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ASSURANCE FROM GOD

Genesis 9:8-17

By

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Genesis Lesson 20

Assurance From God Genesis 9:8-17

If you have gone through a traumatic experience, afterward you probably struggled with anxiety about whether it would happen again. After Marla and I were mugged at gunpoint outside our apartment in Dallas, there was not a night when I came home that I did not think about the possibility of a gunman waiting to get me. Even now I am much more observant of suspicious looking characters when I am out after dark. I don't want the same thing to happen again.

Of course, we can't guarantee that traumatic events will not recur. I may get mugged again. If you've been in a bad accident, it could happen again. Life is uncertain in these matters. But there is a most important traumatic event in the future where we can be certain about the outcome. That event is God's judgment, when we all must stand before Him. We all must soberly face the questions: Will God judge me for my sins? Should I fear God's judgment?

It's crucial that we answer these questions carefully based on God's Word of truth. There are many who do not fear God's judgment who ought to be greatly troubled by it. But there are others who fear God's judgment who need assurance from God that their sins are forgiven and that they will not be condemned when they stand before Him. It is to these people that our text gives a word of assurance.

More than anyone who has ever lived, Noah needed God's assurance concerning future judgment. He had just come through the most devastating, widespread judgment God has ever inflicted on the human race. Everyone on earth, except Noah and his family, had been destroyed in the flood. All animal life, except that on the ark, died. We can barely imagine the feelings of horror and anxiety which swept over Noah and his family as they emerged from the ark as the sole survivors on the planet. Everyone they knew before was gone. Every time they started to say, "Let's go see so-and-so," they stopped mid-sentence. So-and--so wasn't there any more.

Imagine the terror they would have felt when they heard thunder and saw storm clouds forming. Every little rainstorm could make their stomachs churn. What if the rain doesn't stop? What if God destroys us this time? Should we even bother to build homes and plant crops, or will God wipe out everything again? These questions must have been plaguing their minds. Noah and his family needed to know, "Is God going to judge us?"

Anxious people need assurance, and they need to hear it over and over. God graciously repeats Himself ("covenant" occurs 7 times in 9:8-17), so that Noah and his family will not only hear the message, but also *feel* it. He promises never to destroy the earth again by a flood (9:11, 15). God's promise to Noah was not a spiritual promise, since it concerned the physical destruction of the earth. But it points ahead to the spiritual promise He makes to us in Christ:

Because God is faithful to His promises, believers can have assurance of deliverance from His judgment.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We don't have to live in anxiety about past sins. We can know with certainty that our deliverance from judgment is based on God's faithfulness to the promises of His Word.

Lucy and Linus were looking out the window at a steady downpour. "Boy," said Lucy, "look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?" "It will never do that," Linus replies confidently. "In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that it would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow." "You've taken a great load off my mind," says Lucy with a relieved smile. "Sound theology," Linus affirms, "has a way of doing that!" Let's look at the theology stemming from God's promise to Noah.

1. God is faithful to His promises.
 - A. God's promise to Noah: Never to destroy the earth again by a flood.

God has kept that promise now for over 4,000 years! The word "covenant" used here is an important word in the Bible.

There are different covenants which God made with people. But the idea is always the same. A covenant is "a pledged and defined relationship" (Herbert M. Carson, *Basic Christian Doctrines* [Baker, 1962], ed. by Carl Henry, p. 117). God pledges to do certain things in a defined relationship of responsibility toward certain people. Note the following aspects of God's covenant with Noah:

(1) *It was unilateral.* God took the sole initiative. Noah didn't think this up. He didn't negotiate with God. God originated this covenant and announced its terms to Noah. All of God's covenants are that way. He is sovereign. He determines what He will do in accordance with the counsel of His own will. We cannot come to God and try to bargain. In Hong Kong, you can sometimes bargain with the shop owners. But some of them have signs that say, "Fixed price." That means no bargaining. Don't waste your time! God's covenants with man are that way. He fixes the terms and announces what they will be.

(2) *It was eternal* (9:12, 16). God knows His plan from the beginning and carries it out exactly as He promises. While men may disobey and seemingly thwart God's purposes, His promises will be fulfilled. The Lord promises never again to destroy the world by a flood. This does not mean that God will never again judge the ungodly and destroy the earth. We would err seriously to think that! But it will remain in effect until the Lord returns (2 Pet. 3:4-7, 10).

(3) *It was universal* (9:9-11). It even included the animals! God's blessings of protection from the judgment of a universal flood extend to every living thing. While there have been local floods that have killed many people and animals, there has never been a flood of such proportions as the one in Noah's day. (This promise, by the way, is a strong biblical evidence that the flood was not just local.)

