingrained in the life of the people of God that we understand that the promise of the gospel is couched in the same terminology, that of a new covenant.

And so as we look today specifically at verses 7 through 18, we're looking at the sign of the covenant, the sign that God marked this covenant, that He would never flood the earth again, that there would be perpetuity of seasons and harvest, that the cataclysmic judgment that God poured out with the flood waters would not be something that God does again, and that is to give us a kind of assurance not just about the stability of our lives in this world, but a kind of assurance about the kind of God that we serve, kind of God who always keeps His promises. And so looking at this passage teaches

us that promises by God are not made to be broken, but to be upheld forever. And though this world is marked by faithlessness, our God will always be faithful to His Word, just as He was to Noah and to the entire planet. He continues to hold on to His everlasting covenant with the same nature that He had then that He does now.

And so how do we look at a passage like this. Verses 1 through 7 are really the beginning of this, and I think you heard an exceptional exposition of those verses tying in really the message of Genesis and the themes of Genesis into what was happening in those verses. And those are seminal and important verses, because things like the death penalty, the nature and ramifications of God protecting life are spelled out in those verses, that life is something not that God cares little for, which could be perhaps what someone takes from seeing God's devastating judgment of the whole earth, the decimation of all the inhabitants of the planet, save those in the ark. And so you could never say that God doesn't value life in light of Genesis chapter 9, because He does everything in verses 1 through 7 to restore and to protect and to safeguard life, including the death penalty, and even the life of animals, and the life of all those with blood in them. And so the details of that you looked at last time.

The idea behind verses 1 through 7 is the protection and sustenance, the preservation of human life according to this promise of God. But every promise that God makes also requires a sign or a seal or a token. And that's the focus of verses 8 and following. And we all know that the token or sign that God gave to the world and its new inhabitants as they start this whole thing over again, just like in the opening chapters of Genesis, He gives them this sign and this renewal and this new start, and it's this sign of a rainbow, something that I think we only have a partial understanding of how important this is for us. And so I want to work through this passage today really looking at some of the significant themes.

I'm going to look at it in three parts today, three parts as we look at God's sign. "God's Promised Sign" is the title of this message. Let's look at it with three words. The first word is "scope." The first word is "scope." The second word we'll look at is "permanence," and the third word we'll look at

is "generosity." How are we going to understand the promise that God made to Noah and those who follow Him, and what that has to do with the promises that He made to us, I think these three words help us understand the faithful nature of our God: scope, permanence, and generosity.

First, let's look at the scope, the scope of this covenant spelled out starting in verse 8, the scope of it, or you could call it the breadth of it. Look with me at verse 8. A word about the structure of this passage, I think you can see it in your Bible, it's marked off by, "God said." So there's really three parts to this passage, starting in verse 8: "Then God spoke," verse 12, "God said," and then in verse 17, "God said." That's called an *inclusio*, it's two ends all focused on the middle. There's some really beautiful structure in this passage, and we'll see that; but I want to focus on really the whole passage and how these words can help us understand the message of it.

So, first, we talk about the scope. What is the scope of the promise that God made to Noah? What is the breadth of it? Well, we start with the original recipient which is Noah, Noah. It says, "God spoke to Noah and to his sons," in verse 8. It goes on in this passage in verse 12 when he says, "This is the sign, a sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations."

Further, to understand who this covenant is for, you look at verse 17: "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.'" When we're thinking about the scope, the parameters, the breadth of this promise that God makes, we understand that it was made with Noah. He's the one that made sacrifice in the previous chapter before God, and God received that pleasing offering, and took that as the first opportunity since the garden of Eden, for God to utter a blessing was after Noah made that sacrifice.

What's happening in thinking about the scope is that this is clearly a promise that goes beyond the recipient, the original recipient Noah. Immediately his sons are included, also inhabitants of the ark. Not only that, but everyone in the ark, everyone who came out of the ark in verse 10,

all that comes out of the ark. And then the use of words like "every" in verse 10, "and every animal," again in verse 10, of all that comes out of the ark. In verse 11, "all flesh."

