

# Genesis 8:20-9:1-17

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Preacher: Benjie Slaton

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I wonder if I asked you to define what the American dream is, what you might say. You know, maybe you're kind of the Annie story, the rags to riches. America is the place where you can have the opportunity to become whatever it is you want to become.

Maybe you're the kind of MLK version of the country of justice and peace where a person is judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Maybe it's the Statue of Liberty version. Give us your poor huddled masses, the immigrant story that was my family's story.

I don't know what your version is, but the American dream is one of those things that we often don't have a good bit of agreement on. In fact, I was reading an article on that this week by a woman named Sarah Churchwell, who I don't know who that is, but she was talking about how this discussion is pretty relevant for our time.

Back in 1931, when America was coming out of the Roaring Twenties, right, heading into the Great Depression, or actually in the Great Depression at that point, there was rising authoritarianism across the ocean in Europe, and there was political strife and dangers in the U.S., and this writer was trying to figure out how to talk about that.

[ 1 : 2 2 ] And here's how he talked about the American dream. He said this. He said that America had lost its way because it prized material success above all other values.

Indeed, it had started to treat money as a value in itself instead of merely as a means to produce or to measure value. Sounds familiar.

Sounds familiar. It sounds familiar in a day where we don't seem to have a great sense of what it is that makes us as a people united.

You know, what is it that we're trying to hold on to? I think when you see these seasons of stress and weakness, oftentimes what happens is you can trace some of that stress and weakness to an insufficient vision of what life ought to be, of what we ought to live for.

As we've worked through the beginning chapters of Genesis, we're now up to Genesis 8 and 9, you can see that there's a similar kind of crisis of meaning going on, that the people of Israel had received these stories.

[ 2 : 3 1 ] Moses, through God, was giving the people stories about who they were supposed to be. What he was telling them was, look, you're no longer just slaves in Egypt. You're now free people.

You're my people. You are not just, you know, a group of, you know, huddled masses, a group of exiles who are trying to scrape out an existence in the desert.

You're people who have an inheritance. You're people who have something that I want to give you. You are people who have a vision, a vision for something important, something beautiful, a vision for the life that God has for them.

That's what Moses was trying to communicate with all these stories in Genesis. See, when we don't have a clear vision of who we are to be, we tend to lose focus.

We tend to, well, we can't see ourselves rightly. What we've been talking about with Alan Noble, Alan Noble has his book that's out on our book table called, You Are Not Your Own.

[ 3 : 36 ] What he's saying is, is we live in a world right now where it seems like we're told every day that you are, you belong to yourself, that it's not important that you belong to God. That's, of course, you know, we talk about this with the Heidelberg Catechism every Sunday, that I am not my own, but I belong body and soul and life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

This passage that we're looking at, it's right after Noah comes out of the ark, God reaffirms the vision that the people of God ought to have for themselves.

It's a vision that is true for us. It's actually a more powerful vision than the American dream, whichever version we possess. That's what we need to see this morning.

Here's what I want you to see, that when you belong to God, you can discover a life of restored meaning made possible by a renewed covenant.

When you belong to God, instead of belonging to yourself, you can discover a life that has restored meaning. Restored meaning because of God's covenant promises.

[ 4 : 42 ] All right, I'm gonna read from the end of chapter eight. Then Noah built an ark to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter by day and night shall not cease.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.

Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat the flesh with its life, that is its blood.

[ 5 : 45 ] For the lifeblood I will require a reckoning. For your lifeblood I will require a reckoning. From every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning.

For the life of man, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his own image. And you be fruitful and multiply.

Team on the earth and multiply it. Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you. And with every living creature that is with you, the birds and the livestock and every beast of the earth with you.

As many as came out of the ark, it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you. That never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood.

And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you.

[ 6 : 46 ] For all future generations, I've set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring 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 of all flesh that is on the earth.

God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant that I've established between me and all flesh that is on the earth. Friends, this is God's word and he gives it to you because he loves you and he wants you to know him.

When someone becomes a Christian, they are given a sense of restored meaning. That's part of what's going on here. All of this section comes after verse 20.

Noah comes out of the ark and the first thing he does is he builds an altar and he worships God. And so all of this stuff with God speaking to him is coming in the context of that moment of worship.

[ 8 : 00 ] Maybe it's a vision. Maybe it's an appearance. We're not really sure, but we know that it's coming in the context of worship. Verses one to seven, that middle paragraph in your program forms its own independent section.

You can tell that because the beginning and end match one another. God tells Noah, Be fruitful and multiply. Now that sounds familiar, right? That's the same thing that God gave to, the same language God gave to Adam and Eve at the creation.

See, what the big picture is, God intends Noah to be restored to the original vision of human life. Look at verse three. He tells him to have dominion over the plants and the animals.

