

Scripture Reading: Genesis 8:20 – 9:17

“Then Noah built an altar to Jehovah, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And Jehovah smelled a soothing aroma. Then Jehovah 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. 22 "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold & heat, Winter & summer, And day & night Shall not cease."

Genesis 9:1 “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. 7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it." 8 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."

"God's Covenant with Noah"

- Back in chapter six Noah found grace in the eyes of God; God remembered Noah on the ark and now God blesses Noah & his family!

Next Lord's Day is celebrated as Ascension Sunday in the Church calendar and just as we see the Ascension of Jesus in our readings for that day from an earthly and heavenly perspective I want to take these two weeks to consider God's covenant with Noah from those perspectives as well.

This week we will look at the practical impacts or changes this covenant brings on the earth at the time of Noah and down through all of history... And next week we will consider the covenant from God's perspective! As we look at things from an earthly perspective we again see a lesson in patience and obedience from Noah: The waters that prevailed have now receded and after more than a year on the Ark it is time for Noah & his family and all the animals that God protected to leave the Ark.

We have studied the patience and obedience of Noah and he continues to be a good example for us to follow: It had been almost two months since Noah opened the Ark and saw that the earth was dry and yet he waited for the Lord's command to exit just as he had been given the command to enter the Ark.

- John Calvin rightly points out that we no longer receive verbal commands from God: But we DO have the revelation of His Word and the wisdom of parents, elders and other Saints to help us discern the Lord's will in our lives.

Calvin reminds us that, “Even in the minute affairs, Scripture commends to us this self-government, that we should attempt nothing but with an approving conscience.”

In other words, while there are many details of your life where you will not find direct guidance in the Bible, like the color of your socks, IF there is something in a decision that you are about to make that troubles you because of a Scriptural principle, or the opinion of someone you should be honoring or listening too, think long & hard before making that choice!

This will give you great peace, even with the little things, and the same principle applies to the big issues as well as we will see with God’s covenant with Noah this morning.

- We should know great peace because we are reminded that God is in charge of the BIG picture as well!

We see this in at least three very practical ways as God makes His covenant with Noah:

- God still knows the wicked state of man.
- God will provide for man and will now protect man from himself
- And God will give man a very visible reminder of His care...

We will consider more details about the sacrifice of Noah next week, but listen again to God’s response: “Then Jehovah 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.””

Here is where God’s revelation in the Scriptures is SO important: We can see man made in God’s image & we see the wickedness of man all around us...

- BUT we don’t know how to hold these truths together!
- Is man wicked or is man noble?

How can he be both: This is the great tension that remains with any natural revelation or religion! But here we are given, literally, the mind of God and it explains how this tension is resolved:

- God knows that man is wicked, but God is merciful to the fallen creatures made in His image!

We see this clearly again when Jesus comes as the Great Savior to save His people from their sins...

In John’s Gospel account he records the first visit of Jesus to the Temple where He overthrows the tables and is challenged by the Pharisees asking for a sign: Jesus tells them "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." something they proceed to mock and then we read:

“23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.”

- Faithful Jews like Nicodemus would have surely thought back to God’s Words here in Genesis 8, and perhaps that is what led to his nighttime visit to Jesus recorded in chapter three!

God knows that man is utterly lost and does not bother looking for some divine spark to try and fan into a flame or wait for man to make the right choice on his own!

- God knows that men & women will only be saved because of His mercy & that is just what Jesus had come to show!

Back in Genesis nine the next thing that we see is how God now provides animals in addition to plants as food for man and institutes the death penalty as a means of restraining the sin of man so God can keep His promise to not destroy the earth again with another great flood.

Noah could see that things would now be different and that the world would not end up back in the same place of needing judgment in just ten generations as it did after the fall in the Garden.

There is plenty of discussion about whether any meat had been eaten prior to this time and if it had whether it was sinful to do so. To me the text is pretty clear but not an area that we should be unduly dogmatic about. However, even though animals have now been given as food we are still to respect them as living creatures made by God...

- And thus we were not to eat them alive nor with the blood...