When you look at verse 12, He makes a covenant between, He says, "Me and you and every living creature that is with you." You go on in the passage and see the inclusive language again, "Me and you and every living thing of all flesh," verse 15. You look again at verse 16, "every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth," and then again in verse 18, "all flesh that is on the earth." The scope or breadth of this promise that God makes to Noah goes beyond Noah and it applies to all the inhabitants of the ark, Noah's entire family; the progeny, all the descendants of Noah, which would be inclusive of all human beings, since Noah functions as almost a second Adam in restarting the human population, and the responsibility to multiply and fill the earth. So all can trace their lineage back to Noah, all nations, all peoples.

And this promise is inclusive not only of the humanity that Noah represents, this promise is clearly inclusive of something that may be surprising to us, and that is the creatures, the creatures, every living thing. In fact, He finds it necessary to even describe the creatures: "living creatures with you, the birds, the livestock, every animal of the earth with you; all that comes out of the ark, every animal of the earth." God's promise in this particular passage is intentionally enveloping all of creation. All of the created realm that received the judgment of God is now receiving the promise of God. So the scope includes Noah's descendants, everything in the ark, and all the living creatures that will follow them.

What's happening here is important, it's significant in understanding the nature of this particular covenant. Everyone acknowledges that this covenant is one of preservation, that God will protect the life on this earth, that He will keep it going, that there is hope for all of those who saw this cataclysmic judgment that the next time raindrops fell, they would not be struck with terror because of the promise of God. But there's more here than that. There is a linking, a linking here between Noah and humanity and the

animal realm, or the created realm. That's why ten times He says, "Every, all living creatures." There is a relationship between creatures and creation.

O. Palmer Robertson, who writes quite a bit about the covenants in the Bible, says that Genesis chapter 9 makes a link between the creative and the redemptive covenant of God. In other words, our redemption, God's plan to rescue the human race that was launched in Genesis chapter 3 when He promised a seed that would overcome the serpent from the woman, that there would be a Savior, there would be a Deliverer, that promise is inextricably linked not just to the spiritual reality and needs that all sinners have for their souls to be rescued from the penalty and sway of sin, but our salvation, our redemption is inextricably linked to creation, to this world, to this created place.

Now that's helpful for us because we are physical beings. We're not just souls, embodied spirits, we are people, we watch baseball and we eat bananas; that's people stuff. We're physical beings, we come from the earth, and we're surrounded by all kinds of physicality in this world. And Christians are not to be completely removed from the physical realm, that's platonic philosophy; that's not Christian, that's pagan. And so we have something to say about streams, and rivers, and mountains, and billy goats, and the tropics, and an island, and sand, and platypus, and cattle. All the physicality of this world, from black holes to Bengal tigers, every bit of it matters to God. And our fate is intrinsically linked to the fate of this world; that's why this covenant is an umbrella over, with the scope and breadth of all creation enveloping both God's creative power and God's redemptive power. That's why this rainbow will be such an important and physical sign, because it's associated with the rain that falls, the clouds in the sky, the sky, the air before us. It's over a picturesque scene of this actual physical stage in which the drama of redemption will play out. And the redemption of the fallen race of Adam will be tied to the redemption of this entire world. God's not done with this planet.

Now what we take from that, we need to be careful, because some Christians may have an overworked, ecological concern. Can I say it like that? And I think we also need to be careful that some Christians have no

ecological concern – and I'll let you just fill that in with however you want to think about that; you know, recycle a can maybe is what you take from that. But the idea is we cannot be dismissive of creation. We cannot be thinking about the spiritual realm in the natural realm as if they never meet, because they meet in us, and they meet in Christ, and they meet for all eternity in the world to come. Heaven is not an ethereal promise of a place that's some kind of immaterial, it's a place where we will feast, and we will live, and we will explore and experience in a physical and eternal reality the perfect confluence of the spiritual and the physical. You see, this whole world will be redeemed, and I'm talking about the black holes and the Bengal tigers. And the promise of salvation and deliverance in the New Testament is linked together with that reality.