Every person who has ever lived has had opportunity to observe God's mercy through the creation, even in God's care for the animals. As Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

(4) *It was unconditional.* God does not say that the promise will be revoked if men reach the same levels of sin as they did before. The Mosaic covenant was conditional. It depended on the obedience of the nation Israel. If they didn't obey, God would not keep His part of the deal, to bless them (Deut. 28). But the covenant with Noah was not dependent on Noah's or anyone else's obedience. It depended solely on God's word to Noah.

God's covenant with Noah reveals His abundant grace. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward those who deserve His judgment. If God acted on the basis of what we deserve, the human race would have perished centuries ago. Do you ever think about what God must see as He looks upon the earth? Sometimes when I read the crud in the newspaper, I feel overwhelmed with the corruption of this evil world. But God sees it all, and yet He withholds His judgment, graciously offering forgiveness to sinners. What amazing grace! Though the day of judgment is coming soon, today is still the day of salvation, when God offers a free pardon to every sinner who will take it.

(5) *It was confirmed by a sign (9:12-17).* Some think the rainbow first appears here; others think that God is giving new significance to something Noah already knew about. If there had been a cloud canopy over the earth before the flood, and it had not rained, but rather the earth had been watered by a mist coming up from the ground (Gen. 2:5-6), then it's reasonable to think that now, with the climatic changes after the flood, a rainbow appeared for the first time. One commentator suggests that up to verse 17, God was speaking to Noah, but Noah didn't know what God meant by a rainbow. But then God spread a beautiful rainbow across the sky, and while Noah was gasping in awe, God said, "*This is the sign of the covenant*"

God's sign of the rainbow was both gracious and appropriate. God put the sign in the clouds, where Noah and his family would have looked with fear when the storms came. The same water which destroyed the earth now causes the rainbow. Arising, as it does, from the conjunction of the sun and the storm, it points to God's mercy breaking through even in His judgment. Coming at the end of the storm, it shows that the storm of God's wrath is past.

Franz Delitzsch insightfully wrote, "As [the rainbow] shines forth against a dark background which but shortly before flashed with lightnings, it symbolizes the victory of bright, gentle love over the darkly luminous wrath; growing as it does out of the interaction of sun and dark clouds, it symbolizes the readiness of the heavenly to interpenetrate the earthly; extending from heaven to earth, it proclaims peace between God and man; reaching, as it does, beyond the range of vision, it declares that God's covenant of grace is all-embracing" (in H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* [Baker], p. 340).

Just as there is nothing quite as beautiful and breathtaking as a rainbow, so there is nothing as glorious and beautiful as the many splendored grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10). Just as a rainbow allows us to see the various facets of pure, white light, so God's grace enables us to see Him who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see (1 Tim. 6:16). Even if man forgets the meaning of the rainbow, God says that He will look at it and remember His covenant (Gen. 9:16).

I think that science sometimes robs us of appreciating God's revelation through His creation. It's like a chemist doing an analysis of the chemical elements in a piece of strawberry pie. I suppose there's a place for that, but the main thing with strawberry pie is, "Taste it!" You can explain a rainbow as a refraction of light, but the main thing is, enjoy its beauty and remember the meaning God assigns it, that He is faithful to His promises on our behalf!

There are many parallels, and a few differences, between God's promise to Noah and His promises to us in Christ:

B. God's promise in Christ: To deliver all who trust in Him.

Just as God destroyed the world through the flood, and the only ones saved were those in the ark, so He has said that He will yet destroy the world through fire and only those who are in Christ will be saved (2 Pet. 3:4-7, 10). Jesus instituted the New Covenant in His blood, through which He promised to deliver all who trust in Him.

(1) *It is unilateral.* It stems completely from God. He initiated it, He laid down the stipulations of it. It's not up for debate if you don't like it. It stems from God's grace toward those who deserve

His wrath. God owes us nothing. The only merit is the merit of Christ. Many people miss God's offer of salvation because they insist on coming to God on their own merit. But we can't come to God until we realize that He has done it all. We can only receive as a gift what He has done. We can't bargain with God based on our good works.

(2) *It is eternal.* The author to the Hebrews argues that Christ's blood obtained "eternal redemption" (Heb. 5:9; 9:12). We don't have to fear that God will change the terms of the covenant at some point in the future. When Jesus from the cross said, "It is finished," He meant that His work of redemption completely paid the penalty for our sins. There is nothing to be added to what He did there. It is accomplished and established forever.

(3) *It is universal.* That is, it is available to all who will believe in Jesus Christ. It excludes no race; Christ purchased for God with His blood those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). None will be excluded from God's covenant because their sin was too great (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

(4) *It is conditioned on faith in Jesus Christ.* God's covenant with Noah applies to everyone, apart from their faith. It even applies to all the animals. But God's new covenant in Christ applies only to those who put their trust in Him as Savior. Jesus said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). John writes, "... whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of the new covenant.

