

TEXT: Genesis 8:20-9:17

TITLE: The Promise of Preservation

THEME: The Lord expands His plan of redemption (救贖) by making a covenant with Noah: with a set of commands, a promise to preserve nature, and a sign.

Recap: Last time when I was here, we looked at how the Lord has caused the floodwaters to subside (消退), and recreated all of creation and also brought Noah and the animals out of the ark into the new creation. This is where we will be picking today, in Genesis 9. READ.

INTRODUCTION

Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, last year, when I took some of my relatives to downtown Toronto, they saw some of the flags that were hanging up in the air, they asked me about the meaning of those flags. After I told them about the meaning of the flags in our society, one of them told me that she could have never thought about that since the first thing that came to her mind was the pack of color crayons (粉筆) that we used to draw together when we were young. So, let me ask you as well, what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you see a rainbow? May be some of you are reminded of the beautiful scene you have once seen after a rainfall? Or maybe because of the influence of our society, we right away think of the flags hanging up in the air with a corrupted meaning? Or maybe some of you are like my relative, the first thing that came to mind is the color crayons with which you used draw at school?

Here in Genesis 9, Moses tells us that rainbows were given when the Lord made a covenant (约) with Noah. And they contain a greater significance than what our society perceives. So, how is a rainbow connected to the Noahic covenant? What does it mean? Why is it significant to you and I who are living in the 21st century? These are what we will be looking at today. We will be looking at the text in three sections:

- I. The commands of the covenant (vv.1-7)**
 - II. The promise of the covenant (vv.8-11)**
 - III. The sign of the covenant (vv.12-17)**
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- I. The commands of the covenant (vv.1-7)**

Let us begin by looking at the covenant commands.

In vv.1, the Lord told Noah to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” **And notice that these words are very similar to the words that the Lord has said to Adam in Genesis 1.** Genesis 1:28, the Lord told Adam to “*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.*” Just as Adam was given the command to multiply and fill the earth at the original creation, the Lord has also given Noah the same command Noah at the time of recreation. **This is as if Noah has been made into a new Adam!** Remember that just a chapter ago, the Lord wiped out (除灭) all mankind because of the reign of sin, but now, the Lord wanted to fill the world again with mankind! This is telling us that God’s plan for mankind has not changed even after the flood, although evil multiplies as mankind multiplies, yet, the Lord wanted the world to be filled with His people who bear His image, all for His glory.

Then we also see that the Lord has said that the animals have been “given into his hand.” This is another way of telling them to have dominion over the animals! Remember that this was also what the Lord has given to Adam at creation, “to have dominion over the animals.” **But the words are a little different. Why? It is because the context was different.** At the time of the creation, Adam was morally perfect, holy, and righteous,

he was created to be God's holy representative, as a king to rule the world on behalf of God. Remember that Adam has exercised his dominion as the animals came to him one by one and were named. And at the time of the original creation, mankind was living in complete harmony with the animals. Mankind also were not carnivorous (食肉的), but vegetarian (素食者). **But ever since the Fall, everything has changed, all of creation has been cursed as a result of the sin of man, including the animals.** The harmonious relationship between mankind and the animals that existed prior to the Fall has been changed. So, that is why the Lord said to Noah, *"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."* It means that mankind and the animals would no longer live in harmony and the animals would rebel against man's rule. More than that, we also see here that the Lord has permitted the eating of the flesh of the animals after the Fall.

However, there is one exception regarding the consumption of the flesh of the animals, which is that mankind may not eat animals with their life blood in them. This command will later be expanded in Leviticus 7:26-27. But why? Why was the eating of blood prohibited? Two reasons: First, the purpose was to separate the people of God from its neighboring nations, who had the rituals (仪式) of blood drinking. Second, it is because blood in the Jewish culture is equated with life. If blood is still in the animal, means that life is still in it. More than that, they also believed that lifeblood is too sacred to be eaten by man, because lifeblood is often associated with the idea of expiation (除罪) and atonement (代赎). So, when an animal is slaughtered (被宰杀), it must have its blood drained (流干) from it before man may eat. But the author of Hebrews actually tells us that all the purpose of the sacrifices in the OT were a type that pointed the OT saints forward to the ultimate once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who was the lamb that was slain (被残杀). And this is also how the ceremonial law (礼仪律) was fulfilled in Christ.

