

Scripture Reading: Genesis 8:20 – 9:17

“Then Noah built an altar to Jehovah, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And Jehovah smelled a soothing aroma. Then Jehovah said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. 22 "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold & heat, Winter & summer, And day & night Shall not cease."

Genesis 9:1 “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. 7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it." 8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: 9 "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. 11 Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."

"God's Covenant of Salvation"

Today we celebrate Ascension Sunday in the Church calendar and just as we saw the Ascension of Jesus in our readings from an earthly and heavenly perspective I have taken these two weeks to consider God's covenant with Noah from those perspectives as well.

Last week we saw some of the practical impacts or changes this covenant brought on the earth at the time of Noah and down through all of history...

And this morning we will return to look at it from the Heavenly perspective...

However, before we do that there was one of the ‘applications’ that I did miss last week which is important:

As we looked at things from an earthly perspective there is a lesson in patience and obedience to learn from Noah:

The waters that prevailed have now receded and after more than a year on the Ark it is time for Noah & his family and all the animals that God protected to leave the Ark.

It had been almost two months since Noah opened the Ark and saw that the earth was dry and yet he waited for the Lord's command to exit just as he had been given the command to enter the Ark.

- **John Calvin rightly points out that we no longer receive verbal commands from God: But we DO have the revelation of His Word, and the wisdom of parents, elders and other Saints to help us discern the Lord's will in our lives.**

Calvin reminds us that, "Even in the minute affairs, Scripture commends to us this self-government, that we should attempt nothing but with an approving conscience." In other words, while there are many details of your life where you will not find direct guidance in the Bible, like the color of your socks, IF there is something in a decision that you are about to make that troubles you because of a Scriptural principle, or the opinion of someone you should be honoring or listening too...

- **Think long & hard before making that choice!**
- **This will give you great peace, even with the little things!**

And the same principle also applies to the big issues as we reflect on the fact that Jesus has Ascended to the Father's right hand as part of the Covenant of salvation which we will consider from God's perspective this morning. As we focus on the covenant from God's perspective we should remember the flow of the flood account we have been studying for a number of weeks:

- **The sinfulness of sin had brought the world to the point where God decided to destroy everything.**
- **Back in chapter six Noah found grace in the eyes of God; then in chapter eight God remembered Noah on the ark [which we saw as the center of the account] and now God blesses Noah & his family!**
- **This can & should give us great peace because we are reminded that our God is a covenant keeping God who is in charge of all of history!**

We should be reminded of the Ascension of Jesus as we consider the sacrifice of Noah from a heavenly perspective where the sacrificial animal is changed and ascends before God as a soothing aroma.

Listen again to God's response: "Then Jehovah said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.""

God renews His covenant with men after smelling that soothing aroma and it is a picture of how the Ascended Jesus is our advocate before the Father: Remember the picture given in Revelation chapter five of Jesus as a lamb that was slain!

- **The work of His final sacrifice is ever before the Father reminding Him that we are forgiven in the precious blood of His beloved Son.**

Last week we considered the great sign that God gave to remind Him and us about this covenant with Noah:

- **The Rainbow!**
- **And again God has given us a greater sign of the greater propitiation in the sacrifice of Jesus which we celebrate each week at this great Table.**

And as I pointed out when we see the rainbow, or come to this Table, we should remember not only this great covenant scene before us in Genesis chapters eight & nine, but all the gracious covenants that God has made with His people:

- **All of which flow from the great covenant made among the persons of the Trinity in eternity past and all of which culminate in Jesus!**

We have studied the first revelation of God's covenant of salvation in the Garden with the promised coming of the Seed of the Woman: Jesus.

- We are now studying the next great covenant scene here with Noah where God promises to preserve the world until Jesus can save His people from their sins.

Moving on in the Book of Beginnings we will spend a great deal of time on the next great covenant scene where God establishes His people as the children of Abraham.

If we continued on in Exodus we come to the next great covenant scene at Mt. Sinai where God reveals what is required to be Holy as He is Holy.

Next we see great covenant promises given to King David about the rule of His greater Son Jesus and finally the prophet Jeremiah foretells of the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus!

- It is important that we see how all of these earthly covenants flow from the great covenant in eternity past, but also how they all come together in the life and work of Jesus!

The Apostle Paul stresses this in the opening portion of his second Epistle to the Church at Corinth:

II Corinthians 1:18 "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me, Silvanus, and Timothy--was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.

- 20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."

