

Today we are going to be looking at “Words of Comfort, Signs of Hope for Those in the Valley of the Shadow”. How many of you know this: “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ...*” Oftentimes I think we apply that [phrase] to the end of life. (By the way I think that most of us are conscious of the fact that we have a number of saints who now are probably walking through the last section of that journey.) Realistically, beloved, we are all living in that valley. The advent of sin through the tragedy, the infamy of Adam’s rebellion against God, his rejection of His word has brought the shadow of death over the entirety of the earth and all of us live our lives in that valley. It is only through the redemption of Jesus Christ that we begin to get glimmers of hope, and it is only [when] the story is over that we are out of the valley. Someday the earth will be renewed. So today we are looking at something like that, trying to understand the nature of God’s grace as it come to us in the valley. The beginning sections of Genesis are designed to help us understand the way the world is; not the way we would like it to be, but the way the world is, both our sin and God’s grace. Those two need to come together if we are going to walk faithfully through the days God has given to us.

We have already devoted two messages to the eighth and ninth chapters of Genesis. Today we are going to devote a third to it. We have taken note already of God’s grace in remembering Noah after the flood, and we are going to visit that matter once again, perhaps from a rather surprising perspective, that God’s grace visits Noah to get him off the ark. We know that God’s grace visited Noah to get him on the ark, but it also visited him to get him off. We want to look at that.

We know about Noah that Noah was a man who waited on the Lord. We know that that waiting was not passive, it was active, Noah was continually keeping himself disciplined and focused in order that he might hear the Lord’s directions and be ready to act when the time had come. We also know that Noah when he got off the ark built an altar that he might worship the Lord God. He worshiped the Lord with a sacrifice. We considered that that sacrifice was one of thanksgiving – I am alive! – but also it was a petition – Here I am, here we are. Where are we exactly? Well, I just said we are in the valley of the shadow of death. But as we have contemplated before, Noah and his sons look out on the ruined world around them they realize they have the task of rebuilding the conditions for life in the midst of a world ruined by sin.

This is a paradigm; a paradigm is a model for you and for me to understand the way things work in the world that we actually live in. It is here that we begin to encounter the profound lesson of these two chapters. Getting off the ark and stepping into the world we know is a second start. It is critical that we not think that it is a return to Eden, because it is not. It is not a return to the way things were before sin left its mark. Here are some of the contrasts that I think it is wise for us to fix in our mind, because again it is a paradigm, wanting us to understand something about the way things work. So we know that Adam and Eve began in a garden. What do Noah and sons and wives begin in? [They begin] in a mud pit! It is not a garden. It is not a garden anymore. We know that Adam and Eve began in innocence, receiving life as a gift from God. It was an adventure in a world of beauty and bounty and goodness. What about Noah and sons? What do they begin in? Noah and sons receive life as those spared from death. They face the harrowing task of bringing order out of chaos. They are learning in whole new ways what the curse of God upon the soil really meant as the consequences of sin. This is what God had said already [Genesis 3:17-19], “*...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plant of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...*” Such would be the general condition for all mankind until the end of the age when God would make all things new. That is the condition of things that you and I must put up with all the time. How precious, therefore, are words such as these that [Peter] give to us in Acts 13:18-21. Listen to these beautiful words and ask yourself, are these words, do they echo in my heart, do they echo in my mind? Are these the lodestar that stands out in front of me and call me constantly forward. This is what Peter said: “*But what God*

foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out. . .” And here is the glorious promise, *“..that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”* That is now: refreshed in the Lord as we realize that our sins are taken away from us, the burden of our guilt is removed, we have free communion with the Holy Father; that the Holy Lord Jesus Christ comes to dwell in us, that the Holy Spirit comes to rest upon us: oh times of refreshing! How many have been in a bitter dispute with a fellow Christian and finally reached the place where you could say, “You know what, let’s set this aside. Let us forgive one another the way God has forgiven us. Let us restore the union, the bond of friendship, of fellowship.” What do you experience then? Suddenly the shadow of grief for joys lost melts away, and once again you and your friend can embrace one another, you have the freedom to openly express your affection for one another, and you can once again walk together down the road, rejoicing in the grace of God: times of refreshing. But you know what, you are still sinners aren’t you. So Peter goes on and he says something more: *“..that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”* Someday God will restore everything. He will restore the world to its first beauty. He will restore the innocence of creation as if sin had not occurred, and we will be utterly free from all of the sorrows, the trouble, the grief, the confusion, the contention: it will be gone! Do you live for that hope? By the way, it is because of this, it is when we finally understand, we get down to the root of the realities of the way the world is and the way we are to function in it, that Christians realize they are not caught in the world’s system. We begin to experience a liberation from the powerful seduction and pull of the myriad desires and delights [which] the world sets in front of us in order to capture us and make us its servants. For we realize there is nothing here that compares with what will be, therefore I will not let my soul become limited by the small pleasures of a fallen earth, because I live in the anticipation of the unlimited pleasures of a perfect God and a restored creation. That is, you see, the essence of the gospel we have received from Jesus Christ. It is far more than just escaping the short term consequences of our sin.

So now the ruined world matches the ruined souls of those drowned. Recovery for Noah and sons and their wives would entail the slow reclamation of the land. Desert and jungles, vast tracks of empty land where forests [grow] and prairies [stretch wide beneath the sun], the steppes of Asia and the savannahs of Africa; all of them inhabited by dangerous animals and in the course of time even more dangerous tribes and clans of men in the slowly emerging recovery from the flood: not a world of ordered fields and pleasant meadows. It is helpful for us to recapture the perspective of the ancient cultures’ on what we fondly refer to as “nature” by recalling a promise that God made to the Israelites when they were going to conquer the Promised Land. Nini and I right now are having a family reunion next summer. We are looking for just the perfect place to go and enjoy being together as a family. We plan to go up in the mountains. How many love going to the mountains, out in the forest: oh it is just wonderful. That is because you have guns. You have guns. When the eight hundred pound grizzly bear rises [then] pow! But what if you have no guns? What God promised the Israelites when they were going to conquer the Promised Land was, “I will make certain the wild animals will not devour you.” We forget now because it has been so long since it was true, but the Middle East in those days was filled with lions. It was a habitation filled with many, many powerful predatory animals, and rightly those people were fearful, very fearful of nature, as we so fondly refer to her as “mother nature.” This was a place of terror and they sought protection and God promised to give it.

How were those families when they came off that boat? What do you think? They look around and everything is changed, everything, nothing is as it was. We would say that was trauma. As they looked at the ruin and the death around them, they knew this was no natural disaster. It was the action of God in judgment. They are still sinners. The question that arises, realistically, is, what can we expect from a God Who is capable of such wrath? We tell ourselves constantly over and over, “Jesus loves you; Jesus loves you; Jesus loves you.” That is true. But I fear that sometimes we are repeating that as a mantra in order to forget the reality of God’s judgment. We are reminded of that now and then in the New Testament; in Hebrews in particular we reminded that it is a terrifying thing to fall

into the hands of a holy God. We should be mindful indeed. What can we anticipate from a God of such wrath? Peter tells us what will happen at the end of the age. You do know what will happen, [don't you]? The entirety of creation shall be burned up. Moses records for us in Genesis 8 two reassurances. They are needed. The first reassurance comes in 8:22. There what God says to Noah is that “...*while earth remains seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.*” How would that sound to someone who just went through a whole year of monstrous flood, in which certainly the seasons were lost sight of. The return of order, the promise of consistency, that you can count on what is coming down the line. Then in Genesis 9:8-17 we get the second reassurance. This is what God says:

“Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ‘Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 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.’ And 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: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh at is on the earth.’ God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’”

