

In the Beginning

A New Beginning (Genesis 8:20-9:17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on March 27, 2022

Introduction

- ❖ Last week, we started to look at the story of Noah and the Great Flood. It stretches four chapters, and we only considered chapters 6-7. There we were introduced to a fallen world growing exponentially worse. And we're told that God regretted making man on the earth and was grieved in his heart (6:6). **So he had a plan to start over. To reset things.**
 - We were also introduced to a man named Noah, who found favor in God's eyes. Now Noah wasn't a perfect man and didn't do anything to merit that favor. But he did believe God and took him at his Word when warned about the coming flood and when told to build an ark. And that faith was counted to Noah as righteousness (Heb 11:7). Because of faith, he's described as a righteous man (6:9). And because of grace, the LORD rescued from the flood – Noah, his family, and a pair of all the animals of the earth and a pair of all the birds of the heavens. That was chapters 6-7.

- ❖ When we get into chapter 8, the flood waters subside. And in v13, we read that on New Year's Day – "*in the first month, the first day of the month*" – the waters were dried off the earth. **There's a sense of newness. Turning over a new year and at the same time turning over a new creation.** What you'll notice in our text are parallels to Genesis 1. We're told the animals are brought out of the ark and set loose to "*swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply.*" (8:17; cf. 1:22) And later in chapter 9:1, Noah and his sons are commanded to, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*" (cf. 1:28) We read all of that back in chapter 1.
 - What we see here, in chapters 8-9, is a new beginning. A restart. But we haven't returned to Paradise. We're not back in the Garden. **God is starting over, but things are not the same as before.** He tells humanity to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, knowing full well that they're going to fill it full of sinners with all of their sin.

- ❖ **The effects of the Fall are so entrenched that even a deep cleanse like the Flood is insufficient.** Scrubbing the surface of the earth and washing it clean of sinners is not enough. When I was a teenager, I had real bad case of acne. I tried all the facial cleansers on the market. Deep pore cleansers and facial masks. I was using *Proactiv* way before the celebrities were pushing it. I'd wash my face 4-5 times a day and still it wasn't enough. I ended up going to see a doctor, and she prescribed me antibiotics. I had no idea that my problem was not just oil and dirt on the face, but it was compounded by bacteria in my body. So I could wash my face all day long, but without going deeper, it would never be enough.
 - **In the same way, a deep cleanse of the earth by means of a flood was certainly effective, but it wasn't going to be enough.** Because human nature went unchanged. Sin might have been washed away, but that which produced sin in the first place remained the same. So just as he thoroughly cleaned the earth, God had a plan to thoroughly cleanse the human heart – but next time he wasn't going to use water.

- ❖ Now we'll certainly consider God's better solution by the end of this message, but let's start off by walking through our text. And as we do so, I'd like to show you three gracious provisions from the LORD: (1) A promise to preserve his creation, (2) A prohibition to protect his image bearers, and (3) A sign to point towards a better solution.

A Promise to Preserve His Creation

- ❖ Let's begin with a promise by the LORD to preserve his creation. We see this in chapter 8:20-22. **And what's important to note is how this promise is made in response to something Noah did right after stepping foot off the ark.** After the flood waters subside and the ark comes to rest on a mountaintop, Noah opens the ark doors and releases all the animals. Then he and his family leave the ark to settle on a newly cleansed earth.
 - Immediately, Noah begins to gather wood and stones. Your first thought is that he's building a home for himself and his family. That makes perfect sense. It's likely the first thing we would've done if we were in his shoes. **But v20 goes on to tell us that the first thing Noah builds is – not a house for his family – but an altar for the LORD.** *“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”*

- ❖ That's encouraging. **His first priority was to worship the LORD.** That's more evidence of Noah's faith. That's how faith expresses itself. Your instinctive response to God's salvation is not to pursue self-interested agendas but to praise the LORD for his goodness and grace. In Noah's day, that grateful praise was often expressed by means of **a whole burnt offering**.
 - That same term shows up in the book of Leviticus where we learn more about the significance of whole burnt offerings. In Leviticus 1, we're told that such offerings were completely incinerated (Lev 1:9). You don't eat a portion of it. You offer it up completely to the LORD signifying a total giving of yourself to him. And we're told that these burnt offerings would make atonement for your sins (Lev 1:4). **They were designed to have a propitiatory effect – to placate God's righteous anger.** To turn his just wrath away from the sinner – as it falls upon the sacrifice.