In order that we might see how all of this impacts our lives and the importance of remembering the heavenly perspective on Ascension Sunday I want to turn to one of Paul's Epistles and some wise words from Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo!

The Epistle that gives us the longest and most comprehensive review of God's Covenant is also the one that gives us the most practical advice for employers and employees [or slaves and masters if your nation is not as civilized as ours], for parents and children, for husbands and wives, for churches and their leaders... An Epistle that begins with God's actions in eternity and ends with an admonition to put on the armor we need for our battles here on earth...

The Book of course is the Epistle written to the Saints at Ephesus and yes the Apostle Paul begins with a rather long explanation of the eternal nature of God's plan of salvation for us! Some have argued that we must see what I am about to read as speaking to the corporate Church and others insist it must be for individuals, and the truth is that it is for both and applies to BOTH.

We as the Body of Christ and we as members of the Body of Christ should hear what the Apostle declares regarding God's action for us and toward us as He carries out His great plan of salvation covenanted among the Persons of the Trinity before the world began and carried out each day of our lives...

Ephesians 1: "1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: *[please note who the Saints are in Scripture!]* 2 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy & without blame before Him in love,"

[We will consider these heavenly blessings with the words of Augustine in a moment as part of our Ascension Sunday, but please note they are from eternity past!]

5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him.

- As we saw, ALL of the promises are fulfilled in Jesus and they are now ours because we are IN HIM!

11 “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

- Paul will now speak of praying for these Saints, as we should one for another, BECAUSE of what God has done for them! *[notice the therefore]*

15 “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 2: “1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

- Now this reality of being children of wrath, children of Adam may be seen in a long life of sin in some and merely the rebellion of young people who are trained to obey early in their lives, but the bottom line is we all are born as children of wrath and must have God’s grace... Again, this is why we baptize the covenant children that God blesses us with!

- We do so in faith, knowing that NO ONE is saved but for the grace of God...

4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

- And just so we don’t miss the point Paul says this again...

8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

- For almost the entire 38 years that I have been a Christian I have watched the battles of Lordship salvation or obedient faith & other debates over faith and works...

And they have been around for most of church history...

And yet it seems to me that so much would be solved if we simply keep these three glorious verses TOGETHER!

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10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

And then because Paul is addressing a Gentile audience he stresses how all of God’s Covenants that flowed from the one great covenant in eternity past are now brought to fulfilment in Christ:

11 “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”

17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

What glorious truths to reflect upon as we finish up our discussion of God’s Covenant with Noah on this Ascension Sunday for the year of our Lord 2014!

In closing I want to take us back about 1,500 years to hear reflections on these great truths from Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo given in one of his sermons on the Ascension of Jesus... And yes he was a Saint just like all the rest of us ☺

"Today our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; let our hearts ascend with him. Listen to the words of the Apostle:

If you have risen with Christ, set your hearts on the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth. For just as he remained with us even after his ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies.

Christ is now exalted above the heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his body, have to bear. He showed this when he cried out from above: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? and when he said: I was hungry and you gave me food. Why do we on earth not strive to find rest with him in heaven even now, through the faith, hope and love that unites us to him?

[in other words, why don’t we believe what Paul wrote to the Ephesians!]

While in heaven he is also with us; and we while on earth are with him. He is here with us by his divinity, his power and his love. We cannot be in heaven, as he is on earth, by divinity, but in him, we can be there by love. He did not leave heaven when he came down to us; nor did he withdraw from us when he went up again into heaven.

The fact that he was in heaven even while he was on earth is borne out by his own statement: No one has ever ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. These words are explained by our oneness with Christ, for he is our head and we are his body. No one ascended into heaven except Christ because we also are Christ: he is the Son of Man by his union with us, and we by our union with him are sons of God.

So the Apostle says: Just as the human body, which has many members, is a unity, because all the different members make one body, so is it also with Christ. He too has many members, but one body. Out of compassion for us he descended from heaven, and although he ascended alone, we also ascend, because we are in him by grace. Thus, no one but Christ descended and no one but Christ ascended; not because there is no distinction between the head and the body, but because the body as a unity cannot be separated from the head."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 116

"12 What shall I render to Jehovah For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of Jehovah. 14 I will pay my vows to Jehovah Now in the presence of all His people. 15 Precious in the sight of Jehovah Is the death of His saints.

16 O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. 17 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of Jehovah. 18 I will pay my vows to Jehovah Now in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the Jehovah's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise Jehovah!"