And so I love this reality, because look at, if you have a moment, you have time, at Romans chapter 8. I think this is the clearest example of this link between redemption and creation, Romans 8:22. And Paul is talking about to the Romans the future glory that will be revealed in the age to come. And in verse 19 he says, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly, as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Do you see the link between the created world and God's plan of redemption, that God has something great in mind not just for the souls of those who He has rescued and ransomed and redeemed in Christ, He has something in mind for all of the created realm. Not this because it's made of plastic. But real plants and real animals and the real ground, so that when you go outside – and you should have your kids go outside, not just digital world, but real world – have them go outside and see that the entire realm of creation, God looks at it and says, "This is Mine." And so as sure you are of the bigness and the broadness of this world, and the Grand Canyon and



the Swiss Alps and the vastness of the solar system, God's purpose for deliverance and salvation is linked into all that He created.

And so He makes this promise to Noah, to all who will descend after Noah, you and I, and to the created realm of creatures. That's what's so remarkable about the scope and breadth of this promise that He makes to Noah, so that we can look our dog in the eye and we can say to that Labrador, "We're in this together." And that's not trying to say something weird about, you know, all dogs go to heaven, because we know that's true, but cats don't; you know, we know all that stuff theologically. I went to seminary, just trust me. And so we can know that kind of thing.

But every time we see either rebellion in the physical realm, an animal attack a person, or we see the stewardship of this earth hunting and harvesting meat from the mountains, good stuff like that, every bit of it is a reminder of God's relationship that He has covenanted with both creation and redemption. And so we see this physical realm testifying not only that it has a Creator, but that the Creator has promised that He will sustain all of it along with His promise to sustain us, which will come to a point where redemption is His goal for His creation. And so we're in it together with all this created realm. It really expands my thinking on the breadth of God's creativity and redeeming power; and I hope it helps you see it as you breathe physical air, and as you dig and plant your plants and harvest your crops, and do all the things that living in a physical world entails, that every scoop of soil reminds us that we're inextricably linked to this creation; and God will redeem both us and it.

Second, permanence, permanence. Not only is the scope of this thing quite vast, this promise God made to Noah and his progeny, but I want you to see the permanence of it. This isn't a momentary covenant, this isn't a bargain for a short period of time. Look what He says in verse 9: "and with your descendants after you." That's the perpetuity of this covenant. Look in verse 11: "All flesh shall never again be eliminated by the waters of a flood, nor shall there ever again be a flood to destroy the earth." Look at verse 12, it says, "For all future generations." You can look again at verse 15, "Every living creature of all flesh, and never again shall the water become a flood

to destroy all the earth." And then in verse 16, that, "He'll remember the everlasting covenant."

You see, the scope of this promise is one that involves both creation and redemption, all of it under God's sovereign care. The permanence of this has everlasting ramifications. When God put this promise in His mouth to Noah's ears and to his son's ears and to the ears of the animals, He puts something before us that's supposed to last, not just to this day thousands of years later, but for all days to come. This is something that we will celebrate in heaven.

In Revelation chapter 4, God's throne is depicted. And do you know what's around it? A rainbow. Why is that? Well, it's because this is an everlasting covenant with eternal ramifications, and it's reminding us that God has more in mind in what He's doing in saying, "I'm not going to flood the earth again." There will not be a global catastrophe that causes all life to be snuffed out again. There will not be a time where harvest will not continue, where the seasons will not continue. He's promising that; but there's far more than temporal preservation happening here. There's something temporal and there's something eternal being linked together. And this, dear friends, should give us a kind of stability in this world, and a kind of assurance, and a kind of balm for our anxieties, as the heads on the screen and the TV just keep yelling that the world is going to end.

Whether it's the threat of terror in the world today, whether it's the melting polar ice caps, or holes in the ozone, or famines and floods, there will be wars, and there will be famines, and there will be floods; but they will not snuff out life on earth ever. There's a promise that God will not do this again: He will not destroy all life by flood. And with a mindfulness of the judgment to come, when God destroys this world in the future by fire, that will be with an extraordinary amount of preservation of His own people. To the man, God will sustain all of His people through everything; and until that final day, we can have every confidence that there will not be a war that will end the human race, there will not be some kind of nuke that will end the human race, there will not be some kind of ice age that will end the human race, there will not be some kind of ecological disaster that can end

the human race, because the human race is not sovereign over the human race.