This is the same thing that was going on in creation. Noah, in a sense, is like a second Adam. In fact, we're told later that Israel is another Adam doing what God had originally called Adam to do.

You see, when God converts you, Peter, with the passage that we read earlier, uses Noah as the flood story as an illustration, a true, but an illustration of what conversion looks like.

[ 9 : 13 ] To become a Christian is like being taken through a flood and led out into a new world. And what God is saying is that in that new world, I want it to look like the world was originally meant to look.

I want you to restore the vision of life that I have made you for. Now, it's not the exact same as being in the garden because there's all this language now about all these things dying and blood.

The world is not going to be the same as it was. There's still going to be killing of animals. There's going to be violence. But what God says in verse 6, the whole point of verse 6 is to say, God is going to bring us a measure of justice even in that world.

But it's still fallen. So what God is giving Noah is this vision of what a restored life could look like, a restored sense of meaning in the midst of a fallen world.

I think that's helpful because what that says is that should shape our expectations. That we can live in this world and find true meaning, things that are important and useful and good and reflect what God has originally made us to do.

[ 10 : 28 ] We can read Genesis 1 and go, okay, that's what my life can look like. But in a limited sense. A sense where it requires God's grace and His goodness to be at work in us.

See, as Christians, we're invited to this restored meaning as those who belong to God. But here's the problem. The problem is that very few of us actually live with that kind of vision.

Because as Alan Noble talks about in his book, there is this constant pressure on us at this particular moment for people who are alive right now who live in places like this.

The pressures that we feel are particularly acute. Here's how Alan Noble describes the pressures of our present moment. Listen to this. He says, to live authentically, at this time, means that you have the pressure to justify your own existence, to express your own identity, to interpret meaning for yourself, to judge according to your own moral compass, to belong where and when you choose to belong.

I want to walk through some of that to justify your own existence. Doesn't it seem like just being a human is not enough? You know?

[ 11 : 55 ] To like, have a job, raise kids, to live in a community. It's just not enough. Everything is telling you that you need things that are going to give you more meaning than that.

That that's not enough. That you're not enough. Maybe it's your work that you need to find some meaning from. Or maybe it's, maybe it's a cause, a political cause, or a social cause.

Maybe it's finding meaning from your kids. That's not going to work out well. And then there's, you know, maybe it's a vacation property that you want to, you know, be able to own. Maybe it's a legacy that you're bringing to your children.

There's this pressure, this pressure to justify your own existence. There's the pressure to express your identity. We talk about this a lot in the context of sexuality and gender, but it's also more than that.

I mean, social media is this constant pressure to project an identity. You know, social media is just like a group of 15-year-olds telling everybody else, you know, insecure 15-year-olds showing everybody what's important to them.

[ 13 : 01 ] Trying to kind of cultivate their image. Every single click and like and post is somehow communicating something about who my soul is.

and all of us are tied into that pressure that we feel. To interpret meaning for yourself, judge according to your own moral compass.

You know, we're so motivated by just like pragmatism. If it works for me and my family, then that's my moral compass. It's fascinating to me being a parent and watching the ways that the decisions that people make in their parenting.

Ways that maybe a few years ago they might have said, I would never do X and then of course they do X. I'm not judging anybody. I'm just saying it's fascinating because I feel those pressures.

I want something that works because there's just too many things to fight about. And you know what? If it doesn't quite match my moral compass, I can maybe fit it in.

[ 14 : 10 ] What about this? To belong when and where you choose. You know, we're constantly deciding what and where to commit ourselves.

Where to belong. What it's going to communicate about my desired identity. You know, belonging to a marriage. Not important. Belonging to a place.

Not important. I'm saying this as a man who's lived in, I don't know, like five or six cities. Belonging to a group of people. Belonging to even a church.

This is one of the reasons that we try to really, you know, emphasize church membership at Grace and Peace because we want to push against a culture that says you don't have to belong anywhere or you can belong somewhere today and somewhere different tomorrow.

No, no, no, no, no. God has made us to belong with one another. To belong as a people that has obligations. And that's hard and sometimes you have to work through conflict because of that.

[ 15 : 11 ] But, but God has made us to belong because it reflects that we belong to God. Here's the thing. this culture that we're living in that tells us that you are your own.

You belong to yourself, your own desires, your own morality, all that kind of stuff. The pressure that we're all feeling and trying to live against that is not working well. It's not working for us.

The grunge rock band Green Day, Green Day fans, yeah, they just released a new song. I thought they were all in like their 70s but you know, no shade against 70 year olds and musicians.

But they just released this new song called The American Dream is Killing Me. And it's the video of it. I watched the video. I'll put it on the website later. It's this like normal American city and they're singing and then there's like a zombie attack.