Perhaps you're wondering, "I don't have faith in Christ. How do I get it?" Faith is not something we work up. If it were, we could boast in our faith. Faith is something God imparts to the seeking heart as you hear the truth about God as revealed in His Word. Faith doesn't focus on itself, but on God who is totally dependable. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Since Jesus is both the author and perfecter of faith (Heb. 12:2), ask Him to give you the faith you need for salvation.

(5) *Its sign is the Lord's Supper.* When the Lord, on the night He was betrayed, offered the bread and the wine, He said that the cup was the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). Just as Noah could look at the rainbow and know that God's judgment was past, so we can contemplate the emblems of the Lord's Supper and know that His judgment for us is past. The storm is over; Christ bore the flood of God's wrath for us, and gave us a sign to assure us. If you wrestle with recurring guilt over past sins, come often to the Lord's Table. It is the sign God has given to us in Christ that there will be no more judgment. Thus,

2. Believers can have assurance of deliverance from God's judgment.

God binds Himself by His covenant and lays down the terms of His relationship to man. It is for us simply to receive it and act upon it. Notice how repeatedly God emphasizes to Noah that it is He, God, who is making the covenant:

"I Myself do establish My covenant with you" (9:9); "And I establish My covenant with you" (9:11); "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you" (9:12); "... My bow ... shall be for a sign of a covenant" (9:13); "I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you" (9:15); "I will look upon it [the rainbow], to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature" (9:16); "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh" (9:17).

Over and over God drives home the point so that Noah can be assured, not based on his feelings, but on God's sure word. And yet God wanted Noah to get beyond the intellectual level to the feeling level, so that, based on his faith, Noah would know in his heart that God's judgment was past. Noah's trust in God would have been strengthened from these words repeated by God.

God wants us to know that we have eternal life if we have believed in Christ. It is not based on our feelings, but on the sure word of the Lord, who has said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and

no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

If we believe God's promise, we can have His assurance in our hearts. It is based on believing God's Word, but it ought to go beyond intellectual assent, down to the depths of our hearts. God wants us to feel assured of forgiveness in Christ, based on His sure word of promise.

Conclusion

Just as the Lord graciously repeated Himself over and over to Noah to assure his trembling heart, so He reaffirms His grace and mercy to us in Christ over and over. Just as God gave Noah (and us) the repeated sign of the rainbow to tell us that the storm of His wrath is over, so He tells us to observe the Lord's Supper often, where we see the sign of peace, the communion elements, which tell us that Christ bore the storm of His wrath. We need not fear God's judgment if we are safe in Christ. Perhaps some past sins keep plaguing you with doubts about your standing before God. He wants you to know that if you have trusted in Christ, He has removed your sins from you as far as the east is from the west. "As many as may be the promises of God, in [Christ] they are yes" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Donald Grey Barnhouse (*Let Me Illustrate* [Revell, 1967], pp. 253-254) tells of a French woman during World War I who was going through a time of great trial. Barnhouse had led this woman to Christ, and had introduced to her the idea of a promise box. It was a small box kept on the kitchen table in which were about 200 tiny rolls of paper, each with a Bible promise written on it.

During this time, the war was raging and this woman had no food for her children, except scraps of potato peelings from a nearby restaurant. Their clothes were in rags and their shoes were worn with holes. In a moment of desperation, she remembered the promise box and cried out, "Lord, O Lord, I have such a great need. Is there a promise here that is really for me? Show me, O Lord, what promise I can have in this time of famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword." She was crying by this time, and as she reached for the promise box, blinded by tears, she accidentally knocked it over and all the promises came showering down around

her, on her lap and on the floor. Not one was left in the box. Suddenly she was flooded with joy in the Lord as she realized that the promises of God were all for her, and that they were all yes in Jesus Christ.

Whatever your situation, God's promises are yes for you in Christ. Do you need to know that your sins are forgiven? God says yes in Christ. Do you need assurance that you are God's child? God says yes in Christ. Do you need peace in your heart? God says yes in Christ. Because God is faithful to His promises, you can have assurance of deliverance from His judgment if you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important not only to know (intellectually) that you're forgiven, but to feel it?
2. How would you answer the person who said that if we emphasize God's grace, people will take advantage of it to go on in sin?
3. Is it ever legitimate or healthy to doubt one's salvation? If so, when? What Scriptures apply?
4. Is assurance of salvation something we should grow into, or a basic fact to be believed?
5. Is there a difference between not fearing God's judgment and not taking it seriously? (Consider 2 Cor. 5:10-11.)

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