
GENESIS: IT ALL STARTS HERE

CONSPICUOUS GRACE

GENESIS 9:1-17

1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ***“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.***

6 ***“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. 7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”***

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 ***“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 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. 11 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.”***

12 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: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 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. 16 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.”***

17 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.”***

INTRODUCTION

The Rainbow is a display of beauty and joy. Young eyes and old ones light up at the sight of the colorful bow in the sky. And yet, as wondrous as it is to us, the rainbow has likely aroused less joy and peace in our hearts than it was designed to do so long ago. God set this bow in the clouds in order to remind humanity of His promise of grace, and this is far more joyous than appreciating the beauty of the heavenly sign. For millennia now, God has made good on His promise to never again judge the world by flood waters, and we should recognize such grace in humility. Yet, there is more effectual grace still and a more extensive promise that should seize our attention and cause our hearts to leap. The Cross of Christ reminds us that God has judged sin and offered salvation to all who trust in Him.

SETTING THE STAGE

Two Saturdays ago, I married Jacob Whitworth and Louann Peacock right here on this stage. They each made promises of lifelong commitment and mutual fidelity. Time will tell if these promises were true and genuine, but this couple also exchanged tokens of their promises in order to serve as a reminder. *“What token do you give as a symbol of your covenant in Christ?”* This is the question I ask the bride and groom when it comes time to exchange rings. A “token” is a thing, a symbol, a sign of something much greater than itself. The wedding band or ring signifies the covenantal bond of husband and wife. It displays a committed promise between a man and woman – they belong to each other. Proximity, emotional status, and circumstance are utterly unimportant regarding such a promise. The husband and the wife may ask, “How do I know my spouse will remain faithful? How do I know he/she is committed for life?” Ah, look upon your hand! There rests the token of his/her promise. He/she promised, and, therefore, he/she must.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

(1) FOUR PROMINENT OBSERVATIONS

(2) THE “INCONSPICUOUSNESS” OF GOD’S GRACE TOWARDS US

(3) GOD’S CONSPICUOUS GRACE

(1) FOUR PROMINENT OBSERVATIONS

1. COVENANT LANGUAGE

This massive appearance of the word “*covenant*” gives us good reason to consider what we have seen of God’s covenantal relationship to man so far.

○ *Covenant of Works*

The word “*covenant*” is first used in relation to Noah (and those associated with him), but we see striking similarities between Noah and Adam.

- Blessing and Command
 - Adam: “*God blessed [humanity]. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...’*” (Gen. 1:28)
 - Noah: “*And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’*” (Gen. 9:1)
- Provision
 - Adam: “*And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food’*” (Gen. 1:29). AND “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...’*” (Gen. 2:16).
 - Noah: “*Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything’*” (Gen. 9:3)
- Prohibition / Limitation
 - Adam: “*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat’*” (Gen. 2:17).
 - Noah: “*But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood’*” (Gen. 9:4).

- Threat of Death

- Adam: *“for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen. 2:17).
- Noah: *“for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man”* (Gen. 9:5).

- **Covenant of Grace**

- A. Saving Grace

- God said, *“I will establish my covenant with you... and you shall come into the ark...”* (Gen. 6:18). And *“the LORD shut him in”* (Gen. 7:16). And *“God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark... [and] made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided...”* (Gen. 8:1).

- This Saving Grace was an effectively preserving grace

- This salvation in the midst of judgment is only available through God’s gracious promise. It is effective only for those who find rest under its shade, while others are exposed to the full fury of God’s wrath.

