

Genesis 9:8-17
Grace Finds You
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9-25-16

We are continuing our series of messages this fall in which we are looking at the wonder of God's big story.

Last week, we began with this beautiful hymn of creation. Each stanza proclaiming in greater fashion God's goodness, punctuated by the refrain: "And it was good," "and it was good," "and it was very good." What we learn in these opening pages of Scripture is that God takes immense pleasure in what God creates. Like a painter who methodically and skillfully brings a painting to life—admiring it as she goes—God takes pleasure in each moment of formation. And the underlying motive for every stroke of God's creative brush is simply this: love.

But it doesn't take long for that idyllic Eden experience to go south. In my Bible...2 pages. Two pages and it's all mucked up. This hits it pretty much on the head, right? We start things with the best of intentions and two pages is about as far as we often get. Whether it's a commitment to prayer and a robust devotional life, or a new diet or exercise regimen, pretty soon we're hitting the snooze button or taking a pass on prayer.

Here's what it looks like in my life: today, I'm going to be more patient with my kids, and by breakfast, I'm defeated. We need a God who will pick us up when we fall.

Because paradise gets lost pretty quickly. And it always happens so subtly, doesn't it? The gradual graying, the blurring of the lines. Did God really say? For Adam and Eve, the descent was not so much a free-fall as much as a slippery slope away from God.

Now, even if this story seems pretty distant to you, from a time and a place very different from our own, chances are you know this tension. Right now in our culture, it feels like the match is perpetually held within a hair's breadth of the fuse.

Clearly, things have not improved that much since page 2, and I doubt God is any more impressed with us than he was with the first generation. By page 5, the Bible says: **the Lord regretted that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.**

Wait, did I read this right? Is this the right Bible? The Lord is sorry?

But here is God's first movement of this story: Love spurned. Love, if it is true, if it is real, is always an invitation; it is always permission-granting, as one scholar put it. God doesn't force himself on anyone, God's love and fellowship is always an invitation—no one is coerced. Even though God longs for that relationship with Adam and Eve, he does not commandeer it.

So what does that mean when that relationship is severed?

As a parent, or better yet, as the child of a parent, whether I realize it or not, I'm less concerned with what the boundaries are as I am with the consequences when those boundaries are crossed. You

ever have a child who stares you straight in the face while they do just what you ask them not to? I actually really love this moment; this is a teachable moment. They're not concerned with what the boundaries are, what they want to see is what happens when that boundary is crossed. Will you follow through with your word? Will you enforce the boundary?

As God's children, we are loved in our freedom and we're given the choice to obey or not to obey. The question we ask is this: How will God respond when his people walk away from him and make a mess of his good creation?

Chapter 6 gives us an eye into God's thinking. The first thing God does mourn. He mourns the brokenness of his creation. Parents, we understand this. But then God goes one step further and the Bible tells us God considers blotting out from the earth the humans he created. Would it be easier to pack it in and just move on to something else? Is all hope lost?

And just when you think that the Bible is over, even before it begins, a flicker of light, hardly recognizable, reaches out into the darkness. Noah. Here's the second movement: love remembered.

Verse 8 reads: **"But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord."** When everything seems to be going down the tube, all of a sudden hope emerges. Perhaps this story, tragic and heartbreaking as it is, doesn't need to be the only story—perhaps there's an alternative. *Perhaps there's another to whom I might show mercy; someone with whom to start fresh, someone to reveal that my mercies can be, and are, new each morning. Someone to whom I can show that I am unchanging, unyielding, relentless in my faithfulness to make all things new.*

Think with me for a moment and consider this idea. Without a fracture in the relationship, God cannot choose hope, choose mercy, choose grace. Without something dying, there cannot spring new life. This is a theme we will see over and over throughout the pages of Scripture. God is the God of second, third, and fourth chances. It is God's character to be the God of new life. So that when you've lost it with your spouse again, or you've finally come to the end of that white lie with your boss, when you've finally decided that was the last drink, God is waiting for you there with the promise of new life.

Noah finds favor in the sight of the Lord. Or to put it another way, ***Grace finds Noah.***

So God comes to Noah and this is what he says, and here I'm paraphrasing Holy Scripture...

The Lord said to Noah there's going to be a floody floody, get those children out of the muddy muddy. Children of the Lord.

The Lord said to Noah build me an arky arky, build it out of wooden barky barky. Children of the Lord.

