

"THE NEW ERA"

Genesis 9:1-17

God began with Adam. He only put one restraint on him. He did that which God forbade him to do, and the course of history thereafter was one of sin. There was no law up to the time when God destroyed the earth. Men had nothing to hinder their going on in their own way except their consciences, and you know how easily a person can stretch his conscience.

When God sent the great flood upon the earth, every living creature was destroyed except Noah and the occupants of the ark. After the flood waters subsided and evaporated, Noah and his family found themselves on dry ground. Noah took his place as the second head of the human race. There was to be a new beginning, a fresh start, full of hope and with every guarantee of divine blessing. Sin had been punished, grace was working, and God was ready to guide and bless those through whom the earth was to be populated and ruled.

Through the first seven verses, which have to do with the establishing of human government, we look back to creation and note what was said and given to Adam. We have the blessing of fruitfulness. This blessing was given to the first pair when they were created. It is renewed in Noah, the head of the renewed world. "God blessed Noah and his sons." Divine exhortation naturally followed the blessing--"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." The divine promise appropriately followed. It was the renewal of the blessing of dominion. (Genesis 1:28). Divine provision was also assured to him. Food and sustenance were guaranteed. In order that man might be protected, God made animals afraid of man. God put the fear of man upon every creeping thing and everything that moves in the air and on the earth and in the sea.

There is a divine prohibition in this new beginning. It emphasizes the sacredness of life. The purpose of the prohibition is to teach the sanctity of blood. Because the life of man is sacred and because man is in God's image, God demanded that if a man takes another man's life his life shall be forfeited. That is capital punishment. If from the beginning everyone who dared to take another man's life had had his own life forfeited, history would not have been as it has, and murder would not be as rampant as it is today. God ordained capital punishment, and, where it is not administered, murder will always be on the increase. Not one murderer in fifty forfeits his life for the murder, and that accounts for the abundance of them. The world will grow worse unless the Word of God is followed. The shedding of human blood creates a guilt and a responsibility before God. God will hold every slayer responsible for the blood that he sheds. A human life is sacred because the creature is made in the image of his Creator.

In verses 8-17 we have the account of the first great covenant mentioned in the Bible. It is often said that God never gives a command without providing the grace needed to obey, and we have a striking illustration of this great principle in the passage before us. "God spake unto Noah." Notice that the initiative, as always, comes from God. Noah did not propose a covenant nor ask for one. The same is true with all of God's covenants including the everlasting one which He has made with us in the blood of Jesus Christ. God's love and grace took the initiative in them all. None was an afterthought. God purposed our salvation before the world began and took all steps necessary to bring it about. The great covenants of the Bible are not agreements between equals. They are agreements between a benefactor and beneficiaries. God is the great Benefactor.

The source of this covenant with Noah was God. It was of God's free grace alone that the covenant was made. His blessings were to be bestowed even though nothing had been done by man to deserve it. From first to last everything is of grace. The scope of the covenant is also noteworthy. It included Noah and his seed and "every living creature." Thus the blessings of God were to be extended as widely over the earth as they could possibly be.

The purpose of the covenant should be carefully noted. It gave the assurance that human life should not be cut off or the world destroyed any more by a flood. God promised not to bring another similar judgment upon the earth. The covenant declared God's mercy in relation to the past, in telling Noah that there would not be another flood of judgment. It declared God's power in relation to the present. It declared God's faithfulness in relation to the future. It told them to look forward and to rest quietly in the assurance that as each day came that all would be well with their lives. It declared God's grace in relation to man. It was intended to elicit faith, hope and love. Faith accepts a present gift, but hope expects a future gift. Faith looks upward to the Promiser, while hope looks forward to the thing promised. Faith appropriates here and now, but hope anticipates the coming blessing.

As Noah stepped out of the ark on to the earth, one of his most pressing needs was the assurance that there would be no repetition of the awful calamity that had befallen the world. The covenant which was made with him by God gave him that assurance. Of this covenant the bow in the cloud is the token or sign. "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." Here for the first time Nature becomes a symbol of deep spiritual significance.

A rainbow contains the seven prismatic colors--red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. The rainbow is the child of a storm and sunshine; it is the smiling offspring of the weeping storm. It is produced by the rays of light falling upon drops of water. In fact, three things are necessary to produce it--cloud, rain and sun.

The cloud is needed as the canvas on which the rainbow is to be painted. The sun is needed to give the light or colors of which the painting is to be composed. The drops of falling rain are needed as the pencil by which these colors are to be applied or the medium required to decompose the rays of light and spread out their varying hues in blended loveliness.

