

The Promise to Preserve

02/10/2013

0 Comments



Genesis 9:8-17

This last January James and Zelma (Tichenor) Barnes of Greensburg, Indiana walked the aisle...again. The elderly couple was married 70 years ago, and the retirement home that they are currently living in put provided them with a ceremony where they could renew the vows they made in 1943.

The couple's original wedding was something of a whirlwind.

According to the home's Activities Associate Alli Hountz, the Barnes' had been neighbors since they were young children. While James Barnes was in basic training for the Navy during World War Two, he sent Zelma a letter asking her to marry him. Zelma accepted, and while James was home from the military for two days, the couple wed.

The very next day, James was stationed on board the USS South Dakota, which would eventually shoot down 32 Japanese planes during Pearl Harbor.

The couple never had a honeymoon or even what you might call a traditional wedding ceremony. Aspen Place surprised the pair by announcing they'd finally have a proper celebration of their long-lasting love and marriage.[\[1\]](#)

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It is certainly true that the couple's relationship was never in question. They had been together for 70 after all. Their taking the time to renew their vows was simply a celebration of the love that they shared. It was a way for them to reaffirm the covenant bond that they held so dearly.

You might say that the experience of James and Zelma Barnes parallels the relationship that we have been looking at in these Scriptures over the last few weeks. Way back in chapter 6 we read how the Lord entered into a special relationship with Noah. In chapter 6 we read how the Lord established a covenant with Noah and promised to save him and keep him.

Our passage today occurs not too long after Noah got off the ark. But it has been over 100 years since the original covenant was made with Noah. Now, after the whirlwind beginning and after so much time has passed, the Lord comes to Noah again to renew His covenant vows.

You might say that here the Lord pledges his abiding love once again. And as we examine this passage together, and as we look at this covenant that God renews, I think we can see something of God's love for us too.

At the outset of this passage we can see something of the nature of this covenant.

I. The nature of the covenant

Look with me at verse 11. God says, "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." You notice that this covenant has a universal tone to it. Never again will he cut off all flesh by a flood.

Theologians sometimes call this covenant the "covenant of preservation." That's because the Lord swears to preserve his all of his creation. There will never be a flood again, and so the earth will not be ravaged in such a way ever again.



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I want you to recognize how important this is. This is significant for two reasons.

First of all, you have to understand that, if God had not done this, then there would always be the nagging feeling hanging over us that it could happen again. Every time you walk past a waterfall, or every time you see the storm clouds building in the distance, you'd wonder, "Is this it?"

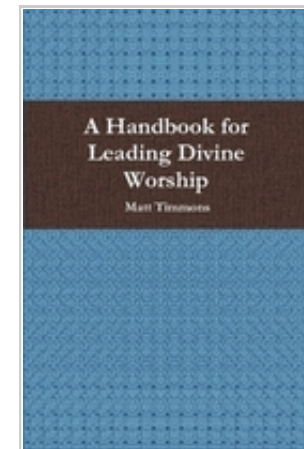
There used to be a show on the weather channel called, "It could happen tomorrow." I've never seen it, but I saw some of the advertisements for it. The premise of the show was that they would describe some natural disaster happened in the past. Then they would ask, "what if this same disaster hit today?"

One episode was about a hurricane that hit New York City and tore through much of the New England states. They played up the carnage. Then they would close the commercial with the deep voiceover: "It could happen tomorrow." The whole point, of course, is to scare the bejeebers out of you.

If God had not made this promise, then that eerie kind of feeling would be hanging over our heads all the time. We would always be saying of the flood, "It could happen tomorrow!"

Let me give you another example. A coworker of mine once expressed his dissolution with the Big Bang Theory. He had been taught that a long time ago there was a freak accident a long time ago where static matter all of a sudden blew up. Perhaps you were taught this too—that the laws of physics were defied for one moment in time and there was a big bang that launched all matter spiraling through space.

Now, this is what my coworker said. He said, "If it happened once, why can't it happen again?" In other words, if a random disaster that defied all the laws of physics could happen once, what keeps it from happening again? And in the back of his mind he always wondered, "Could there be a nuclear explosion that ripped us apart today?"



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I thought that was a pretty keen insight. I commended him for seeing something of the downside of that worldview.

If God had not made this promise, that sort of feeling would have to hang over our heads all the time. If God had not made this covenant, we'd all be saying, "It could happen tomorrow!" Every time we walked past a water fall, or every time we saw the storm clouds forming on the horizon, we would probably get the shivers.