- ❖ **Now not only was Noah's offering a complete sacrifice – it was a costly sacrifice.** Back in chapter 7:2-3, Noah was instructed to bring onboard seven pairs of all clean animals and seven pairs of all clean birds. So he had more than one pair to work with, but still there are only seven pairs of each animal or each bird on the entire planet! And now you're going to take *“some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird”* and burn them up into ashes? Isn't that a bit wasteful? Shouldn't you try to conserve them? There are only seven pairs.
 - **But Noah made a costly sacrifice in faith.** And that pleased the LORD. We're told in v21 that the LORD smelled *“the pleasing aroma”* of the whole burnt offering. The Hebrew word for *“pleasing”* shares the same root word found in Noah's name. It means *rest*. Back in chapter 5:29, Noah's father Lamech names him *rest* in hope that Noah will bring us rest (or relief) in this sin-cursed world.
 - **And now we're told that the sacrifice he offered up on the altar has a pleasing aroma – or in other words, a rest-inducing aroma. It brought rest to God's righteous indignation towards sin.** It put to rest his anger.

- ❖ Now I get it if some of you are thinking that that's a rather primitive depiction of God. He's this angry God that needs to be placated? That sounds unbecoming of God. **But if you just compared to any of the Mesopotamian gods in those other ancient flood accounts, then the LORD comes across very dignified.**
 - In the Epic of Gilgamesh, after the survivors of the flood offer a food sacrifice, the gods swarm around the offering like flies. For even the gods had to go without food for seven days and seven nights (the length of their flood). **But in Genesis, the LORD God is not hungry. He has no creaturely needs. But he is grieved – grieved over our sin.** But Noah's costly sacrifice relieves (gives rest to) that grief.

- ❖ Look back at v21 and notice how it says the LORD says the following "*in his heart*". Meaning God said this to himself. Noah didn't hear it. **Noah doesn't learn if his sacrifice is efficacious – if it has put God's anger to rest.** He doesn't know that God was pleased with his sacrifice and has committed himself to never destroy the earth again in like manner. I think that was intentional. **So that Noah doesn't walk away thinking that it was his sacrifice that turned God's hand like it was some form of magic.**
 - That's sometimes how we treat prayer or our praise. If we pray the right words or offer up the right praise – then it's like saying the right incantation or casting the right spell – it makes God do what we want. **The LORD does hear our prayers and does respond to our praise, but out of the freedom of his will and the goodness of his grace.** God is not a genie in a bottle. He does not serve at our pleasure.

- ❖ But even so, we're told that, in this case, God is pleased. **His attitude towards humanity, towards a fallen world, has changed because he is propitiated.** His wrath is satisfied. His justice is served. Just not on Noah and his family. But on all those pairs of clean animals and birds sacrificed in their place. **God's stance has changed, but sadly man's nature has not.**
 - In v21, we read a sad assessment of man's inherent sin nature. "*For the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.*" It's similar to how humanity was described before the flood in chapter 6:5, "*every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" It's clear that the cleansing flood was not enough. It was incapable of cleansing the human heart.

- ❖ But even so, God promises to preserve his creation and never again to curse the ground because of man – *even though* the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. **God will keep his promises even though man remains inherently sinful.**
 - The LORD goes on in v22 to promise that there will be a return to the regularity and predictability of nature. "*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*" So while the human heart remains irregular and unpredictable, creation will be different. The regularity and predictability of nature will be a testimony of divine faithfulness. I hope you never look at a sunrise or sunset the same again. **As the sun rose this morning, it shouted the faithfulness of God to keep his promises.** He who has ears to hear; let him hear.

A Prohibition to Protect His Image Bearers

- ❖ So the first gracious provision in our text is a promise to preserve his creation. This leads to our second point. The second gracious provision is a prohibition to protect his image bearers. **To protect, in particular, the offspring of the woman. Through whom, we're told in Genesis 3:15, comes the Promised One, the Serpent Crusher, Humanity's Hero – who will inflict a crushing blow to Satan and will one day reverse all the effects of sin's curse upon this world.** After the Flood, wickedness and violence are still ever present, so in order to preserve the line of the woman, until the Messiah comes, a prohibition was put in place.
- ❖ Look starting in chapter 9:1. We said earlier that this section reads like a recapitulation of Genesis 1. **Noah is being treated in many ways like a second Adam.** He's given similar instructions to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
 - **Now, in contrast to those other ancient flood accounts, the biblical version is very pro-human.** Yes, we're depicted as inherently sinful, but we're treated as precious still in God's eyes. For we were made in his image. So God wants us to populate the earth with more image bearers. **But, in those other flood accounts, the problem that incited the flood was overpopulation.** So, after the flood, the gods resolve to limit the growth of humanity by afflicting us with sterility or high infant mortality.
 - The biblical flood account is strikingly different. **Human beings aren't considered the problem. Human sin is.** We are not a plague upon this earth. But our sin has plagued us and will continue to do so until the appointed time when the Promised Seed of the Woman arrives.
- ❖ **And until that time, God needs to protect humanity from itself.** From our own sin and folly. Because even though things have restarted, things are not the same as what we saw back in Genesis 1. **Our dominion over the animal kingdom has changed.** Adam and Eve were to exercise loving rule over the animals, and the creatures willingly submitted to them (Gen 1:28). Humans and animals lived in harmony in the Garden (and will again one day on the New Earth; see Isa 11:6-8).
 - But apparently after the Fall but before the Flood, animals had also corrupted their way on the earth (Gen 6:12). And without a fear of man, some were ferocious and preyed on humanity. **So after the Flood, one significant change is that God put the fear of man within animals (9:2).** *“The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens.”*
 - That's why birds don't flutter into your hands when you whistle to them. That's why squirrels scamper away when you get near. That's why even the few animals that could do us harm would much rather avoid us than confront us. **God has instilled a fear of us in them as a means of protecting us.** To curb any violence against us by animals.
- ❖ **And then to reinforce this new state of affairs, God grants us permission to kill and eat animals for sustenance.** Look at v3, *“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.”*