And notice that in the next couple of verses, the Lord said, from vv.5-7, *"surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning (算账); 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."* Here, we see that the Lord has prohibited the taking of the life of a person, either by the animals or by man. This is a distinction between the shedding of the blood of the animals and the shedding of mankind. **The Lord has permitted the shedding of the blood of the animals for food, but He has prohibited the shedding of the blood of mankind.** We know that this is not a new rule, because we have already seen how the Lord has dealt with Cain when He murdered Abel in chapter 4. But here, the Lord has given the specific command regarding the prohibition of the shedding of man's blood, not only because life is precious to God, but because mankind is made in the image of God. **Also, notice that there is a great consequence for the killing of the person!** Notice that the Lord says "I will demand/I will require/and I will require" three times, but you know that in the Hebrew, the verb literally means 'to pursue relentlessly (不懈地)', or 'to seek diligently.' **This is telling us that God simply requires repayment of a life for a life.** The taking away of human life is a serious offence! What a message to those who are murderers, to those who kill life in the womb through abortion (流产), and to those who end old age or suffering through euthanasia (安乐死). You see, the Lord demands the life of the other person in the case of a murder, simply because a man is made in the image of God, the murdering a man is destroying the image of God.

And this leads us to a personal reflection (思考) for you and I. It is because you and I sitting here may probably say that this does not apply to us, since we would never murder someone. But though we may not be physically murdering people, we may be committing murder in our hearts. Remember that our Lord Jesus said that if you have hated someone, you have already committed murder? So, my question is: how are you treating your neighbors or the people around us? Who are outside of the church? Who have wronged against you in the streets. Remember that whether or not they are believers or not, they are still God's special creation because they were made in the image of God, to reflect Him and His glory. May the Lord help us to treat others in a Christ-like manner, glorifying the Lord in even our relationship with others.

II. The Promise of the Covenant

After the Lord had spoken to Noah about the covenant commands, He made a covenant promise to Noah. This leads to our second point. But before we look into the content of the covenant, let me remind you what a covenant is.

A covenant is a binding contract that was made between two parties, usually a superior with the inferior. Back in the days, the kings would tell the conquered (被征服的) people that they might have to pay taxes in order to live. But this is not how the Lord made a covenant with His people. The Lord always makes a covenant with His people out of His pure love and mercy. And also notice that this covenant is unconditional, the Lord did not demand anything from Noah. The Lord made this covenant with him not based upon anything he could have done or achieved! It is because the Lord knew that Noah was a sinner, even though he was a righteous man, he still could not do what He required.

But what is the content of the covenant?

Here, the Lord promised that He would never send the flood again to destroy the world. Try to put yourself in Noah's shoe, can you imagine how Noah felt after the Lord has promised him that He would never send the flood again? Imagine how they felt after the flood! They must be scared after seeing the severity (严重性) of God's wrath! How the world was destroyed by the flood waters, and everything perished. But now, having heard God's promise of the they must be relieved! It is because Noah knew that every intention of his heart was evil. He knew that God had every right to send the flood again to destroy the world again. But here, the Lord has assured him that he wouldn't. And notice also that this covenantal promise was not limited to Noah alone and in his lifetime, but it was extended to Noah's children and to all the generations after them. What a gracious promise!

And also notice that this covenant was not only made with Noah and his descendants, but vv.10 says that this covenant was also made with "every living creature." It means that this covenant was made with every animal that has been preserved from the flood and brought into the new creation. Even though the world was still under the curse of sin, and evil would again fill the earth as mankind multiplied on earth, yet the Lord has promised to protect all of creation.

But essentially, we want to ask why. Why would the Lord make such a covenant with Noah and all of creation? Yes, one of the reasons is surely because all of creation is precious to God and He did not want to destroy them again. **But there is a greater reason! And it was to fulfill the greater promise that He made earlier in chapter 3!** Remember that after Adam had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil, he deserved to die, but the Lord made a promise with him that there would come a seed from his wife to deliver him from sin. *Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."* If the Lord had destroyed all of mankind with the flood, and if He would again destroyed mankind, the promise of the Seed would never been fulfilled. So, this covenant was meant to preserve the chosen line of the offspring of the woman, through whom the True Seed would one day come to bring redemption for the world. And this promise was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the True Seed of the woman, who came to crush the head of the Serpent with His death and resurrection (复活) .

