

**Genesis 9:8-17** <sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that was with you-the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you-every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." <sup>12</sup>And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup>I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup>Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." <sup>17</sup>So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

**1 Peter 3:17-22** <sup>17</sup>For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup>After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits- <sup>20</sup>to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup>and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

IN 1882, A BLIND MINISTER NAMED GEORGE MATHESON, COMPOSED THE LYRICS OF A SONG THAT HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO MANY OVER THE CENTURIES.

THE SECOND AND THIRD VERSES OF HIS HYMN- "O LOVE THE WILT NOT LET ME GO", POINTS US TO THE THEME OF TODAY'S MEDITATION.

"O JOY THAT SEEKEST ME THROUGH PAIN, I CANNOT CLOSE MY HEART TO THEE; I TRACE THE RAINBOW THROUGH THE RAIN, AND FEEL THE PROMISE IS NOT VAIN, THAT MORN SHALL TEARLESS BE.

O CROSS THAT LIFTEST UP MY HEAD, I DARE NOT ASK TO FLY FROM THEE, I LAY IN DUST LIFE'S GLORY DEAD, AND FROM THE GROUND THERE BLOSSOMS RED, LIFE SHALL ENDLESS BE."

THESE WORDS BRING TOGETHER THE FIRST AND LAST BIBLICAL COVENANTS.

AND COVENANT- IS A WORD THAT DESCRIBES THE BIBLE ITSELF. THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS REFER TO THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS MADE BY GOD.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT OR HEBREW PART OF THE BIBLE THERE ARE MANY COVENANTS BUT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THERE IS ONLY ONE.

TODAY WE WILL LOOK AT ONLY TWO OF THESE PLEDGES, SPECIFICALLY THE FIRST AND LAST COVENANTS.

THESE AGREEMENTS, MADE BY THE LORD, ARE EACH UNIQUE IN THEIR OWN WAY.

THE FIRST ONE, OFTEN CALLED THE COVENANT WITH NOAH, IS ACTUALLY NOT JUST WITH HIM, BUT WITH ALL OF CREATION.

IN THIS IT IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER COVENANTS, BUT IT ALSO DIFFERS IN ANOTHER WAY.

THIS FIRST ONE IS A ONE-SIDED DECLARATION, IN WHICH GOD MADE HIS SOLEMN PROMISE, WITHOUT WANTING OR NEEDING A RESPONSE FROM CREATION.

THE FIRST COVENANT FOLLOWED A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE BIBLICAL STORY, ONE THAT WAS THE MOST PROFOUND EVENT SINCE SIN, AND THE EXPULSION OF ADAM AND EVE FROM EDEN.

THE EXTREME SINFULNESS OF HUMANITY AND THE UNWILLINGNESS OF ALL BUT NOAH AND HIS FAMILY TO REPENT AND TRUST IN THE LORD, CAUSED GOD TO GRIEVE OVER CREATION.

BUT THE FAITH SHOWN BY NOAH WAS WHAT SAVED CREATION FROM COMPLETE AND IRREVERSIBLE ANNIHILATION.

THROUGH THE ARK NOAH AND HIS FAMILY BUILT, AT GOD'S COMMAND, THEY- AND ALL THE CREATURES IN IT SURVIVED THE DEVASTATION OF GOD'S PUNISHMENT.

THUS A REMNANT WAS SAVED TO BEGIN AGAIN AFTER THE FLOOD WATERS RECEDED FROM THE EARTH.

IN THIS WAY, THE ARK WAS THE VEHICLE OF DELIVERANCE, GOD'S INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION THAT GOD PROVIDED FOR CREATION.

THE ARK ALSO BECAME A VISIBLE SIGN OF GOD'S GRACE FOR THOSE IN IT, AS WELL AS THEIR DECEDENTS.

AND THE COVENANT GOD MADE, WITH THE HUMAN AND OTHER SURVIVORS OF THE GREAT FLOOD, WAS THE PROMISE TO NEVER WIPE OUT ALL OF CREATION THROUGH A FLOOD.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE SECOND SIGN OF GOD'S GRACE THAT REMAINS WITH US EVEN TODAY-THE RAINBOW.

A SIMPLE SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF RAINBOWS SAYS: "A RAINBOW IS CAUSED BY THE SUNLIGHT FILTERING THROUGH WATER IN THE AIR.

EACH DROP BECOMES A PRISM TO RELEASE THE COLOR HIDDEN IN THE WHITE LIGHT OF THE SUN."

AND A SIMPLE NON-SCIENTIFIC WAY TO DESCRIBE RAINBOWS IS: THEY ARE PRETTY.

BUT THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RAINBOW IS MUCH DEEPER AND MORE IMPORTANT THAN EITHER OF THE FIRST TWO DESCRIPTIONS.