There may be a cloud without a rainbow, but there cannot be a rainbow without a cloud. The appearance of the rainbow tells us that, however dark the cloud may be, the sun is shining still. So it is with the dark and tragic things in our lives of which the clouds are the symbol. The cloud of guilt is arched with the bow of pardon; the cloud of mystery, with the bow of providence. The cloud of sorrow is illumined with the bow of comfort; and the dark cloud of death, with the radiant bow of hope.

"Through gloom and shadow look we on beyond the years;
The soul would have no rainbow had the eyes no tears."

It is important for us to remember that the flood did not come of itself and that the rainbow did not appear of itself, but that God sent both of them. In the giving of the rainbow, God ratified His promise that no more would the earth be destroyed by a flood, and He established a memorial of the new relationship between Himself and His creatures. He assured Noah that the rainbow was a visible sign which would serve at once to confirm men in their faith and to dispel their fears.

1. The rainbow is a symbol of beauty.
God, the master artist, has done a noble work in this world in which we live. What a beautiful world we may live in, if we so desire! In it is the beauty of everlasting friendships, love that outshines the stars, flowers to garnish our pathways, and birds without a wrong note.
2. The rainbow is a symbol of harmony.
All seven colors of the rainbow exist in such juxtaposition as to make a perfect chromatic whole. The rainbow is God's lesson of harmony to us. Is there discord in our lives? Is there the knowledge of personal failure? Are we thorough masters of ourselves? Any lack of harmony in our lives is a result of our unwillingness to tune our lives to the master key, even Christ.

3. The rainbow is a symbol of faith.

God said, "By the sign of the rainbow, never again shall a flood destroy the earth." Thus God was vouchsafing His faith in the future of the human race. Because He believed in men, there would be no necessity of another destruction. God believes in us. God trusts us. He endows us with the possibility of divine sonship, gives us the privilege of choice, either to walk in the mud of sin or among the stars with Him. He has faith in us, and He depends upon us to live worthily in His sight. Therefore, we should live accordingly.

The rainbow typifies the cross of Christ and enables us to understand certain of the marvelous truths concerning it which bring peace and comfort to our souls when rightly understood and believed. In what ways does the rainbow typify the cross?

I. It Is The Token Of An Unconditional Covenant.

A covenant is a contract wherein one or both of the parties to the covenant pledge themselves to perform certain things. In the covenant with Noah, God made an unconditional promise never again to destroy the whole earth with a flood. God did not ask Noah or his family to promise anything, but simply to believe what He said. The cross is the token of God's new and unconditional covenant. It is God's pledge to those of us who trust Christ as our Saviour, that the Father will never condemn us for our sins, because Christ was punished in our stead on the cross. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

II. It Is The Token Of A Perpetual Covenant.

Nothing was to abrogate or nullify or supersede the covenant God has made with those who trust His Son. It will stand through all eternity.

III. It Exhibits The Glory Of The Sun.

The rainbow exhibits the glorious component lights that blend into the white light of the sun. In the rainbow we behold the brilliant red, yellow, green and blue.

In the cross we see the magnificent justice, infinite love, marvelous wisdom and matchless power of God exhibited in their magnificence.

IV. It Forms A Bridge Between Earth And Heaven.

Its ends are on the earth, and its arch is in the sky. All man's efforts to please God by human works could not bridge that gulf. But, Jesus Christ on the cross, God's Rainbow, has united God and man. He has bridged the gulf that separated them. He has reconciled us to God by the blood of His cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

V. It Embraces The World.

Between its arms it gathers all the earth that we can see. And in this it is but a type of the all-embracing love of Christ and mercy of God. "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea." It embraces all men within its sweep.

VI. It Was Designed To Be An Incentive To Holy Living.

Noah could not behold that sign in the sky without realizing that God loved him and had been gracious to him, and that he ought to continue to trust God and obey Him. The purpose of the rainbow was to remind redeemed men of their duty to God. The cross should likewise be an incentive to holiness for all believers.

VII. It Is A Constant Source Of Comfort.

Every time Noah saw the rainbow in the sky he was reminded anew of God's love and reassured of God's announced purpose to bless him and his family.

The cross should be a source of comfort and a ground of rejoicing to all believers. It reminds us that God, who loved us enough to give His Son for us, will not withhold any other blessing He has promised for our growth in grace.