So you can turn off the TV for a minute and take a breath and go, "Okay, God made a promise that this earth will keep going until He brings it to a full and final conclusion and renewal." Too many people live in peril and on a knife's edge of every single thing the TV tells us to be scared of. And a promise like this one, with permanence and lasting beauty, serves to help us see that the purposes of God are indestructible. You get that?

There's another word that shows us this, this permanence on display in the beginning and the ending of this passage. Verse 9 it says, "I Myself am establishing My covenant with you." And then again in verse 11, "I establish My covenant with you." And then finally in verse 17, "I have established between Me and all flesh that's on the earth the sign of My covenant."

This word "establish" further reinforces the permanence of what God did when He sealed this sign with Noah. The everlasting ramifications have to do with God establishing. The Hebrew root word for "establish" is to raise up, it's to renew, it's to reinforce. To establish is not to make something new in Hebrew, to establish has to do with to set it up in a significant way. It could be translated "to raise up," "to renew," or "to cause to stand." And as you learned in verses 1 through 7 what God's doing in reiterating the promises made to Adam in the garden is showing that this cataclysmic flood was not a surprise to God; and the endurance of God's promises, both in their scope and in their permanence, are something that God will always see to.

And so God establishes not for the first time ever, but He renews and upholds and recommits to show us as temporal creatures who only last for a brief time that the work that He started, He will finish. This is true in every promise that God has made. That's why we find great assurance in promises in the New Testament, like the work that God started in you, He'll be faithful to finish to the day of Christ Jesus. That's why we look to Jesus, the

author and finisher of our faith. And so we know that in every season, whether flood or famine, whether want or plenty, God will still be upholding and establishing His word of promise. We don't have to live on the edge of a knife, we can live with confidence that God knows exactly what He's doing. And though the world is screaming mad concerned that their choices will cause this planet to come undone, God upholds and sustains it all by the word of His promise.

So we've seen the scope or breadth, and we've seen the permanence of this covenant. Lastly, and most significantly, let's look at its generosity. And just because I use the word "lastly" doesn't mean the sermon is over, okay. We've got to look at the generosity of it, this is the most important part. And I 'm going to break this down here into three subpoints under generosity.

How do we know that this is a generous covenant? Well, the first way we know this is a generous covenant is because we see in it, number one, the sovereignty of God, the absolute sovereignty of God on display. And I 'm sure you noticed it in the passage. Verse 8 says, "I Myself am establishing My covenant."

God makes it clear that this covenant is one that the responsibility and upkeep of it is solely and exclusively based on His work, that it's His covenant. Yes, we share in it. In other words, we receive the blessings and benefits of this covenant, but this is what is technically called a unilateral covenant. A bilateral covenant, an agreement between two parties. A unilateral covenant is the kind of agreement that happens when one nation conquers another and enforces its will on the conquered nation. God in an act of war against mankind has flooded the earth for her sinful rebellion, and He has preserved one family and the species of the earth on the ark, and God will set the terms moving forward. That's what He did in Genesis 9:1-7. And as He called them to go fill the earth, they are to obey this.

But God's establishing covenant of protecting life on this earth is inviolable and it is unilateral, it is unconditional because it is based in the complete

and total sovereignty of God. "I establish My covenant Myself, My covenant I establish." The use of the personal pronoun by God Himself, that He has set the bow in the cloud, and that He makes the cloud appear over the earth, verse 14. And in 15 He says, "I will remember the covenant. I will look at it," verse 16, that God says to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant" - verse 17 - "which I have established between Me and all flesh," emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God, that He is the one who provides this generous, protective covenant that will temporally protect life on earth, but have eternal ramifications when it comes to the covenant of salvation or redemption.

And so the sovereignty of God is on full and glorious display in this passage, and it shows us that the generosity and grace and benefit that comes to us from the sign of the rainbow is something that is based not on human performance or human merit, or something that we could earn or something that we could bolster, but something that God has accomplished, that God has done, and that we cannot take away. No one, no one, not human despot or ruler, not disobedient Christian, not some kind of rebel in this universe can undo a sovereign unilateral unconditional promise that God has made; and that is the kind of promise that God makes here, and that's so important if you're going to understand the grace that God gives in a covenant that will build on this covenant. But I leave that there for now.

