The First Covenant

Genesis 9:1-17
Key Verse: Genesis 9:11
“I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

Today were going to talk about covenants. A covenant is a binding contract between two or more parties. One of the most common covenants is the marriage covenant. In it a husband and a wife will make promises to each other. A common one sounds like this: I, _____, take you, ____, to be my wife (or husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy law, this is my solemn vow. That is pretty binding. But at least you know where you stand and you are protected. Imagine what it would be like if there wasn’t such a vow, how could you be sure of your spouse’s eternal pledge of love and commitment?

There are all kinds of examples of and how important covenants are still in today’s world (business contracts, peace treaties-NATO, etc.), and why we need them. Imagine life without covenants. Without them, you might not get paid for your hours of work each week. What if nations didn’t keep their peace treaty? In this passage, we see how gracious God is to make covenants with us. And here we see God’s first covenant, and it’s one of pure grace because it’s one-sided. There are three parts the covenant blessing, the covenant promise, the covenant sign. You may wonder, “What does God's covenant with Noah have to do with you?” God's covenant with Noah has never been revoked it still applies today.

In last week’s passage, Noah, his family, and all the animals finally left the ark after being in there for over a year. As soon as he got out, Noah, was so thankful that God saved him from the flood, he gave an offering to God. The Lord saw his faith and was pleased. Then God poured out his blessing upon him. Take a look at verse 1. “Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” This verse echo’s the blessing God gave Adam (Gen 1:28). Even after God saw that man was only evil all the time, God still wanted to bless his children. God wanted mankind to be fruitful, to prosper, and to increase in number. God never wished to do us harm. Everything he did, and has done, has been to the benefit of mankind. However, this second blessing was a little different than the first because God omitted subduing and ruling over the creatures. Instead of ruling over the animals, man would now be allowed to eat them. God gives man a new diet and actually, the animals would now be afraid of man because “Meat was now on the menu.”

Take a look at verses 2-3. “The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. 3 Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.” For the first time in history the

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animals, which had spent the last year cooped up with Noah and his family, would be terrified of mankind. In the past, Noah could have cuddled with a Bengal tiger, (remember he named the tiger) or slept next to the cow, but now when Noah looked at that cow, all he saw was hamburgers and steak. And when he looked at the lamb he thought of a gyros sandwich. And whenever he heard the cluck of a chicken, he couldn't stop thinking about frying it. All the animals would run away from him in fear because mankind just became the alpha predator. Before the flood, mankind were herbivores but after the flood they became omnivores. None of them were safe anymore, anything that walked on the ground, or flew in the air, or swam in the water God said it was all ok to eat. Obviously, this would worry the animals, so that's why they were filled with fear and dread and stayed away. Before this, they had never experience fear and dread. The sin of mankind not only broke the relationship between man and God, but also between man and animals. This will never be restored until we see Jesus return.

Even though God gave the animals to man for food, they still had to follow some rules, especially in regard to blood. God wanted to instill in man's heart the importance of blood. Take a look at verses 4-5. "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being." Although mankind was now allowed to eat animals, they were NOT supposed to eat the meat that still had its lifeblood still in it. This is because blood was the source of life. "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Lev 17:11) And it was Abel's blood that Cain spilt that cried out to God for justice. (Ge 4:10) It is interesting that as soon as Noah got out of the ark, God had to make a rule against murder. He was going to hold mankind accountable. God announced three times that He will demand an "accounting" for the taking of human life – from both man and beast. That word "accounting" is very interesting. It means to inquire, investigate, study, follow, read repeatedly, and search carefully. Think of a CSI team carefully going over a crime scene. In God's eyes the shedding of human blood and the taking of human life requires due diligence. Why this triple warning? Because God knows what is in the hearts of men. God knows man is prone to violence, because our sinful hearts are filled with hate.

Human life is important. Human blood must not be shed and human life must not be taken. Yet, God knows it will happen anyway. So, note the consequences in verses 6-7. "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. 7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it." After the destruction the flood caused and the terrible loss of life, there could be a danger that life would be cheapened. Maybe life would not be valued as it should be. The thinking would be, "If God wiped out so many people, then they must not be worth that much." Then people wouldn't think twice to take a person's life. John Wesley Hardin, a gunfighter from the Wild West Days of America in the late 1800s, got a reputation for being so mean, that he once killed a man for snoring. (he could hear the man snoring in the room next to him and he couldn't get any sleep, so he yelled turn that man over, when he got no response he shot twice into the wall, one of the

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bullets hit the man in the head) And even now-a-days, there is so much senseless killing I fear that people will grow to not value life, the Parkland Florida shooting took 17 people's lives, and for what? We may be tempted to look at someone that isn't like us and think that they don't measure up to our standards. And as a result, we don't really value them. Especially in our time now, people have become so divided and hostile toward one another there is a danger to devalue those who don't agree with us. But in God's eyes all life is sacred. Human life is a gift of and from God, so, only He can decide when human life is to end. All life is sacred because mankind was made in God's image. And if a life is taken, then that image of God is snuffed out. Not only that, those people are also God's children and he loves them too. So instead of killing one another, God wants us to be fruitful, to prosper, and to increase in number, not decrease by killing each other.

