Genesis 9:11-17 *Legendary 2: Noah: God’s Post-it Notes*

Last week we started a new series of sermons for the summer called **Legendary 2**. It’s basically a sequel to last summer’s series, where we looked at Old Testament heroes of the faith. Last week we considered **Ezekiel and the Valley of Dry Bones**. This week we’re going to talk about **Noah.**

You probably know the story. There is a big flood. But God tells Noah about the flood in advance. He builds a big boat out in the middle of a field. Then God brings him two animals of every kind, male and female. Noah and his family and the animals get on the Ark and it rains for 40 days and 40 nights. They float around for over half a year. Then the waters start to recede, Noah sends out a dove that comes back with an olive branch, the boat comes to rest on a mountain, and God sends a rainbow as everybody comes off the Ark.

***Never Again***It’s the end of the story that I want to focus on today. I want you to imagine for a bit what it would have been like when Noah and his family got off of the Ark.

Can you imagine the excitement of being able to walk and run on solid ground again? Can you imagine the sense of profound gratitude and joy? God had kept them safe through the flood. For days and days they had floated, not entirely sure what would happen to them, and now here they were safe and sound on the side of Mt. Ararat. It’s no wonder that the Bible says the first thing they **did was build an altar to the Lord** (Genesis 8:20).

But I also imagine that there would have been a certain sense of dread as well. I mean, God had just destroyed the entire earth--we think of this as a children’s story, but it really isn’t, it’s a story about the destruction of the entire human race—I’m sure part of Noah must have been asking: "What's to keep it from happening again?"

Can you imagine Noah's nervousness? He knew that the world had been destroyed because of wickedness, and he knew that there was still wickedness in him. What was to keep God from deciding that Noah had to go? Or Noah's children? Or his grandchildren?

That offering Noah put on the altar? In addition to being a thank offering, it may also have been a sort of preemptive move on Noah's part, asking God to spare him and his children in the New World right from the start.

Noah didn't know what was going to happen next. Yes, God had saved him from the flood, but that was no guarantee that God would save him from whatever came next. Like I said before, Noah knew the wickedness of his own heart. He knew what he deserved.

And so I imagine that Noah looked up with more than a bit of trepidation the first time a thundercloud rolled in his direction. I imagine that he told Shem and Ham and Japheth to stay close to the ark, just in case they needed to load it up again.

But the great thing about these verses (and the great thing about God) is that they make it clear that Noah doesn't have to worry. Right off the bat, God makes it clear that there is not going to be another world destroying flood. Our text is **Genesis 9:11-17**:

11I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12And 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: 13I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15I 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. 16Whenever 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." 17So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

The burden, or primary message, of these verses is quite simple. It is best summarized by the final sentence of **verse 15:**

Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

That's what God wants Noah to know. That's what He wants us to know. God is promising--He is making an "everlasting covenant"--to never again destroy the earth with water. Noah doesn't have to worry, and neither do we. As far as a worldwide, catastrophic flood is concerned, God is promising: "Never again. Never again." And He is sealing that promise with His own sign, the rainbow.

The meaning of Genesis 9:11-17 is very simple: **God will never again destroy the earth with water.** It doesn’t get any more complicated than that.

But, beyond that, there are at least two interesting things I want you to notice in this text.

***Into Every Life a Little Rain***First, I want you to notice what **God does NOT promise here.** While the promise to never again send a worldwide flood is significant, we need to see that it is rather narrow.

For one thing, **God is NOT promising to never again destroy the world.** Do you see that? God says He will never again cut off all life **"by the waters of a flood" (v. 11**), but He does not promise to never again destroy the world. The possibility of a universal deluge is eliminated, but the possibility that the world may one day come to an end is not.

This is important, because a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith is that a time is coming when the world as we know it will be destroyed. We expect Jesus to come again and believe that when He does there will be a final judgment resulting in the end of time. And this promise of God here in Genesis 9 does not contradict that doctrine. The world may not be destroyed by water, but it can still be destroyed. Indeed, 2 Peter makes the comparison between the days of Noah and the end of time by pointing out that the waters destroyed **the earth then and**

"by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7).

So, we need to understand that God is NOT promising to never again destroy the world.

More than that, we need to see that **God is also NOT promising to never again send a** **flood**. While He is promising there will never again be a worldwide, catastrophic flood, He is not promising that there will never again be local, destructive floods. This is important, because if you were living in central Michigan where those two damns broke this week, or if you’ve lived through some of Iowa’s bad flood years, might be tempted to think that God has broken His promise.