- ❖ **So in this post-Flood world, meat is to be a normal part of the human diet.** Apparently, in the pre-Flood world, we were all supposed to be vegetarians. And even if someone did eat meat, they did not do so with God’s consent. That just added to their iniquity.
 - **But since the Flood, humanity is meant to eat meat.** Now that’s not to say it’s wrong to be a vegetarian. That’s a personal choice. A conscience issue. But it would be wrong to say that it’s wrong to eat meat since v3 does give us explicit permission.

- ❖ **But just because we *can* eat animals doesn’t mean we have the right to exploit them.** The text goes on in v4 to give us a prohibition, “*But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.*” In other words, humans are not to eat animals in the way that animals eat animals. **We are to show respect for life and respect for the Life Giver.** To cruelly mistreat animals or to wantonly kill them is to disrespect the gift of life and therefore to disrespect the God who gave them life.
 - Now notice how the animal’s blood is equated with its life. **In Scripture, blood is sacred because it represents life.** To shed one’s blood is to take one’s life. That’s why within Israel’s dietary laws there was a prohibition against eating the lifeblood of animals (Lev 3:17; Deut 12:16; Acts 15:29). Now a lot of that had to do with ceremonial cleanliness, but it was also a way to guard against the exploitation and wasteful abuse of other living creatures who ultimately belong to God.

- ❖ **But if animal life is sacred and to be respected, how much more is human life?** That’s the logic of our text. “*And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.*” (9:5) Animal blood can be shed; just not consumed. But we must not even shed human blood.
 - Human beings are so sacred in God’s sight that not only will other people be held accountable for the taking of human life – even animals will have to give an account. Later on, in the Law of Moses, there are case laws where an ox that gores a human to death is to be killed (Ex 21:28).

- ❖ **Well, if an ox has to die for killing a man, then what should happen if a man kills another man?** The text says, “*From his fellow man, I will require a reckoning for the life of man.*” That reckoning for the life of man in v5 is expressed poetically in v6. “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*” **Genesis 9:6 would be considered the foundational verse giving divine authorization for capital punishment – for enacting a death penalty.**

- ❖ Now I realize the death penalty is a contemporary issue fraught with controversy and ethical questions. **And I know that Christians who seek to be pro-life are often criticized for the apparent inconsistency of supporting the death penalty.** Because the death penalty is argued today as inhumane, as decidedly anti-life.
 - But look at v6 and pay attention to how the argument is being made. Notice how the authorization for capital punishment is grounded in the *imago dei* – “*by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*”

- ❖ **In other words, to kill a human being is to destroy a divine image bearer.** If that's true, then you would expect the harshest of consequences. Killing a bug; killing a beloved family pet; killing an endangered species; and killing a person – all involve the taking of life. **But a society that says only the intentional taking of a human life warrants the death penalty is a society that recognizes and respects the sacredness of human life as the only life bearing the image of God.**
 - My point is that Scripture is arguing for the death penalty strictly on humane grounds. It's because human life is *that* sacred that whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

- ❖ **In other ancient law codes, you could find a provision for ransoming a murderer by means of some monetary payment. But in the Law of Moses, that was strictly forbidden** (Num 35:31). From the biblical perspective, no amount of money can ransom a murderer because you can't put a monetary value on a human life. **From the biblical perspective, a human life is priceless. Only another life is of equal worth.** A life for a life.

- ❖ Now Genesis 9:6 also lays out the groundwork for later biblical teaching that places capital punishment in the hands of – not the individual – but the state (Rom 12:19; 13:1-5; 1 Pet 2:13-14). **So, in biblical terms, the death penalty is not about exacting vengeance or satisfying personal vendettas.** It's not even just about punishment. It's about underlying the particularly heinous nature of homicide and highlighting the sanctity of human life.
 - **That's why I'd argue that the death penalty is consistently pro-human life.** And that's why I think it would be difficult to take Genesis 9:6 seriously and at the same time be categorically opposed to the death penalty in all cases and in every situation.