ITS SIGNIFICANCE IS FOUND IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE WORD, WHICH IS "BOW".

A BOW WAS ONE OF THE PRIMARY WEAPONS OF WAR IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.

SYMBOLICALLY, THE RELEASE OF THE WATERS FROM HEAVEN THAT FLOODED THE WHOLE EARTH WAS LIKE AN ARROW OF GOD'S WRATH SHOT FROM HEAVEN TO THE EARTH.

THUS IN USING THE BOW AS A SYMBOL OF GRACE AND GOD'S COVENANT WITH CREATION, GOD TURNED THE WEAPON OF DESTRUCTION INTO A SIGN OF PEACE.

REMEMBER, THE RAINBOW ALMOST ALWAYS FACES UP AWAY FROM THE EARTH. THUS IT IS A SIGN OF DISARMAMENT.

THE RAINBOW REMINDS GOD OF HIS PROMISE, AND SHOWS US GOD HAS REMEMBERED HIS PROMISE.

THUS IT CALLS US TO TRUST IN THE LORD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES, EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT KEEPS OURS.

FURTHERMORE, THE COLORS OF THE RAINBOW CAN IN THEMSELVES BE A MESSAGE FROM GOD.

SINCE WE ARE IN THE SEASON OF LENT HERE IS ONE WAY WE CAN USE THE COLORS IN THE RAINBOW TO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARDS GOD.

BEGINNING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOW, AND MOVING UPWARD, HERE IS ONE WAY TO VIEW EACH COLOR:

PURPLE-REPRESENTS LENT- A TIME OF REFLECTION  
INDIGO-REPRESENTS GOD'S GRACE  
BLUE- REPRESENTS GOD'S LAW  
GREEN- IS A SIGN OF NEW LIFE-RESTORATION  
YELLOW- IS THE LIGHT OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST  
ORANGE – REMINDS US OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT  
RED- REMINDS US OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

THESE ARE NOT THE ONLY WAYS TO VIEW THE COLORS, PERHAPS YOU MIGHT WANT TO COME UP WITH YOUR OWN MEANINGS AS PART OF YOUR LENTEN REFLECTIONS.

BUT THE POINT IS- THE RAINBOW IS A SIGN OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND GRACE AND THUS IS A SYMBOL OF HOPE.

CONCERNING THIS, THERE IS AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED PART OF A SCENE OF HEAVENLY WORSHIP FOUND IN REVELATION, WHICH RELATES TO THIS COVENANT PROMISE.

GOD ALMIGHTY IS DESCRIBED AS SITTING ON HIS THRONE IN THE HEAVENLY COURT IN REVELATION 4:3- WHICH USES JEWELS TO EMPHASIZE THE GLORY OF THE VISION.

“AND THE ONE SEATED ON THE THRONE THERE LOOKS LIKE JASPER AND CARNELIAN, AND AROUND THE THRONE IS A RAINBOW THAT LOOKS LIKE AN EMERALD.”

WHAT IS OF INTEREST FOR US TODAY IS HOW A RAINBOW IS MENTIONED IN BOTH GENESIS AND REVELATION- IN THE FIRST AND LAST BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.

THE RAINBOW THAT IS OVER THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN, EMPHASIZES THE SINCERITY OF GOD'S PROMISE TO CREATION FOUND IN THE FIRST COVENANT.

THIS BRINGS US TO ONE FINAL THOUGHT ABOUT RAINBOWS, WHICH IS- A RAINBOW IS A LIGHT GOD PLACED IN THE SKY AS THE SIGN OF THE FIRST COVENANT GOD MADE.

THE LESSER LIGHT OF THE RAINBOW REMINDS US OF THE GREATER LIGHT GOD SENT INTO THE WORLD, WHICH IS JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

AND THE SIGN OF THE LAST BIBLICAL COVENANT GOD MADE THROUGH JESUS, HIS SON, IS SYMBOLIZED BY THE CROSS.

TRULY, THE CROSS IS MORE LIKE THE RAINBOW THAN WE MIGHT THINK.

THE RAINBOW IS HOW GOD TRANSFORMED A WEAPON OF WAR INTO A SYMBOL OF PEACE.

THE CROSS WAS A TERRIBLE INSTRUMENT OF EXECUTION THAT BROUGHT GREAT SUFFERING BEFORE DEATH.

BUT AFTER CHRIST'S SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS, BY RAISING JESUS BACK TO LIFE AGAIN, GOD TRANSFORMED THE CROSS INTO HIS OWN INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION AND NEW LIFE.

AND SO FOR CHRISTIANS, THE CROSS IS NOT A NEGATIVE SYMBOL BUT POSITIVE ONE. AND EVEN MORE THAN THAT IT IS THE SYMBOL OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS AND GRACE.

IT WAS THROUGH THE CROSS JESUS MADE PEACE BETWEEN SINNERS AND ALMIGHTY GOD POSSIBLE.