But God did not promise to eliminate those kinds of floods. In fact, He is very clear in **verse 14** that rain clouds will still come. That means that the earth will still continue to receive the benefits of rain, as well as the dangers. God is not promising to take that away.

At the risk of over-spiritualizing this text, I think we might even draw an application here. **God is NOT promising an easy life to Noah.** This promise guarantees that the world will never again be destroyed by flood--and, more than that, it implies that God will continue to preserve and protect and care for His creation--but it does not mean that Noah's life will be free from difficulty and trial here on out. The word about clouds still coming implies that Noah and his descendants after him will still face hardships and challenges.

Again, I don't want to read too much into this text, but we are reminded that the Christian life is not all about pleasure and pain-free living. Into every life a little rain must fall. We need to remember that just because we signed-on to follow Jesus it does not mean we will never encounter sadness or sorrow or sin. In fact, it is often for those of us who follow Him that the burdens of this life seem the greatest. God's promise is not to relieve us from those things, but to protect us through them.

***A String Around His Finger***The second and more significant thing I want you to notice in our text is the reason it gives for the rainbow. I want you to notice that the sign of the covenant**--the rainbow--**is said here to be not for us, but for God.

This was a real eye-opener for me. I'd always assumed that at the end of the flood Noah and his family came out of the ark and there was this beautiful rainbow waiting for them and God said, "Look, this rainbow will be a reminder TO YOU that I will never again destroy the earth by flood." Perhaps some of you parents play the same game with your children that my mother used to play with me. Whenever we would see a rainbow Mom would ask me what it was for and I would say, "God put that there to remind us that He loves us and that He will never send a giant flood again."

Now, don't get me wrong, that is one of the purposes of the rainbow. It is the sign of the covenant given to remind us of God's promise. But notice, in the text, it does not say that the rainbow is meant primarily for our benefit, but for God's. **Look at verses 14 and 15:**

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind.

Or, again, in **verse 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.

Do you see that? God doesn't say, "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds you will remember..." He says: "Whenever... the rainbow appears in the clouds I will remember..." In other words, He is saying that the rainbow will serve as a reminder to Him to never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Do you get this? Do you see what this is saying? God is using the rainbow like a string tied around His finger, or like a post-it note stuck on His bathroom mirror. In fact, that's what I mean by today's sermon title.

I **use post-it notes** for reminders. I write little notes about things I need to do or people I need to call and then I hang them up in all sorts of strategic locations--on my desk, by my phone, on my computer screen. Sometimes we put them on our bathroom mirror. It’s a way to remember, to make sure I don’t forget.

And that's what God is doing in Genesis 9. He is saying that rainbows will serve as His post-it notes­. He is saying that whenever He sees a rainbow He will be reminded of His promise to never again destroy the earth by flood.

Now, if you think about this for a while, it will really blow your mind. What does God need a reminder for? Why in the world would God need a post-it note? Isn't He supposed to know everything? Isn't He omniscient? A verse like this might even cause you to call into question your picture of God--as though it were implying that without the rainbow God might forget and let the flood waters come again.

Well, I am pleased to tell you that there is no need to begin doubting God. The Bible is clear, God does not forget. **Deuteronomy 4:31** says:

"For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers."

God does not forget. He knows the end from the beginning, His purpose will never fail. But, if that is the case, then why does Genesis 9 say that the rainbow is for Him?

I think that what is happening is that God is accommodating Himself to us so that we can understand Him. He is using a very human act--a reminder--to assure us that He really will keep His promise. The technical term scholars use for this sort of thing is **"anthropomorphism",** which is a fancy way of saying that the Bible--and God Himself--sometimes uses human language or human actions to describe God.

We forget. We get absent minded. We need to write notes to ourselves to make sure we remember. So when God comes along and makes a promise and says that He will never forget it, on the one hand, that sounds great--we don't want Him to forget--but, on the other hand, we have to wonder, if I forget things, and he forgets things, and she forgets things, how can we be sure that God will never forget? How can we--who forget so much--possibly understand a God who never forgets anything? We don't want Him to forget, but how do we know that He won't?

And so, this is what God does for us. He comes to us and He does a very human thing to help us see who He is--**He writes Himself a note**. He puts His rainbow in the sky and He tells us that whenever He looks at it, He will remember. It's not like He could forget, but just so we can be sure, He creates Himself a reminder.