- B. Common Grace

- God used the word *“covenant”* 7 times in Genesis 9 (v9, v11, v12, v13, v15, v16, and v17); and this covenantal promise is universal. God’s Covenant is with:
 - *“you and your offspring...”* (v9) and *“every beast”* (v10)
 - *“you and every living creature... for all future generations”* (v12)
 - *“the earth”* (v13)
 - *“you and every living creature of all flesh”* (v15)
 - *“every living creature... that is on the earth”* (v16)
 - *“all flesh that is on the earth”* (v17)

2. VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

- Because God had just killed nearly every human on the planet (excluding only 8 persons), it might have been reasonable for Noah and his family to assume that human life was not valuable.
- On the contrary, God clearly intends to affirm the continued value of humanity, based on the fact that humans are still image-bearers (v6).

3. HUMAN MEANS FOR DIVINE JUDGMENT

- God said, “*I will require a reckoning for the life of man*” (Gen. 9:5).
- And yet, God commands that “*man*” shall be the one who “*sheds the blood*” of the one who “*sheds the blood*” of another man (Gen. 9:6).

4. INCREDIBLE PROOF OF GOD’S FORBEARANCE

- Several generations from Noah to Abraham... Abraham’s great grandson, Joseph, brought the Hebrew people into Egypt... God used Moses to deliver Hebrews from slavery in Egypt 400 years after that... The birth of Christ wasn’t for another 1,400 years or so... and here we are now, about 2,000 years after the birth of Christ.
- And yet, there has never been another world-wide judgment of God.
- For more than 4 millennia, God has demonstrated gracious forbearance!

(2) THE “INCONSPICUOUSNESS” OF GOD’S GRACE TOWARDS US

- The rainbow is regularly in the sky, and yet we have likely never looked at it and thanked God for His grace in not destroying us today.
 - We have nearly entirely forgotten what the rainbow means...
 - This illustrates a greater truth: God’s grace is inconspicuous to expected by us.
- Here is a good test of how Inconspicuous God’s Grace has become to us.
 - How do these statements make you feel?

- God judged all humanity (except 8 persons), and brought death to men, women, children, and babies.
 - Sad? OK... Heart-broken? OK... Angry? Defensive? Doubtful? Not OK.
- God promised never to judge the whole earth with flood waters again.
 - Thankful? OK... Joyful? OK... Presumptuous? Not OK

(3) GOD'S CONSPICUOUS GRACE

- Think of the Rainbow
 - The Bow
 - *“I have set **my bow** in the cloud, and **it shall be a sign** (“token” KJV) **of the covenant between me and the earth**” (Gen. 9:13).*
 - The Bow is an archer’s bow. God has shelved His bow!
 - The Light and the Clouds
 - Rainbows are only observed as light is refracted through the moisture of the clouds, so you will only get rainbows when there is both darkness and light – storm and sun – cold clouds and warm rays.
- Think of the Cross of Christ
 - The bow of God’s wrath was bent in fury upon Christ, who directed the punishment of my sin upon Himself.
 - Spurgeon – “[God] gives rainbows, when there is a cloud. When the greatest cloud which ever gathered upon earth, had covered Calvary with blackness, when the sun himself had suffered eclipse, when human sin and divine wrath had made a tempest so black and terrible that all the earth was in affright, then on that black cloud was painted the rainbow—for Jesus was lifted up, and amidst that thick darkness he, the expiation and the atonement, offered up himself, and poured forth his blood.

When the sinner’s conscience is dark with clouds, when he remembers his past sin, when he mourns and laments before God, Jesus Christ is revealed to him as the covenant Rainbow, speaking peace; and to the believer, when his trials surround him, when

temptations beset him, when he suffers depression of spirits, then how sweet it is to behold the person of our Lord Jesus Christ—to see him bleeding for us, offered up for guilty men—God’s rainbow, hung over the cloud of all our sins, our sorrows and our woes.

Look, believer, when thou hast a cloud—look for a token, and be not satisfied without it.”¹

MY PRAYERS

- May God forgive us for thinking lightly of our sin.
- May God open our eyes to the beauty of His promises.
- May God assure our hearts and minds that He is faithful.

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¹Spurgeon, C. H. (1863). The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons (Vol. 9, p. 367). London: Passmore & Alabaster.