And it is because of this particular plan of redemption, the Lord has extended this covenant to the whole world, notice that vv.10 says that this covenant was also made with "every living creature." **By preserving the**

world, the Lord was creating an environment in which the greater purpose of the salvation of mankind might take place. May be think about it this way. **The world = theatre. God's plan of redemption = drama.** In other words, the Lord has intended to make the world into the theatre in which the drama of redemption would be played out. And because of this greater plan of redemption, the Lord has promised to restrain (抑制) His wrath of judgement, even though sin has not been eliminated. And this idea is what our tradition calls common grace (普遍恩典), a lot of people do not like the term, but I think the idea is there and is true, that because of God's great plan of redemption, the Lord has temporarily (暂时的) restrained His righteous wrath until the final day of judgement, when He will come again with the judgement of fire.

Brothers and sisters, having known this idea of common grace, how the Lord has graciously withheld the judgement should give us a sense of urgency (急迫), to lead us to not only respond with gratitude (感激), but a heart for the lost, because we know that even though they are not being judged now, they will be judged on the day of judgement, and they will perish in their sins forever! May the Lord give us a heart for the lost.

III. The sign of the covenant (vv.12-17)

And after the Lord has given Noah the covenant commands and the covenant promise, **He has also given Noah a sign of the covenant, and it is a rainbow.** You see, rainbows are not just a natural phenomenon after a rainfall, but it is a God given sign signifying that the Lord would never judge the world again with the floodwaters. And it is also interesting to note that in the Hebrew, a rainbow is literally read as "a bow in the clouds," and the term "bow" was a term referred to the weapon that was used to shoot arrows. So, by hanging up the bow in the clouds, this is telling us that the Lord has resented his wrath against mankind.

Notice also in vv.14 that the rainbow is not intended to be a sign for man. It is not intended to help man remember God's covenant mercies. **But the rainbow was a sign to God Himself.** Vv.14-16 says, "*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 (永约) between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*" **Did you hear what God say? He said, "I will remember," and "I will look on it to remember."** This is not saying that the Lord would one day forget and needed to be reminded. But this is an assurance that the Lord will surely not destroy the world again with the flood. And the rainbow was the sign that guarantees this never-ending covenant of preservation (保守), until the day when the Lord returns with a winnowing fork (簸叉) and with fire.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we see here that a rainbow was a visible token of God's faithfulness to the world, **but it actually points us, as believers forward to the greater covenantal signs of redemption, and they are baptism (洗礼) and the Lord's supper (圣餐).** They are to us the visible tokens (标志) of God's faithfulness. When you are baptized, it means that you have entered into a covenant relationship with Him, signifying that you have died, buried with Christ, and raised into a new life with Him from the dead. And when you partake in the Lord's Supper, the meal is a blessed spiritual meal, a reminder of the gifts of grace, and communion with the risen Christ Himself. So, next time when you see a baptism and when you partake in the Lord's supper. Remember what they signify! **By baptism, you were initiated into the covenant. By participation in the Lord's Supper, you identify yourself as a member of the covenant community, in fellowship (团契) with Christ, and in fellowship with those in fellowship with Christ.**

Brothers and sisters, next time when you see a rainbow, think of it more than just white light revealing its component colors, as our scientists tell us, but as a sign of God's covenant mercies. Remember that the Lord has for now set aside His weapon against the world in order that His of redemption might be carried out.

As a Christian, you can be comforted and may rejoice in your salvation because you know that the Lord has made the covenant of peace with you through Christ when He died at Calvary. But while you rejoice in it, tell others about this great news, so that more and more may come to rejoice with us, until the final day of restoration, when the earth will be made new, and all heavens and earth praise the Lord God forever.

And if you are not a Christian, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2) because a time will come when this present earth and everything in it will be destroyed and then it will be too late. Amen.

Let us pray.