God says: "I promise I will never again destroy the world by water."

We say: "But what if you forget?"

God says: "I will not forget. See, I have written myself a reminder. Just as sure as you see the rainbow in the sky, you can be sure that I will see it too. I will not forget."

If the primary burden of this passage is that God will never again destroy the world with water, then the primary lesson is that **He will never, ever forget His promises**. Probably of more immediate concern to us than the possibility of experiencing a worldwide, catastrophic flood is the assurance this passage gives us that God never, ever forgets.

He won't forget. He can't. **He's written Himself a reminder**.

***Other Post-its***And the thing is, this is not the only time in Scripture that God does this.

For example, in the story of the Exodus when Moses leads the children of God out of Egypt, there is the very curious instruction of God for the night of Passover. Before the Angel of the Lord passes through the land the Israelites are told to slaughter a lamb and splash blood over the sides and tops of their door frames. Then, **when the Angel of the Lord** passes by, God says He will "see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer" to enter the houses of Israel. (Ex. 12:23)

I say that this is a curious instruction because God did not need any help identifying the occupants of the houses. He knew which houses belonged to Israelites and which ones belonged to Egyptians. So why did He need the blood? Why this sign?

The answer, again, is that God is writing Himself a reminder to serve as a sort of guarantee that He would not forget. The Israelites might have asked Moses: "What if God forgets where we live and sends the destroyer to our homes?" And the answer would have been: "He will not forget. **See, the blood serves as a reminder**. Just as sure as you see the blood on your doors, you can be sure that God will see it too. He will not forget."

The blood of the Passover lamb is a post-it note for God.

Or, again, consider this passage from **Isaiah 49:15-16:**

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

"See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Can there be any doubt but that this is a prophecy of Jesus Christ? Some 700 years before Jesus and Isaiah is talking about the palms of God's hands!

We know what he's talking about! We know what this is a reference to! These are the hands of Jesus that took the nails on the cross. These are the hands that were shown to Thomas (John 20:27), the scars which can still be seen as Jesus sits on His throne in heaven today (Rev. 5:6).

And they are reminders to God.

This is so cool, it is so powerful, I can't help but to get excited. Do you see what God is saying?

He says through Isaiah: "A mother might forget her child, a father might walk out on his family, but I will never forget you. I will never walk out on you."

And we say, "That's great, but what if you do forget?"

**And He points at His hands** and He says: "I will not forget. I have written myself a reminder. I have engraved you upon my hands. I will not forget."

Or, again, Jesus says:

"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (see Matt. 11:28)

And we say, "That's great, but what if you forget?"

And **He points at His hands** and He says: "I will not forget. I have written myself a reminder. I have engraved you upon my hands. I will not forget."

Or, again, Jesus says that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (see John 3:16).

And we say, 'That's great, but what if you forget?"

And **He points at His hands** and He says: "I will not forget. I have written myself a reminder. I have engraved you upon my hands. I will not forget."

And I could go on and on. Paul says in 2 Corinthians that "no matter how many promises God has made, they are "yes" in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20), and this is what he is talking about. He is saying that whatever the promise is--whether it is the promise that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:39) or the promise that a new city is coming where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 21:4) or even the promise to never again send a great big flood--all God has to do is look at the hands of Jesus and see those "rich wounds yet visible above" and He is reminded of those promises and how they apply to us.

They are His post-it notes, they are the string around His finger, they are His guarantee to us that He will never, ever forget.

***Standing on the Promises***Well, we've gotten ourselves quite a distance from Noah and his flood now. We've gotten from God's rainbow all the way to the nail scars in Jesus' hands. Let me see if I can just remind you of how we got there.

Remember, the simple meaning of our text is that God will never again send a catastrophic, worldwide flood to destroy the earth. It's a good promise, an important one, but it's rather narrow.

But we saw in the gift of the rainbow that there is also a lesson in this text. What God did for Noah in assuring him that he would never, ever forget He also does for us. From the rainbow to the blood of the Passover to the wounds in Jesus' hands we see God's reminders to Himself to always keep is promises. He gives Himself these signs so that we will know that He knows, so that we can **be certain He will never forget His promises to us.**

And so you can trust God. You can believe Him. You can be sure of Him. That's the lesson of the rainbow. Every promise, every blessing, every reason for hope given to us in the Bible--God will not forget it. Even though difficulty and trial may come your way, God never forgets His promises.

God never, ever forgets. He has written Himself a reminder.