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Genesis 9:8-17:

Through This Flood and Home to Him

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“Through This Flood and Home to Him”

Text: Genesis 9:8-17

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

If you would, take a moment to put yourselves in the ever-so-familiar account of Noah and the ark. In a world filled with godlessness, sin, and evil, Noah and His family were the remnant of believers that was preserved as the wrath of God would fall upon the earth. To God, Noah was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation;” he “walked with God.” (Genesis 6:9). It’s not difficult for us to picture a sin-filled world that has rejected us and our Lord. We live in a sin-filled world in the here and now, so it’s not hard to feel the loneliness that Noah and his family must have felt. It is the original sin in man since the fall of Adam that has removed the ability for us to know, seek out, and have a relationship with God. But what is often a challenge for us as Christians is to picture the severity of the flood and the judgment of God that ensued on those 40 days and nights. Strangely, our childhood songs and our fondness of the animals and rainbow seem to make it a point to gloss over what horrific disasters surrounded God’s remnant.

Picture yourself on the deck of that boat. What would you see? You would see men, women, and children drowning and holding on for dear life with no hope of surviving. You would see the human achievements of the land, the farms, the buildings, the homes, and the monuments, all brought to ruin. Your eyes would lay upon the complete destruction of every living thing. The feeling of despair that follows would cause a dread unlike any other. When the waters have filled above the tallest mountain, your morning view would be a lingering reminder of what you had witnessed as you look upon the destructive waters that swallowed up everything you once knew and loved.

I. How Could God Be So Cruel?

Opponents of the Word of God often love to use this destruction as a means to point at God and say, “Look and see your loving and merciful God! How loving and merciful to let such destruction fall on His creation! How could your God be so cruel?” The opponent conveniently misses that every sin we commit is, first and foremost, a sin against our Creator. This sin against Him demands His perfect justice and judgment for unrighteousness. This argument presupposes that God is like a man and must have compassion and permissiveness when it comes to our breaking of His commandments. After all, our line of reasoning is that God surely must understand. Arguments like these miss the truth that God is perfectly good, moral, and just. Perfect goodness cannot contain evil, and He did not design or intend for us to be evil. Instead, what we as sinful human beings did in the garden and continue to do now is choose evil over good rather than letting God, who is perfect goodness, be the ruler over our lives. Isaiah 53:6 puts it best, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The image of God we possessed before the fall was not just an ability to aspire to or choose good; it was given to man as an innate holiness with free will and the ability to choose

something different from God. To be created in the image of God did not mean for us that we are God or a god but that we were good in His sight. Now, we have chosen and often continue to choose evil over good. This, my friends, is what led us to lose His image. Because of our collective decision in the garden, a lack of capacity for good resulted.

This then points us to the necessity of what Christ did for us. The image of God, that is, innate righteousness, cannot exist in the presence of sin. So, it cannot be what is in us that leads us toward righteousness associated with the image of God but rather the work of God in us that results from Christ's satisfactory atonement on the cross. If it were not for Christ paying the ultimate price for us by taking our sin and bleeding and dying for it on the cross, our fate would be the same as those who faced God's judgment on the day of the flood. When we look at it in this way we see the seriousness of our rebellion. The flood demonstrates both the gravity of God's justice and the promise of His salvation.

II. Two-Fold Preaching In A Bow

It's common knowledge that a rainbow is formed when sunlight is spread out into its spectrum of colors and diverted to the eye of the observer by water droplets. However, this rainbow meant so much more to Noah and his family. The meaning to them was well beyond the scientific explanation. It was not a symbol of pridefulness, nor was it a symbol of the breaking of God's law. In all things on this earth, Satan, the prince of evil, has moved to pervert any promises of God or any symbol of the Christian church that may point to the joy and peace we have in Jesus. The cross of Christ has been turned into a fashion statement rather than a reminder of His love for us, the tradition-based upside-down cross of Saint Peter turned into a symbol of Satanism rather than the powerful witness of the apostle, and the rainbow as a symbol of God's covenant with man into a symbol of pride in perversion of God's institution of marriage. These things should not surprise us or rile us up into a frenzy but should move us to cling to what they truly mean to us.