- ❖ But I realize many are not categorically against the death penalty *in principle*, but they would oppose it *in practice*. Especially when you consider how we live in a time where judicial abuses still exist. **Where, in our country, there's a racial disparity and socioeconomic disparity when it comes down to who actually receives the death penalty.**
 - We'd like to believe that we live in a society where justice is blind and cannot be bought. But the reality is that if you have enough money and can afford the right lawyers, then it becomes extremely difficult for the state to get a death penalty case against you – much less to execute you.

- ❖ **But the response to this opposition to the death penalty in practice is *not* to throw it out altogether and, along with it, the sanctity of human life.** The right response is to get the practice right. To work towards a more just application of the death penalty. That's the humane response. That's the biblical response.
 - **Remember why God enacted this prohibition and penalty in the first place.** It was to protect humanity from itself. Not only are there wild animals out there that could easily snuff us out, there other humans with murderous intent who could do worse. So God tells the world how much he values every human life by warnings us of the fatal consequences that come with disrespecting and destroying that life.

A Sign to Point Towards a Better Solution

- ❖ So we've seen the LORD graciously provide a promise to preserve his earth and a prohibition to protect his image bearers. And we saw how all of that is important as the world waits for the coming of the Messiah, the Promised Seed of the Woman. Until his appointed arrival, God preserves and protects us. This leads to our last point. The third provision of God is a sign that points towards this better solution that centers on the Messiah.
 - **We said how a great flood is pretty good at cleansing the surface of the earth. But it's woefully inadequate at cleaning out the wickedness of the human heart.** And that's what God is committed to doing. But according to his sovereign will and his good timing, the better solution wasn't planning to happen immediately after Noah exited the ark.
 - It would not occur until generations and millennia later. **So in the meanwhile, the LORD put a sign in the sky to remind him and to remind his people that his better solution is surely coming.**

- ❖ Look with me starting in v8. Notice how God establishes a covenant with Noah and his sons, promising *"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."* (9:11). So that's the main thrust of this particular covenant – what theologians call **the Noahic covenant**. It's essentially a promise to never judge the earth again by flood.
 - Notice how the Noahic covenant is **unconditional**. There are no stipulations placed on man; for him to keep his part of the covenant. No, the promise is unconditional – God will never again flood the earth as he did in the days of Noah.
 - Notice, as well, how the covenant is **unilateral**. Meaning that God unilaterally bound himself to this promise even without our consent. This is not a mutually agreed upon arrangement. No, God is keeping his promise to preserve this world whether we like it or not.
 - And lastly, notice how the covenant is **universal**. He enters into a covenant with all of humanity as well as every living creature – for every bird of the heavens and every beast of the earth.

- ❖ For God to be in a covenant with animals sounds strange. But think of the implications. **If God is that committed to preserving every species of animals, then how much more should we honor that commitment and work against the extinction of species?** Why do we tend to leave these issues of creation care to non-Christians? To those who don't even believe there is a God to whom these animals belong. Friends, the dominion entrusted to us as image bearers of God calls for responsible stewardship of the earth and its creatures.

- ❖ Now if we look at v12, it speaks of the sign that God will place in the sky as a reminder of this covenant he's entering into with every living creature on earth *"¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."*

- ❖ The sign is referring to a rainbow. Which, we all know, often appears after a storm, coming out of the clouds. **Now what's interesting is that the same Hebrew word for rainbow is used in the OT in reference to a warrior's bow – as in a bow and arrow (Ps 7:12).** In fact, many of the gods of the Ancient Near East are commonly depicted holding a bow in their hand because it symbolized prowess and power.
 - **But here, in Genesis 9, the bow is not being used as a sign of power but one of peace.** Here, the warrior's bow is hung up in a relaxed, horizontal position. It's not pointed down at earth with an arrow notched, ready to fly. No, it's pointed away from earth and up towards heaven.
 - **And the fact that God's bow often appears from out of dark storm clouds is a constant reminder that we deserve those storms.** We deserve his judgment as much as humanity did in the days of Noah. But instead, God has vowed to show restraint and mercy.

- ❖ **And that's only possible because that warrior's bow, pointed upwards, one day did let loose an arrow that pierced the heart of heaven.** It was the day the Messiah, the Promised Seed of the Woman, was nailed onto a cross. Where his lifeblood was shed. And shed for us. For all of us, like the rest of humanity, are guilty of sin and deserving of death.
 - And remember, no amount of money can be paid to ransom those who deserve death. Only a life for a life. Which is why Jesus laid down his life for us. **He received the death penalty for us.** That's how we can be forgiven. That's how the human heart can be truly cleansed. Not by water but by blood. The blood of Jesus the Son can cleanse us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7).