Oh hallelujah! Hallelujah! We are so far removed we can barely step into the emotional intensity of what that must have meant. But when those eight people were standing there at the edge of the ark looking at the ruined world around them, knowing that everything had been buried in water, and that everything but them had died in that water: oh how that must have sounded to them. “It will never happen again; you are safe; I am blessing you!” Together God's promise to Noah and the covenant of the rainbow promised stability and continuity in the world. This lies at the heart of what last week we referred to as the New World Order following the Fall and the Flood. Regarding God's response to Noah's sacrifice one of the commentators I read, Dereck Kidner, said this: “The assurance goes far beyond [what is stated in] v. 21, (*“Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.”*) It does not abolish disasters, but it does localize them, so that the human family may overcome them by forethought such as Joseph's – Ah, this is the way things work. Did he say there would never ever be a flood again? No. He said there will never be a flood again that will destroy all life upon the face of the earth. Will there be floods? Oh yes; in a fallen world that is the valley of the shadow of death you can anticipate there will be natural disasters, terrible things will occur. How will we respond? You might recall that there was a disaster that overtook Egypt in the days of Joseph. How did they respond? Joseph read the interpretation of the dreams that God sent to Pharaoh. “You have seven years of abundance before seven years of famine; I suggest you start saving now.” You can respond to the realities of life in the valley of the shadow as Paul instructed the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:14 where he says, “...*your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need.*...” This is the principle of sharing. I thought about this: I was blown away that this congregation gave over ten thousand dollars to assist the persecuted Christians in Syria and Iraq. That is fantastic! If I ever thought God smiled because of us as a group of believers I think that was the moment for God to smile. God's people responded with compassion. We give gifts to the Rescue Mission, we give gifts to the Hope Center. We support OCS and we support scholarship for kids to go to the school, we support missionaries overseas, we gifts to many people through our deacons, and when we do this we are doing exactly what we should do: our abundance is supplying other people's needs. Someday, someday, we do not know what our need will be.

But there is something else to observe about these promises from God. Both God's promise and His covenant are given wholly at God's initiative. Again the commentator Derek Kidner makes this observation regarding Genesis 9:8-17, “This first explicit covenant...is remarkable for its breadth (embracing ‘every living creature’), its

permanence (‘perpetual’, ‘everlasting’, etc.) and its generosity – for it was as unconditional as it was undeserved. For good measure, its sign and seal, a feature of all covenants, was such as to emphasize God’s sole initiative. . . .” – Who can produce a rainbow? God, only God; it is far out of man’s reach. – “Any idea that a covenant is basically a bargain – you scratch my back, I will scratch yours – this is a covenant freely given by God, He undertakes it entirely at His own initiative, and He expects nothing from us in return. It is a covenant without any obligations laid on the recipients.

How do we know that that is true? How do we know that we are not partners with God in sustaining this covenant? There are a couple of places you can go and look. Turn if you would to Acts 14:15-17. Here the apostle Paul is talking to a pagan crowd. What they have done as a result of Paul having performed a miracle through the power of the Holy Spirit [is that] they have decided that he is a god, one of their pagan gods, and they are trying to worship him. Paul says, “Knock it off! You guys are totally misunderstanding.” He says, “*Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things [these idolatrous practices] to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*” Whom did he satisfy? [It was] the worshipers of Moloch! The worshipers of Baal. The worshipers of Isis (Not the current one: Isis was a god of Egypt.) Did you ever think about that? God pours out His blessings on those who spurned Him. That is right. But there is more than that. We hear the same don’t we from Jesus. Listen to these words of Jesus, Matthew 5:44-45, “*But I say to you – He is talking, by the way, to us – love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. – here is the statement – For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*” Beloved, what is it like to live in the valley of the shadow of death? [It is] because sinners live here and it is under the curse of God. In this place, this world in which we live, God’s blessings are freely poured out on the just and the unjust. He gives His rains and blessed seasons to the worshipers of Moloch! What about us? Notice what Jesus says; He says pray for those who persecute you, love your enemies so that you may be sons of the Father. You are to have the same character. You are to have the same qualities, the same purpose and devotion as your heavenly Father. The Deacons are concerned now and then, and they are quite right to be concerned. How many times do we give our money to people who shouldn’t get it because they are wasteful bums? Well, of course we do; what do you think? Do you think you can spread God’s bounty around and carefully make certain that only the deserving get it? Don’t be absurd, you can’t do that. You can’t look upon the heart of this person. You have no idea whether or not your freely given gift to the unworthy might be the beginning of God’s grace to change them into what He wants them to be. Shall we be hard, narrow, judgmental, condemning? God isn’t; if He was, we’re done! But He gives freely, remarkably.