Isn't that kind of the ethos of our moment zombie movies? Why are zombie movies so, so, why do they, why are they so popular? Well, because they touch something in us.

[ 16 : 22 ] Because there's something about our current time that is putting this pressure on us to belong to ourselves, to make decisions for ourselves, to be our own person, to figure out life on our own, to figure out our own meaning in life.

And what happens is we can't do it and we end up dehumanizing other people and we feel like we are less human. I think that's why zombie movies are popular because we all intuitively feel a sense that we are like zombies in this world.

Walking around, half awake, and mostly dead inside. as a Christian, we are called to reject the powers that are pressing us towards this self-belonging and to trust or to remind one another that we belong to God and to Him alone.

That He is the one who establishes our identity. That He is the one who has given you a purpose. That He is the one who will show you what to value in your life, what your purpose is, what to reject, the things to live for, the things to die for, the things to build for, all the things of our life.

We have to submit ourselves to that. But that's hard. That's really hard. You may have seen on the news this morning or last night that Matthew Perry of Chandler in Friends fame passed away yesterday.

[ 18 : 02 ] He had a parent heart attack too young. He, I don't know if you knew this, he published a memoir last year and he was talking about his fame and his struggles with drug and alcohol abuse.

He actually talked about his hope that he would be remembered as someone who helped those who were in abusive situations more than his fame. I don't know if that'll happen or not.

But as he wrestled with his addictions, here's one way he reflected on this. He said this, I've realized that the American dream is not making me happy. It's not filling the holes in my life.

I couldn't get enough attention. Fame does not do what you think it's going to do. It's all a trick. Guys, the things that we are told over and over every television show, every sports moment, everything on our social media feed, is telling us a lie about what it means to have a meaningful life.

And if we are not vigilant in deconstructing that in our own mind, it's going to seep in and make us believe something that's not true and we're going to hate life because of it.

[ 19 : 25 ] Okay, that's depressing. So, becoming a Christian actually opens you up to a world of meaning. You know, Christians, Christians see this, we feel this discontinuity inside of ourselves, this conflict.

How do we get past it? How do we discover that sense of meaning? Well, there's a category that is introduced here in this passage that helps you discover that and it's the idea of covenant.

It's this, there's a restored covenant that helps you discover meaning. That's verse 8 to 17. It introduces this concept into the story of Israel.

It's been in the background up until now and theologians will talk about how it's in the background, but it hasn't been explicitly talked about yet until here. Here, Moses is explicit.

He repeats it both at the beginning and end, verses 8 and verses 17 down at the bottom. What does he say? That God himself is establishing his covenant with the people, with all of humanity.

[ 20 : 34 ] In fact, it says, with every creature, every beast, every human. Well, what is a covenant? Is it like a contract? I mean, is this like, you know, you go buy a house, everybody has to come to some table and you sign papers together, there's like 20 copies given to everybody?

No, it's not that. A covenant in the Bible is different from how we use a contract today. A covenant in the biblical sense is an agreement, but it's particularly an agreement between a superior and an inferior party.

There's a power differential between the two of them. The superior party sets up this agreement. It sets the terms of the agreement for both sides.

It's kind of like a king and his subjects. The king is saying, this is what's about to happen and you guys are now signed on to it. In fact, you can see that. That's kind of what God is saying. Look at verse 17. He says right at the end, this is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all the flesh that is on the earth.

Noah was informed of this relationship. He did not set up the terms. They didn't have like some negotiation where God was like, hey, I want to set up this agreement with you and Noah was like, well, you know, I like portions A, B, and C, but we're going to have to get rid of D, E, and F.

[ 21 : 55 ] And they go back and forth and their attorneys talk and all that. That's not what's happening. God is saying, this is how I am going to treat you and this is how you're going to treat me.

That's what a covenant is. But what are the particular stipulations or requirements in this covenant that God established? Well, that's back at verses 1 to 7. It's living a life of this restored meaning that God has already set up for Noah.

That being human, being a human, is the requirement of the covenant to be the human that we were made to be.

That's what we're called to. And that's remarkable because the flood was in a sense God's way of reestablishing the original purpose of creation, right? Like the original creation that was formed out of the chaos of the waters, you now have the flood and God is bringing out of the chaos of this flood, he's bringing out a new humanity, a new world.

And he's saying, this is how you are to live. We can say it this way, that God was at work so that Noah and you and I could live as full human beings.

[ 23 : 15 ] The second century church father, Irenaeus, was famous for saying that the essence of Christianity is this, the glory of God is a human being fully alive.