But there is more to it than that. There is more to it than simply our present feeling of safety. This has to do with our eternal security too.

That the Lord promises to preserve his creation points us again to what he will do in the future. His promise here reminds us of his promise to send a redeemer. You remember that God has already promised to raise up the seed of the woman who would crush sin and Satan. This promise is a reminder that that promise is still in effect. That Redeemer will come. God says here, "Don't worry Noah. I'm not going to renege on that promise. I will send the Savior, and he will bring redemption to my people."

And along with that, we see something of what the Redeemer will accomplish! The redeemer will redeem the world! It is not that every soul will be saved in the end. The flood has just shown us that. But God's promise here has a cosmic feel to it. And that is an indication that God's creation will be renewed on the last day. When Adam fell, the creation fell under God's curse. And we read in the book of Romans how creation groans with the longing for the adoption as sons.

Here we see an indication that our Lord will bless the earth and free it from its present groanings.

And to serve as a confirmation of this promise, God gave us a sign: The sign of the rainbow.

II. The sign of the covenant

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You see this mentioned in verse 12 and following. We don't know if rainbows ever appeared prior to this. But from this point on the rainbow is to serve a special purpose. It was to be a reminder this covenant that God has made. It is to be a reminder of the grace of God and how he is faithful to his promise.

What's more, you see that it says that it will be a reminder, not just to us, but to God! It says in verse 14-15, "When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant." This is God speaking here. God says that he will remember his covenant.

Of course, this is what we call an "anthropomorphism." God obviously doesn't forget things. It is just a way of speaking to help us understand something about what God is doing. And this is God's way of saying he will never fail in his promise.

And that is to be a confirmation to us. When we see the rainbow, we should remember that God remembers his covenant. And that should reassure us.

You know, when it comes to the sacraments, we often talk about them being "signs and seals." They are signs that point to a spiritual reality. The Lord's Supper points to the reality that Christ has died for our sins. Baptism reminds us that he has cleansed our sin and accepted us into his kingdom. But they are not just signs, they are seals. A seal confirms something. It is there to assure you that what you see is truly legit.

Sometimes I'll put it this way to my students. When I graduated seminary they gave me a little piece of paper we call a diploma. And you can look at that paper to verify that I really did graduate. Someone might say, "Well, how do I know you didn't just print that off the internet or Photoshop it?" It is because it has my seminary's seal on it. And so that seal is there to assure you that I did indeed graduate.

And that is one of the reasons why we take the Lord's Supper each week. It is so that you may be assured of what Christ has done for you. This is God's seal that he uses to confirm you in

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the reality of your salvation. And your baptism is to do the same thing. If you ever start to doubt your faith, all you have to do is think back to your baptism. Of course, baptism doesn't save you. But it should serve to confirm your faith. It is there to be God's guarantee that Christ is the Savior and that God accepts you because of what he has done.

And the same should be true of the rainbow. Whenever you see a rainbow, you should take a few seconds to marvel at it. All those dazzling colors, are there to assure you that God remembers to keep this world and bring salvation to this earth.

I just want to make one further remark about this. I believe that this is why you find the rainbow mentioned a number of times in Scripture, particularly in the book of Revelation. If you would, turn with me to Revelation chapter 4. In Revelation 4 we read about John's vision of the throne of God. And one of the features of the throne was that a rainbow encircled it. Read with me.

Now ask yourself, why is there a rainbow here? I think that it can serve only one purpose. In the book of Revelation we are going to see some rather scary images. My wife sometimes says that she doesn't like reading it because many of the scenes are rather troubling. There are dragons and martyrs, there are fierce battles and all these bowls of wrath being poured out which wreak all kinds of havoc. There are stories of how a third of the earth suffers this, and a third of the earth suffers that. And we are told of how angels and horsemen inflict all kinds of havoc upon the land. There's no wonder that you get the heebie-jeebies as you read through it.

But here at the beginning of those visions John says that he saw a rainbow around the throne. I believe that this sign is presented here at the outset of those visions to be a reminder that our God is the covenant keeping God. He is the one who will not go back on his promise to his people. No matter what the Lord may do, no matter how the earth may heave, our God will sustain us to the very end.

[1] Adapted from <http://greensburgdailynews.com/local/x2056583691/Couple-renew-marriage-vows-after-70-years>

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