**God’s Promise of a New Beginning**

Genesis 8:1-9:29
Key Verse 9:12-13 – *“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: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”*

There is a YouTube video nicknamed “Double Rainbow Guy.” The video is of a man who lives in Yosemite National Park and on one afternoon, captures the sight of a double rainbow. Completely overwhelmed by this spectacular vision, he wonders out loud “What does it all mean?” through a mixture of both tears and laughter. All he could do wascry out “Oh my God. Oh my God!!!” over and over and over again. As the video increased in popularity, he did many interviews sharing how this deeply religious experience had affected him and related his own life story and that momentous afternoon to that of Noah, though in his words the camera only captured a fraction of how awe-inspiring and majestic it was.

In today’s passage, we see God cementing His promise to all creation in the form of a rainbow. It is the final expression of His divine love and care for humanity and all the other creatures of the world after the flood. In spite of how broken our relationship became, God never gave up on mankind. In starting afresh through Noah and his family, God gave us a new hope in a fallen world. And in making this covenant, God reveal the great extent He is willing to go in loving the world and all creation in it, vowing to never flood the world again as He did. However, God’s assurance goes much deeper than this and as we will see through this passage, is not a one-time deal. It is a promise that resonates across time, coursing throughout our lives, echoing into eternity.

Look at 8:1, **“But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.”** To cleanse the world of the corruption of sin, God flooded the world completely. Doing so filled Him with as much heartache as there was water covering earth. All those who rejected God and chose to live according to their sinful ways perished. For forty days and forty nights, the heavens unleashed its stores of water until all traces of the old world had disappeared and it remained this way for another 150 days. Hidden within God’s judgment was His redemptive purpose displayed through saving one family of faith and a herd of animals stranded in the ark. But, if you put yourself in Noah’s shoes, imagine how difficult it would be to see God’s redemptive work in all this? Noah spent 120 years painstakingly building the ark yet those years probably felt like a brief minute compared to spending day after day after day surrounded by nothing except water. Noah and his family were now in a position where all they could do was wait patiently. Waiting is never easy. We live in a time where our patience and our attention spans have never been shorter as we are used to having everything in life on demand. Instant gratification. We easily forget about the needs of others for our minds are fixated only on things that can give us happiness right now. However, verse 1 tells us that God remembered Noah and all those on the ark. Here, remembering does not simply mean having a distant memory but that God actively cared for Noah. God was always there with them, protecting and guiding them even though He looked both silent and invisible. We too in life go through quiet times where God feels distant to us and we feel stranded in seas of fear and insecurity. Let us take to heart that our God always remembers and cares for us. We are never alone in those seas for He is always with us and by His Word makes all these fearful seas disappear, allowing us to gently come to rest in Him much like the ark.

Gradually, the waters receded, and the ark came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat. Forty days after the tops of the mountains became visible, Noah sent out a raven only for the raven to never return. Not to be discouraged, he then sent out a dove. The dove not could find a dry place to set its feet, so it came back. A week later, Noah sent the dove out a second time, but this time it returned with the sign of life and hope - a freshly plucked green olive leaf signifying the peace of God coming down from Heaven. How overjoyed Noah must have been to see a sign of new life for the first time in almost a year! It meant that God was slowly restoring the world around them. Excitedly, Noah then sent the dove out a third time. Though the dove never returned, it was actually a good sign for it meant the dove finally found a place to live. Noah and his family could finally live on the earth again. In the midst of unspeakable desolation and despair, God had filled the hearts with the hope of a new beginning. Imagine how eager everyone must have been to run out of the ark like it was the last day of school and set their feet on solid ground! However, Noah did something remarkable; they waited two more months for the Lord to give them the command to leave the ark. Why?

Look at verse 15-17, **“Then God said to Noah,“Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”** In the same way that God taught Noah obedience through building the ark, God did it againas they left the ark. Noah had built his entire life on following God’s leading absolutely.Now was the time to see the fruit of his obedience as the Lord honoured him with the same command God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:28). After a year and ten days of living at sea, all living creatures were free to roam the newly formed earth once more. From these verses, we can clearly see how much of a blessing God’s command is. Because of our sinful desires, we view God’s commands as cursed shackles designed to limit our freedom and our fun but these verses show that in placing our trust in Him by obeying His commands, we find true fulfilment and experience the richness of His blessings in our lives.

So what did Noah do in response to God’s blessing and grace? Look at verse 20, **“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.”** The very first thing Noah did was build an altar to God. He did not build himself a house for his family or a barn for the livestock. He did not even take a much-needed vacation after all those years building and living in the ark. Instead, Noah gave heartfelt thanks to God by making a burnt offering to Him. The aroma was so pleasing, God promised to never curse the earth or destroy creation on account of man’s sinfulness ever again (21-22). What is both amazing and confusing about this promise at first glance is that God gives this great promise in spite of the fact that God Himself knows every inclination of the human heart isstill evil. Even Noah is far from perfect as we see him drunk, angry and full of curses by the end of Chapter 9. And from that point onward, humanity will once again turn away from God in favour of following their sinful desires. So why even bother sending the flood to cleanse the world of all sinful wickedness if mankind will still be the same afterwards!?