All of this in some ways might seem irrelevant to us, a bit distant, although we can understand it would be an important reassurance in the aftermath of a universal flood. However I think it is demonstrable that as both the knowledge of and belief in the revealed truths of the Bible fade from our culture’s consciousness, that apprehension regarding the potentiality for massive instability and destabilization of the world has steadily increased. Our generation is more anxious and anxiety ridden than the last and the one before that. We are afraid of the most amazing things: climate change, earthquakes, giant meteors, solar storms. I decided not to make four or five slides of this stuff! Fear runs like waves, back and forth through our society. Fear grips people. Fear – it just amazes me. I hope all of you have four months’ worth of food stacked up in you cellar someplace. Who knows! “I am not going to give it to anybody else; I am going to make sure I’ve got it for me! A nice big pile!” I always think to myself, “Hmm, and when you have your pile, and your neighbor comes, what are going to do, shoot them?” To what degree of barbarity will we be reduced when the hour of necessity puts question against our self-sufficiency?

None of these things are impossible, by the way. It is a question of who we think is in charge. God’s promise is not only that there will not again will be a universal flood, for He says, “I will preserve the order and rhythms of earthly life until the end.” Jeremiah – we read a little of him earlier – was inspired to expand on that promise. If you look at Jeremiah 31:35-36, this is what he says, *“Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the night fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night; who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.’”* What is His point? It is not going to stop. The point is this, God’s covenant of salvation is an eternal covenant and you and I are saved. We are safe.

So the question that arises when you get to this point, when you get to understand these promises that God has set out, “Is this a disordered world?” How many remember the typhoon and what do you call those things, huge waves – the tsunami? Two hundred and fifty thousand people wiped out! Are things wrong in the world? Yes, they are wrong. Why are they wrong? [It is because] we are sinners, this is sin filled world. Is God’s grace present in this world? Yes. That is why there is God’s grace; it is a place of sinners. Things go wrong, terribly wrong. How are we to respond? Trust God and do good. Trust God and be generous. Trust God and know that if you walk with Him it is well with you. He says, “I will sustain the order of things to the end of the age.” When the order of things falls apart, the age is over. At that moment you and I can anticipate that the Lord Jesus Christ will gather us up to be with Himself. In the meantime will you live by fear or trusting in the goodness of God? Trust God, do good. These are the things that demonstrate the reality of our faith in the God Who has saved us.

There is in addition to this general principle hidden inside the sweeping realities of God’s grace a personal and practical dimension. God is promising His grace for recovery from the ruin of sin which disrupts us along the way. God’s grace is promising recovery from the ruin of sin along the way. Some of you can probably identify with this. How many of us are now living on the other side in the midst of a recovery from times of sins. Suddenly your life was shattered, the order routine of your life was shattered, your hopes shattered, you lost your vision of God’s grace and God’s love. You fell into evil practices and now you have come out again and you are standing much like Noah getting off the ark and saying, “Ok, God loves me, God has saved me; here is the ruin, I have to create [the conditions for] life.

Understand that is by no means limited, the valley of the shadow of death, to the flood. In fact, what I had read this morning was very much the same thing. Israel got to Babylon not because she was virtuous and on a missionary journey. Instead she had been so stubbornly, persistently idolatrous and rebellious against God in the Promised Land, that finally God said, “Alright, you are done. I am wiping you out, not as a nation. But I am going to send you where you can see what it is really like to live under the gods of this world. So He sent them to Babylon. Must have been pleasant! But this, then, is what He said. “Look, here you are. This is what I want you to do in Babylon [Jeremiah 29:4-7 and 11-14a].