This command carries forward all the way to the council of Jerusalem in the instructions to the Gentiles and even though I may step on some toes, it would prohibit the ritualistic practice of some hunters to drink the blood of their kills. And of course we see here the institution of the death penalty and by implication the beginning of civil governments:

- Those to whom the sword is given as we are reminded in Romans 13.
- Man is wicked, because man is fallen, but man is noble because man is made in the image of God!

Those who would argue that the death penalty is barbaric or unloving simply do not understand these great truths, and at bottom would have us return to the sinful state before the Great Flood where the wickedness of men was unimpeded.

The final thing that we see from an earthy perspective is the great sign that God gave to remind Him and us about this covenant with Noah:

- The Rainbow!

We will consider this a bit more at the Table this morning, and next week as well.

For now I will simply point out that this is not the place where the rainbow was created, but rather the time it was established as a great sign: Not unlike the fact that Jesus did not create bread or wine for the first time at the Last Supper:

- He did however give them great meaning that continues down to our day!

When we see a rainbow in the sky it should remind us not only that God will never again bring a world-wide flood but of all the other provisions He makes here as well.

Perhaps we should remember not only this great covenant scene before us in Genesis chapters eight & nine, but all the great covenants that God has made with His people:

- All of which flow from the great covenant made among the persons of the Trinity in eternity past and all of which culminate in Jesus!

We have studied the first revelation of God's covenant of salvation in the Garden with the promised coming of the Seed of the Woman: Jesus.

We are studying the next great covenant scene here with Noah where God promises to preserve the world until Jesus can save His people from their sins.

Here in the Book of Beginnings we will spend a great deal of time on the next great covenant scene where God establishes His people as the children of Abraham.

If we continued on in Exodus we come to the next great covenant scene at Mt. Sinai where God reveals what is required to be Holy as He is Holy.

Next we see great covenant promises given to King David about the rule of His greater Son Jesus and finally the prophet Jeremiah foretells of the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus!

- It is important that we see how all of these covenant flow from the great covenant in eternity past, but also how they all come together in the life and work of Jesus!

The Apostle Paul stresses this in the opening portion of his second Epistle to the Church at Corinth:

II Corinthians 1:18 “But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. **19** For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me, Silvanus, and Timothy--was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. **20** For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”

This morning as we consider what the fulfilment of all these promises means for us I want turn once again to one of the prophets where we see another reference to the account of Noah and the great flood in the Book of Isaiah. This reference comes right after chapter 53 of Isaiah which is often called the Fifth Gospel account because of the incredible detail that is given about the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God! [*Mention Dead Sea Scroll background: 980 AD v. 150 BCTABLE 1. QUMRAN VS. THE MASORETES* Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters in Dead Sea Scroll 1QIs^b differ from the Masoretic Text (Geisler and Nix, 1986, p. 382). 10 letters = spelling differences 4 letters = stylistic changes 3 letters = added word for “light” (vs. 11)]

In chapter 53 the promise of the Messiah is made and the prophet then goes on in chapter 54 to encourage God’s people at that time and it should encourage us as well!

Isaiah 54: “**1** "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says Jehovah.”

- God is speaking to those faithful Saints who see no hope from a human perspective and goes on to encourage them with words that have often been used by our missionary to Russia; Blake Purcell:

2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. **3** For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, & make the desolate cities inhabited.”

Now we have often talked about how much easier it should be for us to be optimistic about the advance of the Kingdom today than it would have been for the early disciples who were few in number and being persecuted by Rome and Jerusalem:

- The Church of Christ is now about a billion strong and able to reach the entire world with the Gospel.
- It is sad to see how we often wring our hands & act as if all is lost when it comes to the expansion of Christ’s Kingdom!

But we need to remember that this portion of the Scripture in Isaiah is being written 700 years BEFORE Jesus came, as the nation of Israel was about to be cast into exile!

But God does not want them to despair, but to have great hope:

- NOT in their ability, but in His faithfulness!
- And our real hope today must be grounded in the same way!

4 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. **5** For your Maker is your husband, Jehovah of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.”

[Remind them of our blessing each Lord’s Day at absolution!]