A clue is hidden in the word “aroma.” Think about what it means. It helps give you a preview or the experience of something even before you can tangibly see or touch it, much like the aroma of Esther’s freshly baked bread lets you know you are moments away from seeing, holding and tasting it in all its deliciousness. Here, the aroma of Noah’s offering serves as a previewof what Jesus would later accomplish by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross for our sins, the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Only Jesus could pay the full cost of our sins (Romans 6:23). Only through Jesus do we receive new life and purpose as we are no longer bound by the power of death. This is why the Apostle Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 2:15, **“For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”**Through Christ, we too bear His aroma and the more we live like Him, the more we give it off, drawing many others to Him.

As mentioned earlier, God gave Noah and the rest of creation the command to go forth and multiply. However, the way man would relate to nature was now completely different. Look at 9:2-3 – **“The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”** In Eden, God made mankind to be the steward of all His creation but because of sin, mankind lost both his authority and God-given purpose. Mankind and creation went from mutually loving another to becoming mortal enemies because of the chaos brought by sin. Furthermore, as mankind lost the image of God, we also lost our respect of the sacredness of life. God gives very strict commands in 9:4-6 to underscore the importance of life, both human and animal for all life is given and belongs to the Lord. Throughout history, many atrocities have taken place as a result of people not seeing other’s lives as equally scared and deserving of respect as their own. This is something that God will make us all give an account for at the Day of Judgment, so let remember to do our best inrecognizing the image of God in others and the traces of Him in this world He created.

Ultimately, all these commands lead to God’s covenant with Noah in 9:8-17. The word “covenant” is used seven times within this section, thus we need to first know what a covenant is. A covenant is a formal agreement or contract between two parties… in short, a very special type of promise that requires both sides to do certain tasks for one another and prohibit other actions done outside of the terms of the agreement. Our lives are full of them, some examples being marriage, laws, money, government and your cell-phone bill. God made a covenant between Himself and all His creatures (man included). In future, God would make other covenants mainly with Israel but this first covenant is strange for the whole covenant is a list of things God promises to do for us or never do to us. There isn’t a single thing He asks us to do in return! Why? Because only God is loving and prefect enough to keep such an amazing covenant completely. Half of all marriages end in divorce. Laws are always being written and unwritten to suit the needs of whoever is in power. Money always diminishes in value. And do not even get me started about government… or my phone-bill! God Himself ensures that Hisunconditional, universal and eternal covenant is carried out. This is how God works. He is not dependent upon man’s work or faithfulness for there is nothing man can do to earn His favorexcept for believing in Him and trusting in Him. This is God’s one-sided grace in full display for in this contract, there is little for Him to gain but everything to lose. Yet, He still does so out of His perfect and divine love for all His creation.

Finally God closes this epic saga with a sign. Let us read verses 12 and 13, **“*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: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.””***The original meaning of rainbow is the battle bow used for the purpose of war. The bow was associated with many gods of their time and it is easy to think of God being at war with mankind through the example ofthe flood. However, God gives this bow a completely new meaning. We already encountered the dove and the olive branch as signs of peace but in “setting the bow down” amongst the clouds, Godliterally made peace with mankind in a very one-sided way, in spite of our enmity towards Him. God gave the rainbow as a vivid reminder of His promise to save us through a different way. Just as a rainbow is a miniscule portion of the invisible electromagnetic spectrum being transformed into something visible and majestic, God’s promise is made vividly real so us to see… the same promise that will later take on human flesh in Jesus Christ. And when you consider all the years of hardships Noah’s family went through to get to this point and the uncertain future that lay ahead of them, that first ever rainbow must have been the most beautiful sight they had ever seen for it was the sign of God’s everlasting promise to them. So much so that even God’s heavenly throne in Revelation is brilliantly described as being encircled by a rainbow, leaving John in awestruck wonder at the sight of it (Rev 4:3). I imagine Noah having an intensely spiritual experiencemore profound than even “Double Rainbow Guy”, thankful to God for keeping His promise to the very end, a promise enduring all these years as rays of light broke through the clouds and split into seven magnificent bands of colour. This was the sign of a new beginning.

In conclusion, we witnessed how God gives us a new beginning through the example of Noah. But we need to remember; a rainbow can only take place after thestorm. We all have storms we are weathering against whether they be negative feelings, addictions, difficult life circumstances, fears and insecurities. However, no matter how dark the storm is, you are always a moment away from the light of God breaking through and producing something magical.We need to remember that God remembers us. He cares for us, thinks about us and His desire is to bring the very best out of us for His purpose even in the midst of our darkest struggles. Only He has the power to transform them and bring a new beginning out of them. In Him, there is never a dead end, only a chance to start overat a new life filled with love, joy and the light that is found solely in Him. Let us hold on to God’sassurance always in accordance to His Word. The God of Rainbows. The God of Promises. The God of New Beginnings.