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Takes wives and have sons and daughters; takes wives for your sons, and give you daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf...” – for Babylon? Pray for its welfare? Pray that it prospers? Yes! – *for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”* *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”*

There is a powerful lesson for us to take home and to keep firmly in our hearts and in our minds. God’s judgments against His people are redemptive always. That is the nature of God’s dealing with us in grace in this age. They are intended to bring His people back onto the path of life and back to the first work. What was the first work that

God set for man upon the face of the earth? He said, “You are to multiply and fill the earth and you are to rule over it and you are to subdue it so that it is perfected for the flourishing of life.

I have an incredible example of what it means to perfect things in order that life would flourish, but you all need to pray. Yesterday my wife and I wandered off and down to Sacramento and did one of what is probably one of the most foolish things I have ever agreed to do. We agreed to line parts of our kitchen with rocks! We are following the herd and putting all over in our kitchen. But what is remarkable is if you take a piece of granite and you cut it and polish it, it is perfected. It’s beautiful! That is what he is talking about. We are to take the world and subdue it and perfect and bringing it to its full potential for whatever purposes might be found. What a gorgeous thing to do! One criteria, I said I certainly expect the quality of food to go up!

This is our charge in the fallen world. Let me ask you a question: If we could analogically take and slice through Oroville and polish it, would there be beauty? We are called to pray for and to work for the welfare of the community in which we live.

In the last few minutes we have to take a different turn. We are going to walk back into the valley of the shadows. All of us, I think had we the ability to edit, would prefer not to have Genesis 9 go beyond verse 18. Moses speaks briefly of Noah’s three sons as those from whom all mankind will now descend. That is a very important fact. Then Moses tells us...what does he tell us? He tells us of the drunkenness of Noah and the disaster that follows. It is essential as we read through these verses that we keep telling ourselves that this is the only righteous man that God found. It is essential that we keep that clear in our understanding. This is what we are told in Genesis 9:19-29.

“The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘blessed by the Lord, the god of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.’ After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

At the start of this message I said that God was gracious in remembering Noah at the end of the flood. Some might think that God remembered Noah because Noah was righteous. To some extent that would be true. Noah believed in God, he trusted God; he trusted God’s love for him. But he was not perfect. He was not perfect in his love. It was not a perfect trust. Noah was still a sinner. God knew this. God knew that he would plant the vine. He knew he would drink the wine. He knew he would become drunk. He knew, and yet He brought him off the ark. [Have] you ever dealt with anybody like that? Have you ever endeavored to extent grace to someone and you knew before long they would fall again? So do you not extend grace? Of course you extend grace. Of course you do.

Beloved, this is distressing. It is heart rending. Noah’s sons multiply and set out once again to fill the earth. Noah plants a vineyard and gets drunk. The Bible condemns drunkenness, instructs us in temperance. It tells people with special religious obligation not to drink at all. You cannot read the Bible and not realize that the Bible is fully aware of the danger of alcohol, probably the most destructive drug in America. It defies credibility to think that Noah knew nothing of those dangers before the days of the flood. I am sure people got drunk in the generations before the flood. There is something very important as we seek to understand, to get inside, to be as close to where Noah was as we can, which what we need to do if we are going to let these episodes talk to us. We need to realize that we

do not need to say that Noah set out to get drunk, that is, to sin. I cannot imagine that he did. But I can imagine this: that he did not determine not to get drunk, but just let himself go. The price of negligence in this case is very great indeed. But then I think the price of negligence in all our lives is far more than we want to think.

To understand Noah’s judgment on Ham and Canaan, you have to know that the word used in the phrase, “saw the nakedness” means to gaze with intent. The propagation of children was understood as a sacred duty even as the children born were seen as the direct action of God. That sex was pleasurable was as obvious to them as it is to us, of course. That such pleasure could be disorienting, that it could pull someone into immoral thoughts and acts they also surely knew very well. That is what is implied here. There is something deeply wrong in what Ham did. He disrespected his father under the prompting of inappropriate sexual desire and in consequence a curse [was given]. The first thing to keep in mind is that it was Noah’s negligence in allowing himself to get drunk that becomes the occasion in which Ham falls. How careful should we be? I resolved as a young man first considering going into the pastorate that I would do everything in my power to do nothing that would ever occasion anybody whom I served to fall. I accept freely the responsibility to be as exemplary as a saved sinner can be. When I slip, I accept responsibility and expect to be held accountable for it. Dads, every father is priest in his home and bears the primary responsibility to uphold the righteousness of the ways of God. Consequently also we must accept the responsibility of being accountable and letting our family hold us to account when we have fallen. Negligence, inattention to the righteousness that is expected can bear horrible consequence. That is what happens in the first example.

