

“The Sign of the Covenant” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 10 July 28, 2024

- I. **Genesis 9:13** – “I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.”
- II. **Every once in a while, we get to see a spectacular rainbow.**
 - a. The conditions need to be just right, as the rain and clouds move to one side of the sky, and the sun comes out on the other.
 - b. When I lived in the mountains of Colorado, we saw rainbows many times throughout each summer.
 - i. It was the constant afternoon thunderstorms that made their way to the east as the sun shined brightly from the west...
 - ii. Several times I could even see both ends of rainbows as I looked down from high points into the valley below.
 - c. I also lived in Hawaii for a short time, and there is a reason they call it the “rainbow state”...the climate was perfect for producing rainbows constantly.
 - d. It’s a special treat to see a rainbow here, and for some reason, we don’t see them as much as other places, even though we have lots of rain!
 - i. I suppose it’s because the sun never comes out to do its job of lighting up the rainy sky... 😊
 - e. As a Christian, I’ve always known the story of Noah and the Ark, which is depicted on nearly every Sunday School classroom in the world.
 - i. Even as a child, I remember looking at rainbows as a promise from God and His presence in the world... rainbows reminded me of God.
 - ii. That is... until Lucky Charms came along... which made it hard not to think about rainbows being connected to Leprechauns, pots of gold, and sweet marshmallows.
 1. That sounds humorous, but it’s so easy for the world to take a wonderful symbol of God and His covenant with us... and turn it into something worldly.
 2. Today, it shouldn’t surprise us that rainbows signify something altogether different than God intended, as they represent gay culture.
 3. It’s really quite ironic that the rainbow was God’s symbol of peace to humanity after destroying the world for sin, and now the world uses the rainbow to celebrate what the Bible calls sin.
 - a. It’s worth noting that I love and embrace people from every culture, race, and walk of life, but I’m not willing to adopt, advocate, or celebrate any behaviors that God calls sinful.
 - iii. Before we get too comfortable pointing out the sins of others, I want to bring us home... to our own walk with the Lord.

1. Yes, we can easily point out where the world has gone off the rails, and how sinful behaviors of every kind are becoming more and more normalized.
 - a. It always amazes me how discerning and sensitive we are to the sins of others, and yet so oblivious of our own!
- iv. When we review the Ten Commandments and consider our walk with the Lord, how innocent... or guilty are we?
 1. To begin, do we have other gods and idols that get in the way of God Himself?
 - a. What things in our lives are more important than God?
 - b. What kind of time and energy do our projects and hobbies receive compared to God?
 - c. Do we really take the time to fear, love, and trust in God above all things?
 - d. Do we trust in our resources that God gives us rather than trusting in Him to help us manage them?
 - e. When we review the Scriptures, time and time again the people who trusted in themselves rather than God... or trusted in the things of the world rather than God, either walked away from Him altogether, or were called to repentance for their sin.
 2. In other areas, God calls us to love our neighbor through respecting authority... by supporting other people's bodily needs... staying away from pornography and lust... never taking anything that is not ours, but helping our neighbor to keep their things... putting the best construction on things rather than assuming the worst and / or gossiping about them.
 - a. All these commands are about loving our neighbor – and we are often so quick to point out the wrong in others, while forgetting to review our own hearts.
 3. Listen to what St. Paul writes in Romans after pointing out the sins of others in the world... "You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things." (Romans 2:1 NLT)
 - a. Paul's message is very clear as he says in Romans 3:23, "ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- III. **Today's Old Testament reading gives an account of Noah after the ark.**
 - a. When we pick up the story in chapter 9, the ark had already been built, the animals loaded two by two, and life came to an end on earth... except in the ark.

- b. Once the flood receded and Noah and his family were starting all over again, God makes a covenant with all creatures.
 - i. In ancient times, a covenant was a big deal, and the Hebrew word for covenant is the same as the word for cut.
 - 1. In Genesis 15, God has Abraham cut several types of animals in half, and then he walked through the middle of the pieces... it basically meant that your fate lies with these animals if you don't hold up your end of the bargain.
 - ii. However, in this covenant that God makes with Noah, He does not have conditions... it is an unconditional covenant that He will never again destroy the earth or its creatures by a flood as judgment for sin.
 - 1. God knows that Noah and his descendants will fall into sin, but in His great mercy, the Lord declares that Noah and all those after him may live with a promise from God... and the sign was the rainbow.
 - a. I know some people say that a bow and arrow are held upright, and that God rested His bow sideways as a sign that His wrath was done... but I'm not sure if that's true.
 - b. What I do know, is that God decided to give us a sign forever that He always fulfills His promises and that He is a good and gracious God.
 - iii. The rainbow colors may mean something different to many people in our world today than what's in the Bible, but that doesn't change what God meant as a message of hope and peace.
 - iv. The sign of the covenant is a rainbow.

- IV. **Other covenants require our response**, but a rainbow is about God alone.
 - a. In many ways, this reminds us of the love God showed to Adam and Eve after they rebelled against Him in the Garden of Eden – as He promises them a Savior who will crush satan, (Gen 3:15) even though they could offer nothing in return.
 - i. God loves us so much that He doesn't want to leave us in our sin and brokenness with no hope, but He always seeks us out to restore and redeem us.
 - ii. The rainbow is a symbol of God's unbelievable grace and kindness, and the recognition that we all deserve His wrath, but He wants to restore and redeem instead.
 - b. Jesus is the only one who can fulfill this desire God has for us all...
 - i. And He comes to us without cost, without a covenant that says you must carry out XYZ for Me to love you.
 - ii. Instead, He simply calls us into a relationship of faith and trust in Him.
 - 1. Which means what? What does my faith mean?
 - a. It means that I believe Jesus died for my sins, rose again to forgive me, and He is my Lord and my God.

- b. With this kind of faith, our sins are forgiven, and no curse from Adam and Eve will hold us back from life eternal.
- c. God's promises are always fulfilled, and a rainbow echoes the words of many of the Psalms which say, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His steadfast love endures forever." (Psalm 136:1)
- d. Next time you see a rainbow in the sky, remember again God's unending love, patience, and the assurance that His promises are always fulfilled.