6 "For Jehovah has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused," Says your God. 7 "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,"

- Please notice that as the prophet strives to help God's people see things from God's perspective that he then brings us back to our text in Genesis:

9 "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, So have I sworn That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. 10 For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," Says Jehovah, who has mercy on you."

- *[compare God's perspective with our perspective on the age of America or the outlook of the modern church]*
- I hope you can see how the Prophet is reaching back to the Book of Beginnings and encouraging God's people to look forward.

Now WE, brothers & sisters have the benefit of living in the 21st Century after Christ, with the completed cannon, and can look back on all three of these events as recorded history...

- But we too have a future to anticipate and we share the same ultimate future as those Saints that Isaiah was encouraging!

11 "O you afflicted one, Tossed with tempest, and not comforted, Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, And lay your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, Your gates of crystal, And all your walls of precious stones. 13 All your children shall be taught by Jehovah, And great shall be the peace of your children. 14 In righteousness you shall be established; You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; And from terror, for it shall not come near you. 15 Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. 16 "Behold, I have created the blacksmith Who blows the coals in the fire, Who brings forth an instrument for his work; And I have created the spoiler to destroy. 17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, And their righteousness is from Me," Says Jehovah."

- Now that is obviously a glorious future and sadly many hold that it is all far in the future!
- However, we should not be able to hear those words without thinking it is clearly a description of the New Jerusalem which was revealed to John as coming down from heaven to the earth: John is shown the Bride of the Lamb, the Church.

When Pastor Rich Lusk worked us through those later chapters of Revelation along with Acts chapter four at family camp a few years ago he went to great lengths to remind us about how important it was to see those texts in light of the rest of Scripture!

We should compare them with this portion of Isaiah and Psalms like Psalm 45 which has become one of our favorites. We know that what John saw reflects a lot of now and not yet images, but the image is glorious just like the picture that God gave His people through the Prophet Isaiah.

In looking at God's Covenant with Noah from a human standpoint and how the Prophet Isaiah refers to that time as well as to our future,

I hope you can begin to see why it is important to have the proper attitude toward the big picture of where God is going with history: It is HIS story and history will go where He wants it to go!

Noah could easily have been quite depressed coming off that Ark thinking that the sin of man was going to take things right back to where they were.

But the writer of Hebrews tells us that Noah “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

Noah knew that God had saved his family and even the animals on the ark for a purpose and we will see in a few weeks that He looked for the advance of history as we always should.

Moving forward to what we read in Isaiah, think about how difficult it would have been for Daniel and other faithful Saints to keep their eye on the ball as they endured 70 years of exile and then lived for hundreds of years under the rule of pagan empires until Jesus came as the stone cut without hands to crush those Kingdoms?

We know that Daniel understood and was faithful and when Jesus comes we have Simeon as an example of how there was still faith in the land! With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost which we will celebrate in two weeks, God’s people have been empowered and Satan has been bound so he can no longer deceive the nations.

- **How much more optimistic should we be as God’s people now?**

Last year we saw the Book of Acts come to a close with the Apostle Paul entering Rome on the Appian Way as a conquering general would have done and he preached the Kingdom with no one hindering him... As he sat in an apartment as a Roman prisoner!

I could move on down through Church history until our day and we would fast run out of reasons for American Christians to be pessimistic! Do we see the wickedness of men today? We sure do and if you doubt that just listen to the video message left by the killer down in Santa Barbara this week! We know all the problems that our state and nation have and even those can’t compare with the struggles in Nigeria and North Korea or Iran.

- **We could play one downmanship all afternoon and get ourselves very depressed.**

But what did God tell the people of Israel at a time that was much worse?

- **Get ready to expand your tents!**
- **God is going to do some exciting things!**

So I will leave you with a few simple questions:

Is Jesus still on the Throne?

Is the Holy Spirit still in the world?

Do we still see rainbows when it rains?

Well then, we should take heart and read those final chapters of Revelation on a very regular basis and live as though we believe that this is what God has in store for His people and the whole Creation!

Jesus said, if you love me keep my commandments, and one of His greatest commandments is the Great Commission...

- **So let us be about the business of discipling the nations!**

Communion Meditation: Genesis 9

“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.”