The rainbow for Noah preaches the wrath of God and gives us the comfort that God is for us, not against us. It teaches a proper fear of the power of God and His ability to judge while preaching faith in His promises. It preaches to us the Law and Gospel. Our Lord is not only faithful in His promise that we read about here that He will never again flood the earth, but the rainbow points us to the promises of God rooted in the promised offspring of the woman—Jesus Christ.

The rainbow is about Genesis 3:15, the first prophecy concerning Christ: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Martin Luther had this to say regarding this verse, "This text embraces and comprehends within itself everything noble and glorious that is to be found anywhere in the scriptures." God putting this rainbow in the sky is the visible assurance that He would keep His promise by not destroying the earth so that He could send His one and only Son to pay the price for our sins and restore what has been lost in us by our own volition. It was a beautiful oath from God that He would never again destroy the earth, but rather, He would restore it in the form of a new creation in Christ, just as He makes us a new creation in Christ by

taking away our sins. In this rainbow is compassion, mercy, and love that goes beyond what we deserve and gives us hope in the peace that is to come when Christ returns as He said He will.

III. The Rainbow: A Call To Love

That rainbow in the sky, pointing to Christ's love for us on the cross, calls us to love because God loved us. We are enabled by the Holy Spirit to love because despite everything we deserve, despite every horrid thing we have done against our Lord, despite our earned position as people drowning in the waters of the flood, He loved us so much that He sent His son to die so that God's wrath and judgment would not fall on us. That is what love is. Love is sacrifice. Love is doing everything possible to give yourself to another so that they may prosper. In the words of Jesus, "The most important [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Do we do this daily as Jesus does for us? Absolutely not. We often do not give ourselves daily, and we frequently consider every small thing another person does against us to be the most grievous offense toward us when we, too, are guilty of doing precisely the same thing. Our imperfection and hypocrisy here is why we need Jesus. We need His death and resurrection to atone for our inadequacy that so often misses the mark. What a shame it is that there are those of us who sit in the Lord's house and think we are worthy to be here by our works. If you think you are adequate, perfect, capable, and able to fulfill the law of God, then you have not been looking hard enough in the mirror. If, on the other hand, you see your sin and repent while genuinely understanding God's mercy despite your sin, inadequacy, and rebellion, you have come to the right understanding.

This home, this rest in Jesus, this rest in the Word and Sacrament is beyond any miracle you can comprehend and is meant for us not to lose hope when we see our evil. We must put our sins onto the cross of Christ and cling to God's rainbow of hope in Christ. We must constantly direct our focus to the promises in His means of grace and His promise of salvation because, in the promise of that rainbow that points to the cross, God has promised us that He will remember His covenant, preserve His remnant, create a new heaven and a new earth, forgive us of our trespasses, restore what was lost in us, and get us home.

IV. An Everlasting Covenant

In verse 16 of our text, our God says, "When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature and all flesh that is on the earth." An everlasting covenant in this text means that the covenant will extend to all ages, even to the end of the world. It is confirmation to the generations, including us, that God's promises proclaim forgiveness and peace with Him as this rainbow is attached to God's covenant in Christ. This peace is everlasting in the sense that it is universal. God's grace in Christ applies to every human being. The Bible is clear in many places that Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom for all." (1st Timothy 2:6), not just a select few. As John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The grace promised by God applies to everyone who

would believe in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Just as God's covenant promise to never flood the earth again is everlasting, so the promise of the Messiah is everlasting.

H.C. Leupold wrote in his book *Exposition of Genesis*,

“God's remembering is not to be thought of as over against the possibility of forgetting, as would be the case with man, but rather as a divine activity whereby his “covenant terms” will be vividly before him, and man may take joy from the fact that God thus thinks upon what He promised.”

The next time you see a rainbow, know that God thinks upon all of His promises. His promise of forgiveness in Jesus is always before Him in a way we cannot comprehend. Though this world is wasting away, He is in control. He did not forget about His children on that boat who were surrounded by wrath and judgment. He does not forget about His children in this sanctuary, surrounded by hatred for His Word and the forgiveness found in Jesus. When you see that rainbow, know that God is with us, God loves us, He will never leave us, He keeps His promises, and in Christ, He will bring us through this flood and home to Him.

Amen.

Seminarian Lucas Abbott