And so how is this generous? One, it's generous in His meticulous and matchless sovereignty. Two, it's generous in its grace. This is a gracious covenant. And how do we know that? Well, because the context of this entire chapter is the plunge of the human race into sin, Genesis 6:5, right? The evil in their heart is total, and the corruption is complete, the rebellion is massive, and what you're about to find out - spoiler alert - next week is that Noah, though he is the best man on earth, that the best man is a man at best, because he's going to get drunk in sin - spoiler alert. But even that in the context is reminding us that God makes this sovereign covenant not on the basis of how much we deserve it, but exactly the opposite of that. It's completely and totally based on His grace.

The corruption and evil of this world is evident; and even after the flood, God says in chapter 8, "The evil of their heart is continually from childhood." But that doesn't change God's working with this sinful world. His sovereignty means that He's the initiator. His grace means that that initiation is based on who God is, not on how much you deserve it; because if it's based on your work, then it's not grace.

Later when God is making a covenant with Israel as His chosen people in Deuteronomy 7:7, God will say that He chose Israel not because they were greater than any other nation, that He set his love on them because He loved them. And that's a fine piece of divine logic, and it's the only way that we can understand grace. Grace is grace because we don't deserve it, and we get it because of who God is. That's what's glorious about grace is that it's grounded not in us, but in Him; and that's going to be true of every single one of God's promises, because it's true of God's nature. Grace is who God is. He cannot not be gracious. He cannot not be merciful. Our God of perfect justice is also a God of abundant lovingkindness and forgiveness. And so the context of this promise is the massive, inexplicable grace of God that comes from God's kind nature.

So how else is this a covenant that's generous? It's sovereign, it's gracious, and thirdly, it's sealed. And here's where we get to talk about the rainbow. Kids, we're going to talk about the rainbow. But first, grown-ups, you know the rainbow's been hijacked, right? 1978 an artist in San Francisco came up with probably the most well-known manifestation of the gay rights symbol in the rainbow flag. And you know what? Who cares. That's our symbol. And ultimately, it's not even for us, it's for God. And so I don't care where you see a rainbow flag, a rainbow in the sky, a rainbow painting, a rainbow Burger King cup, rainbow month of June, rainbow everything every day in California, rainbow, rainbow, rainbow; every time I see a rainbow I thank God that He will not destroy, that He didn't blot us out, but that He still extends mercy. So now, kids, let's talk about rainbows.

There's a rainbow in this passage. And what is the rainbow? Well, it's a seal. The generosity is on display because of the sovereignty of God, the grace of God, and now it's the seal of God that He puts on every single

covenant that He makes. When He makes a covenant with Abraham, the seal is circumcision. When He makes a covenant with Israel, the seal, according to Exodus 31:13, is the Sabbath. That's what Exodus 31:13 says, that, "My seal, or My token, or My sign is the Sabbath with them." It is something physical and something visible that marks out the covenant. It's something that reflects it, that symbolizes it, like a mascot is for your favorite team. That is the token or the sign. Well, God's sign to Abraham is the sign of covenant circumcision. His sign to Israel is the Sabbath day, a day of rest, a day that is to be made holy. And for all of creation, you and all your turtles and cats and dogs and this entire planet, there is a sign that God puts over all of it, and He chose that to be the sign of the rainbow.

Now rainbow's a word we use, not a word the Hebrew Bible uses. We call it a rainbow because it comes after the rain and it's shaped like a bow. The Hebrew word is just "bow," it's just "bow"; and it's the same word they use for a battle bow, a hunting bow, it's the same shape as that kind of bow. And some preachers go a little bit too far with the bow, but I'm not mad at it, Spurgeon did it, I'm going to entertain it in a minute. The idea of this bow – that's what the text calls it – is that this bow serves as a beautiful, visual, vibrant, powerful reminder, that in the darkest day of God's judgment on this earth, that immediately following God made a promise to His people, and He sealed it with a sign, verse 13: "I will set My bow. I will set My bow."