Ham disrespected his father. We need to recall that at the core of the corruption in the pre-flood world was that the sons of God took as wives “any they chose”. Considerations of their family or of their character were set aside. We are told that the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children to them. In the context we understand that these are the children of the line of Seth who are now mixing with the line of Cain, a loss of any sense of holiness, any sense of separation. What we are to understand regarding this is that here, already at the beginning, in the family which will be the fountainhead of all who are to follow sexual immorality is already powerfully present. What do you think, do we have problems with sexual immorality? Oh my goodness! What did you think in the valley of the shadow? So how overwhelmingly necessary it become for us to maintain the presence of the light of God’s truth so that we do not let the shadows enfold us or infill us, but rather we keep the light of His purity continually burning so that we can avoid that part of the shadow. Sin shatters unity, alienates affection, breeds pride as well as suspicion and fear. The ascendancy of sin in the life of any people leads to disorder. The disorder is not limited to those being restrained by government. It is equally present in the hearts of those who govern. Responding to Ham’s sin Noah speaks God’s judgment. What is God’s judgment? He says some people will rule over others. Have you noticed? I am an historian, that was my background before I came into the pastoral ministry. There is one sense in which the entire history of mankind is the story of continual warfare as one group of people asserts its superiority over another. There will be hierarchies of power in the world. What is not said here but is soon apparent is that the state will become a hierarchy of power and crush those beneath it.

Now the stage is set. This is the world in which Moses lived. This is the world in which Jesus died, in which, rather, we either do or don’t meet with the Savior of souls. Moses was the child of an enslaved and oppressed people, adopted by their oppressors, at the time the most people in the world, fabulously wealthy and utterly idolatrous and ruling over the sons and daughters of Abraham. What is the world like for us today? We live in the Valley. Happily God’s light has been brought to us. It is precious and not to be neglected.

Please pray with me: Gracious Father we give You thanks. You in Your grace are very good to us, beyond any merit of our own. So may we learn to rest in the certainty of Your promises. May we have every confidence in the stability and continuity of the world until the end of time. Then Father we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ. In

the meanwhile may we be sons and daughters of our God, gracious, resting in God and doing good to others. We ask this, our Father, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application: “Words of Comfort, Signs of Hope for those in the Valley of Shadow”, text, Genesis 8:20-9:29

1. The account of Noah as an account of God’s grace tells us that grace is not given to us so that we can avoid dealing with the consequences of sin, but so that we escape God’s condemnation for our sin and instead receive God’s help in recovering from sin’s ruin. How can we raise children to know this?
2. What lessons have you learned for relying on God’s grace in recovering from sin?
3. As you see it, what assurances do sinners most need if they are going to trust God?
4. What is the most beautiful rainbow you have ever seen? Do rainbows remind you of God and His promise that He will not destroy the world in punishment until the very end?
5. Natural disasters are just part of the way things are. What two ways were mentioned by which people can cope with natural disasters? (See 2 Corinthians 8:14 for the second.)
6. Would you agree that knowing the promises and the prophecies of God fosters peace of mind and that as these fade from our culture’s awareness there is greater uneasiness and fear? What are some of the fears regarding the future of the world that trouble people?
7. What are some of the ways that God has graciously helped you or others you know to recover from times of sin and disorder in their lives?
8. Noah was a righteous man and a great man, but he was still a sinner. Have you ever been disappointed when someone you saw as truly righteous has failed?
9. At the heart of Ham’s sin was the failure to respect or honor his father. Our culture is extremely disrespectful of fathers and fatherhood. What are some ways we can correct this in our homes and church life?