The animals they came in, they came in by twosies twosies, Elephants and Kangaroosies roosies. Children of the Lord.

It rained it poured for forty daisies daisies, rained so hard it drove 'em crazy crazy. Children of the Lord.

The sun came out and dried up the landy landy, everything was fine and dandy. Children of the Lord.

The animals they came out, they came out by threesies threesies, must have been the birds and beesies beesies. Children of the Lord.

I'd like to make a brief aside about this text. Would you allow me to do that? There are some parts of the Bible that offer profound truths about who God is but are not meant to be read woodenly and literally. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are unique in this way, like a great saga. People have spent many, many years and logged a lot of man power trying to find the garden of Eden. We know generally what region it was described to be located, but we don't know exactly—but maybe that's not important. What about the serpent? We're not to worry about what kind of snake it was, or whether snakes can talk, as much as listening to what the snake says. What about the cherub who holds the flaming sword guarding the gate to the Garden of Eden? We don't know where that flaming sword is. We haven't found the remains of an ark at Mt. Arrarat. Nor have we found evidence that the whole world was flooded. But that doesn't mean that this story is any less profound and meaningful to God's people. In reading these texts, their authenticity is not dependent upon us finding these literal places and things. The meaning is located in the narrative they introduce about the God throughout these stories. This God is the God who creates, who mourns the brokenness and violence of this world, and this is the God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love toward Noah and all who come after him, and who starts fresh.

What the flood represents is God's commitment to seeing his good plans of creation carried out. And instead of allowing his people languish in sin and destruction among one another, God chose to start over.

And here's where we are this morning, Genesis 9:8-17. Here God makes a beautiful and lasting promise to his people, and he seals it with a visible reminder.

Verse 11 says: **I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.** Hear what God is saying. He's saying that *even though you may not change, even though you may continue to hurt one another and me, even though chaos will still be found in my creation*, what has changed is God. God's resolve now is that “**never again**” will he exact a cause and effect punishment. Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggemann puts it better than I ever could when he says:

“From the perspective of this story there may be death and destruction. Evil has not been eradicated from creation. But we are now assured that these are not rooted in the anger or rejection of God. The relation of creator to creature is no longer in a scheme of retribution. Because of a revolution in the heart of God, that relation is now based in unqualified grace.”

Nowhere in the last few years has this beautiful picture of the power of grace in the midst of unthinkable pain, life emerging from a flood of evil been more apparent than in the story of Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel. In 1993, after a party in which a fight broke out, Oshea shot and killed Mary's only son Laramiun. The 16-year-old boy she saw sentenced to 25 years in prison was someone she wanted great harm to be inflicted upon for the pain he'd caused in her. But something happened, something changed, when Mary went to visit Oshea in prison.

[\[Story Corp Recording\]](#)

In just a few minutes, we're going to sing our closing hymn, one of the great hymns of the Christian Faith, “How Firm a Foundation”. Remember this promise as you sing these majestic words:

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be near thee, my troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

God has the ability and he wants to take the distresses of your life and with his promise to sanctify them—to fill them with his holy purpose. Noah was not a perfect person; later we see his deep flaws. But the first word about Noah is the same as the first word about you—always and forever “grace.”

Secondly, the sign of the promise. Starting at verse 13: **“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring the 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.”**

We have the temptation to think that the tragic events that happen to us, or when natural disasters occur, that these are examples of God’s judgement against us. The rainbow is a visible promise to us that God doesn’t exact judgment by retribution. When tornados or tsunamis or earthquakes happen, it’s not because someone sinned; they just happen. In fact, I’m glad that earthquakes happen, it means that the earth is shifting and that makes mountains for me to ski on. These events are not a part of God’s judgment, they’re just the natural order. Jesus spoke against this kind of thinking in John 9 when someone asked him, **“Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, so that he was born blind?”** Jesus responds, **“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”**

God doesn’t punish us for our sin; the consequences of our actions is punishment enough. And to remind us of that everlasting promise, God put the rainbow in the heavens. So if you’ve been carrying around the guilt and feelings of punishment because you think God is upset with you for something you’ve done, hear this:

“After a time of great difficulty and destruction, when God placed his bow in the clouds, he hung up his weapon. This means God is no longer interested in hunting you down. What he is interested in however is bringing new life into you. So come out of the ark, come out of hiding, come out of the shame, the doubt, the worry that God wants to punish you, come out and see the promise that God would never again pick up his weapon. Never again.”