Following this, understanding what it means for God to put a bow in the sky with all those vibrant colors of the rainbow and all the – you know, when I want to give you science, I always go to the source, Wikipedia; and you can always count on me for good, good source Wikipedia stuff. And you know what rainbows are? They're reflections. They're the bending of light. The red in the rainbow is the light that's bent the least, the purple is the light that's bent the most, and somehow – oh, God does it – but God makes this rainbow, and every time He makes this rainbow He's showing us this sign.

Now commentators fight about, "Is this the first rainbow ever?" in Genesis chapter 9, "Or were rainbows around, and then God puts the rainbow to work?" I don't have a dog in the fight, I'm not sure why we're fighting about

that. Calvin says there was lots of rainbows before. Some people say there was no rain before, you couldn't have rainbows. I mean, Bible commentators fight about anything. So whether this is the first rainbow ever or this is the first rainbow that God ever blessed and ordained and used as a pointer isn't what matters. What matters is that this rainbow in its circumvents shape, this arc, this bow that God Himself sets over His creation, the word for hunting, the war instrument is now turned into an image of beauty, a sign of a promise, a token, a mascot, a reminder.

And the questions are simple, right? It's who gives this sign. Well, the answer in verse 13 is that God gives this sign. And that means that we can rely on this sign. This is something that came from God, and so we can trust, we can rely that God's promise is true, because He's the source of this sign.

Well, when did He give the rainbow? Again, not trying to decide if this is the first ever rainbow or not, He gave this rainbow, the rainbow that's a sign of the covenant, in the context of an undone world. Imagine exiting that boat, that the massive devastation, all the people that the Noah family ever knew were gone, all the other animals gone. All that was left was an earth to rebuild and repopulate. This had to be a harrowing and frightening scene for those who endured the cataclysmic storm and flood of the earth.

And so God gives it right after the crisis; and I think that's why in Genesis 9 when God says that He puts His bow there, He says it's after the clouds. And so the bow is intended to bring us comfort after a storm, after a crisis. The undone world, the trauma that Noah endured with his family, the protection that they received was followed by this beautiful, vibrant display that was visible, and that was given at the time that they needed it, given by God, and given in a time of crisis.

Well, why did God give them a rainbow? Well, the rainbow was to reassure them, and to comfort them, and so that they would see it. And the interesting part of this passage is that's all inferred, because the rainbow is put on display, and the audience of the rainbow is obviously the people in



the ark and their descendants that will follow. But that's not the main audience. Yes, we receive reassurance and receive comfort from the rainbow. But what does the rainbow do? So if we answer the question, "Who gives it?" It's God. "When was it given?" In a time of crisis. "Why was it given?" To reassure and comfort.

But what does the rainbow do? Well, the rainbow's main function is to remind, it's to remind. And it's interesting because it is a reminder for us; we see it, we bring it to mind. But in this passage, the reminder is directed at God. And that's interesting, isn't it, verse 15. Verse 14 says that, "The rainbow will be seen in the cloud," - obviously seen by us; but verse 15 - "and I will remember My covenant." Verse 16, "When the rainbow is in the cloud, then I will look at it" - God says - "to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature." What does the rainbow do? The rainbow reminds God of His promise. Now everybody knows God doesn't forget, that God doesn't need a post-it note or a string tied around His finger to remember something, or an alert on His phone that says it's time to stop preaching.

So why does God call it a reminder? Well, in the Bible God remembers a lot. In chapter 8, verse 1, it says, "God remembered Noah." In chapter 19, verse 29, it says, "God remembered Abraham." And in Genesis chapter 30, verse 22, it says, "God remembered Rachel," Isaac's wife. And so God will continually use these words, that He remembers His people in their time of need. The psalmist sings about it: "God remembers the afflicted," Psalm 9. "God remembers us in our lowly estate," Psalm 136. And there's lots of times when we remember. Jonah remembers God in Jonah 2:7. All throughout the Bible remembrance makes sense for forgetful creatures like us.