THE CROSS REMINDS US OF THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST'S BLOOD, GOD'S FINAL COVENANT THAT IS PART OF HIS PLAN OF SALVATION.

BUT THE CROSS IS UNLIKE THE RAINBOW, IN THAT GOD DOES NOT NEED TO SEE IT AS A REMINDER OF THE NEW COVENANT, SINCE JESUS HIMSELF IS IN HEAVEN.

HE, AS PART OF GOD'S SELF, ASSURES US THAT WE HAVE NO FEAR GOD MIGHT FORGET THE PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS AND NEW LIFE THROUGH HIS SON.

THIS IS ONE REASON PETER POINTED HIS READERS TO THE CROSS IN THE MIDST OF THEIR SUFFERING FOR BEING CHRISTIAN.

BY REMEMBERING WHAT JESUS DID FOR THEM, PETER HOPED TO ENCOURAGE THESE NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS TO KEEP THEIR FAITH AND NOT RETURN TO PAGAN WAYS AND WORSHIP.

HE REMINDS THEM OF ARK AS GOD'S VEHICLE OF SALVATION IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, AND CONNECTS THE PASSAGE OF THE ARK OVER THE FLOOD WATERS TO BAPTISM.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IS SIGN AND SEAL FOR US OF GOD'S PROMISES THROUGH CHRIST.

IT SERVES TO CARRY US BY FAITH AND JESUS' SACRIFICE, OVER THE FLOOD WATERS OF SIN -TO THE SAFETY OF NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

AND IF THE FLOOD CAN BE SEEN AS A CATAclysmic CHANGE FOR LIFE ON EARTH, JESUS DEATH ON THE CROSS IS EVEN MORE SO.

THOUGH HIM GOD HAS BEGUN THE NEW CREATION, AND SO IS WORKING TO COMPLETE HIS COVENANT PROMISE OF THE WORLD'S REDEMPTION.

BUT THIS NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST'S BLOOD, IS ONE THAT IS A TWO-PARTY PACT, IN THE SENSE THAT GOD WANTS ALL PEOPLE TO RESPOND.

REMEMBER, THE FIRST COVENANT REPRESENTED BY THE RAINBOW, WAS UNCONDITIONAL. IT WAS ON GOD'S SHOULDERS ALONE.

BUT ALL OTHER COVENANTS: THOSE WITH ABRAHAM, MOSES, AND DAVID, AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ONE, WERE JOINT COVENANTS.

ALL OF THOSE REQUIRED HUMAN BEINGS TO DO THEIR PART IN KEEPING THE AGREEMENT.

PETER'S LETTER WAS WRITTEN TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIANS TO NOT GIVE UP ON THE NEW COVENANT, BUT INSTEAD TO HOLD FAST TO THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR.

REMEMBERING THE CROSS, WHY JESUS SUFFERED AND DIED ON IT, AND HOW GOD ROSE HIM TO NEW LIFE AGAIN- IS THE WAY CHRISTIANS CAN DO THAT, ESPECIALLY DURING TRYING TIMES.

EVEN TODAY WE CAN USE BOTH THE REMINDERS OF GOD'S GRACE FOUND IN THE RAINBOW AND IN THE CROSS TO ENCOURAGE US.

BOTH OF THE COVENANTS REPRESENTED BY EACH OF THOSE SYMBOLS WERE ENACTED AFTER A TIME OF TRAUMA.

IN THE TIME OF NOAH- IT WAS THE FLOOD, IN THE TIME OF CHRIST- HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH.

TODAY, IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE WORLD'S AND OUR OWN PERSONAL TRAUMAS AND CHALLENGES THESE SYMBOLS REMIND US TO TRUST IN THE LORD, TO HELP US.

INDEED, WE ARE CALLED TO LOOK BOTH AT AND BEYOND THE PRESENT REALITY WITH THE EYES OF FAITH, AND A WILLINGNESS TO KEEP OUR OWN COVENANT WITH GOD.

WE ARE CALLED TO TRUST IN THE LORD AND SEEK, AS MUCH AS WE ARE ABLE, TO BE HIS SERVANTS IN THE MIDST OF THESE TROUBLES.

THE FIRST VERSE OF MATHESON'S HYMN CAN SERVE AS A CALL TO FAITH AND ACTION, AS WE THINK ABOUT JESUS' SACRIFICE, AND HOW WE CAN RESPOND TO GOD'S GRACE.

"O LOVE THAT WILT NOT LET ME GO, I REST MY WEARY SOUL IN THEE, I GIVE THEE BACK THE LIFE I OWE, THAT IN THINE OCEAN DEPTH ITS FLOW MAY RICHER, FULLER BE." AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: GENESIS 9:8-17 & 1 PETER 3:17-22

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