Now let's take a look at the covenant promise in verses 8-10. "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth." When God gave Noah this promise, do you think Noah breathed a huge sigh of relief? Noah knew he was still a sinner. Noah knew every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). Noah knew God had every right to destroy the world again. But God announced He wouldn't. As we see at the end of Genesis 8, this covenant promise means that "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen 8:22). The first time the word covenant is mentioned in the Bible is in chapter six when God told Noah to build the ark. God said, "I WILL establish my covenant with you" and the second time it's mentioned is here in chapter 9 when God says, "I NOW establish my covenant with you." It was just three short chapters in Genesis, but the actual time frame was about 120 years. God remembered his promise and was true to his word. I find it interesting when you do a word search in the Bible, on the two words covenant and blood, when you see covenant very often blood appears near it showing how closely they are related. Blood is mentioned 392 times and covenant is mentioned 332 times, not only does this shows how closely they are related (almost equally distributed), but how important these topics are to God. A covenant is a binding contract between two parties **enforceable by law**. When people enter into a contract, they do so to protect each other as well as, make their arrangement clear so everyone knows where they stand. God came to Noah and offered this contract to Noah. God didn't have to make it with Noah, but he wanted to, and he did it voluntarily. Who are we, that God needs to put his promise into writing? But he does it so we can be sure, without a doubt, he will do what he says. We can even hold him to it because he documents his promise for us. One thing great about the covenant God made to Noah was that it was unconditional – Noah didn't have to do anything. The promise was based completely on God's faithfulness. Unlike the covenant God made with Moses which was conditional: obey the Law, and I will prosper you, disobey, and I will punish you. Not only that, it was universal, for all people, all animals and the whole earth as well as, all their descendants down through time to us.

In verse 11, God gives his promise to Noah, "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

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This contract, was a one-sided contract, God offered everything and demanded nothing from Noah. God promised to never again destroy all life with a flood. When God saw the destruction, the flood brought upon the earth, he vowed that he would never do it again.

And finally, in verses 12-17 we see the covenant sign that God gave Noah. “And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” 17 So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.” (what do you think of when you see a rainbow?) In our time we are big on logos or icons. Logos are the chief visual component of a company's overall brand identity. A good logo is the cornerstone of a company’s brand. It helps customers understand what the company does, who they are and what they value. God was the original logo designer. God’s first logo was the rainbow. As a sign of the covenant, God set a rainbow in the clouds. But, did you notice who the rainbow was for? It wasn’t a sign for man to help us remember what God had done. Although it did that, God put the rainbow in the sky as a sign for himself. God said, “I will remember…” and “I will see it and remember.” The rainbow was for God's benefit. Inevitability, someone reading this might think, why does God need to remind himself, does he have a bad memory? Let me answer that by asking another question: What really is a rainbow? It is more than just white light broken by a prism into its various colors. The word for "rainbow" in our Bible is the same word used for bows wielded in battle. The Hebrew word is “war-bow”. From the flood we see that God is a warrior. And he rained down arrows of destruction upon the earth with the flood. But after the flood God hung up his weapon and set it in the clouds. A rainbow has the curve of a hunting bow, but it doesn’t have a string or arrow. Without a string, or arrow, it can’t be used as a weapon of war. How many of us when you look at a rainbow and are reminded that God is a Warrior-Judge? Are you comforted to know that God has put his weapon up, like over a mantle, on display for all to see?

Notice how God concludes this part with the past tense in verse 17, God said, “I have established”. It was done, God sealed it. In fact, God sealed the contract in blood, Jesus’ blood. Remember how God puts such a high value on blood, and on life. Blood is our source of life. Without blood we’ll die. If you see your blood outside your body, that’s not a good sign. I read that they are doing “young blood” transfusions in the hopes to extend life – a new anti-aging start-up company called Ambrosia, is charging about $8,000 a pop for blood transfusions from people under 25. However, our human blood will only give us life for so long, but Jesus’ blood gives eternal life. Just as God established a covenant with Noah, Jesus established a new covenant with us through his blood. Jesus said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mt 26:28) Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. He is the one who stands between us and God, and locks in the agreement. “For you know that it was not with

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perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Pe 1:18-19) Jesus' precious blood guarantees this covenant for us – that God would write his laws in our hearts and minds and forgive our sins. This promise is made secure by Jesus' blood, which has the power to cleanse and purify us totally.

God's covenant with Noah, revealed God's unconditional promise of grace. No matter how much more sinful man would get, God promised that he would not destroy all life in a flood. (This doesn't mean he won't purge all sin in fire at the Lord's Day, but until that day comes, the whole earth will never be flooded to destroy life). This was an unconditional promise of God's grace. With the New Covenant, this is also an unconditional promise of God's grace: that our sins are forgiven. Sin is what caused the Flood to come. Sin causes death. But Jesus' blood establishes the New Covenant, because his blood covers over our sins and washes them clean. "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Ro 5:9) There is power in Jesus' blood. Jesus' blood has the power to free us from our burdens of sin. Jesus' blood has power to free us from our pride. Jesus' blood has power to make us as white as snow. And it is unconditional because Jesus gave his blood for us. Yes, our life blood is precious, but how much more precious is the blood of Christ. And it was poured out, given freely to us to establish the new covenant. God promised that when he saw the rainbow, he would remember his promise to all mankind, God also promised, for those who believe and follow him, when looks upon Jesus he will remember our sins no more.

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