But in what way does God remember? Well in one sense, it's just God calling His promise to mind. But the most important part of God's remembering is that He's the one that does it. I mean, what if it was for us to remember? What if that was on us, us who live just a short little time? Our generations pass and pass and pass, and what if it was entirely up to us to remember God's sign of the rainbow? But it's not. It is God's provocative

reminder, and it shows us that God will never forget and never fail to accomplish what He promises. That's why it's an everlasting covenant.

This great gift of a rainbow reminds us that God will preserve life on this earth and accomplish all His plan of redeeming mankind; and that rainbow serves to remind Him that this is important. It would be important if we remembered. It's far more important that He remembers; and He tells us that He will remember His covenant. And so in God's great plan of unbroken and inviolable promises, He links together creation and redemption in a way that encompasses all of this earth, and endures for all the ages to come, and displays His unchanging, generous, sovereign, gracious, sealing grace, and puts on display, that though God will forget your sins, He will never forget His promise.

Turn your Bible over to Isaiah 54; and we're going to start to pivot towards the Lord's Supper together. But I want you to see that the promise that God made to Noah is one that endures and reflects His generosity that's on display in the remembrance we're about to take together. Isaiah 54, it's a renewal of marriage vows with Yahweh between Israel and Yahweh. I'm going to read you ten verses, follow along with me.

"Sing, O barren one," - verse 1 of 54 - "who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, and you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says Yahweh. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities."

It's a promise coming from God, everybody. It's a promise coming from God that He will restore the nation of Israel. They'll be brought back from captivity, and that their life will be renewed and restored. But look at the basis for this promise that God makes to His people, verse 4: "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; do not be confounded, for you will not be

disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, Yahweh of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth He is called." I mean, this is a promise that is a covenant of marriage, that God promises that He will rescue and redeem His people in an eternally salvific way.

Verse 6: "For Yahweh has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in the spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I have compassion on you," says Yahweh your Redeemer. This is a beautiful instance in the history of Israel where God promises His covenant people that He will save them, that He will redeem them, that He will rescue them, that though they do not deserve it, He'll pour out compassion on it. This is God being God, being a Savior who is gracious and generous and sovereign.

And why does He do it? Why does God do it? Well, it reminds God of something, verse 9. Isaiah 54:9, "This is like the days of Noah to Me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and I will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord who has compassion on you. What Isaiah 54 teaches us about Genesis 9 is that every single instance of God's compassion, of God's mercy, of God's salvation, and of God's deliverance is rooted and grounded in that rainbow promise where He said He will preserve life on the earth, because that was a signal, a token instance of God's promise to never violate His word, and to preserve His creation and redemption plan. And every single time God redeems, and every single time God saves, and every single time God gives us compassion undeserved, it's a reminder that there is a rainbow over this sky that is far more beautiful than the purple and the red and the yellow that was over the landed ark that day, that there's a far more beautiful, a far more significant, a far more glimmering and attractive sign that God has placed over His final covenant, His new covenant, and it's more beautiful than a rainbow, because it's Christ Himself.

You see, Jesus on that cross, resurrected by God after His atoning death, is the blood and body of Christ, is the sign of His new covenant, a covenant that is not different and distinct than all those other covenants that came before, but a covenant that builds on every one of those covenants. And so the rainbow points us to a greater promise-keeping God who makes a promise that everyone who finds themselves by faith in Christ is safe, as Noah's family was safe in the ark, eternally blessed, because we belong to Jesus Christ, and He is the everlasting sign. Because God kept His promise to Noah and because He sealed it with a rainbow, He will keep His promises to you, dear Christian, because He sealed it on the cross of Jesus with His body and blood, that we gather Sunday after Sunday to remember, a promise even greater than that glorious rainbow: the glorious promise of forgiveness of sins that's found in the death and resurrection of Christ. Amen. Amen. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for Your covenant-keeping, sign-confirming, grace-enduring, wide, wide mercy that we have come to know, not because we are good, but because You are good. Father, as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper together now, and as the deacons gather the bread, I ask that You would help our hearts to ready, to remember, to contemplate, to think carefully about what You have accomplished for us in Christ. Help us, God, to remember that You remember. Help us to think deeply and carefully about the depth of our sin, and the glory and depth of forgiveness we find in Jesus, in His name. Amen.