The glory of God is a human being fully alive, not a zombie. If he had zombies back in the second century, I don't know. God's design for you is to please him by being fully human, by living in your particular body, by caring for this world, by honoring the relationships and the places that he has placed you in, by working hard, by delighting in his gifts, by eating and sleeping and loving and laughing and serving and building and belonging and worshipping.

All of that done in a relationship with the God who made you and has established meaning for you. That is what you were made for.

That's what we were all made for. But here's the thing. God set up these requirements in his covenant but humans always fail.

Israel failed. I mean, they didn't have this agreement for like 20 minutes before they failed. We're gonna read about that. Every time, God reestablishes his covenant with the people and he says, hey, remember, this is what I have set up for you and then the people fail constantly.

[ 24 : 45 ] None of us, none of you live as the humans you were designed to be. None of us do. Here's what's incredible is that what we find out in the story of Jesus, you know, the story goes on and we get all the way to the story of Jesus and what we find out there is that Jesus has fulfilled our side of the covenant on our behalf.

Now, let me back up. We talk about Jesus' death on the cross. You know, this is church. There's a cross behind me. We talk about that a lot, turns out, here. And what we talk about is that Jesus took the penalty for our sins.

We've failed the covenant demands and God has paid for Jesus, has taken our sin upon his shoulders and he has paid the penalty for that failure. But what we often fail to remember is the perfect obedience of Jesus.

Jesus upheld the requirements of the covenant for us. See, Jesus obeyed his father with perfect obedience in every way.

Jesus, we could say, was the human that you and I were meant to be. Jesus, he's even called by Paul. He is the true Adam. He is the true Israel.

[ 26 : 10 ] In Jesus' obedience, he fulfilled the obligations of the covenant that we have failed to live up to. So not only in the cross of Jesus does Jesus take our sin from us, but he gives us his own righteousness and goodness.

What that means is that we have now everything. We are enabled to live a life of meaning we never could have lived before we've become a Christian.

We are now able to live with a sense of purpose and meaning. See, God's covenant, whenever you see covenant show up in the Bible, that's a reminder to you of God's promise to redeem us through Jesus.

Every time you see covenant, you see this reaffirmation. It has the same basic meaning. Here's the meaning of the covenant if you want to boil it all down. It's this. I am your God.

You are my people. I've made you for a life of meaning as humans. But you've failed. And I'm going to provide a way for you.

[ 27 : 29 ] I'm going to save you. That's what you see. That's why, you know, if you've come around this kind of Presbyterian church world, you hear us talk about covenant a lot. There's covenant Presbyterian church, covenant college up on Lookout Mountain.

That's why we talk about this. Because it's glorious that God has promised. God has promised before you have obeyed or disobeyed, God has promised to save you.

Before you have done anything, God has established this way. This is how it's going to go. Now all you have to do is trust me. This is the beauty of grace.

Our God is a God of grace. And this is made clear when he gives us the sign of the rainbow in verses 12 and 13. Did you notice this?

It says that God put a rainbow in the clouds, in the sky as a reminder, as a sign of his covenant promise. Every time God makes a promise, he gives a sign to go along with it because he knows we need to be reminded.

[ 28 : 35 ] Now, why a rainbow? It's kind of odd. It seems like an interesting thing. Well, one, there's nothing any of us can do to make a rainbow in the sky.

It's God's personal reminder of his kindness to us, of his initiation to us. The second thing is this.

Did you notice that it doesn't actually say rainbow? It doesn't actually say rainbow. The Hebrew word is a bow. He puts his bow in the sky. Why?

Well, ancient Near Eastern mythology used the idea of bow in the sky pretty frequently. They would look in the clouds in the stars, the constellations, and they would look for patterns of like bows in the sky.

And what that represented for them was the anger of the gods. That when they went through seasons where there was a bow in the stars, that would mean that there was an impending danger in conflict because the gods had now trained their arrows on some enemy and humans would be part of the conflict.

[ 29 : 45 ] What Moses is doing here, what God is doing through Moses is he's saying when you look up and when you see in the clouds this rainbow, you should know that this is different from the ancient Near Eastern thing.

This is not a harbinger of danger but a harbinger of mercy. Why? Because the bow is not pointed at an enemy. The bow is not God's way of pointing his arrows at the sinful and rebellious people that we have become, the people who have failed his covenant but the bow is put in the clouds to point back at himself.

What God is saying is I'm taking on myself the responsibility of upholding these covenant promises. I will not leave you even though you fail these covenant stipulations, even though you are not living the life of meaning I've made you for.

I'm not going to destroy you. I will bring reconciliation at the cost of myself. And what we see is that in Jesus God takes that responsibility on his own shoulders.

See, right here at the beginning of Israel's story God wanted them to see that this is so foundational. God didn't set up the world for Israel or for you with this basic idea.

[ 31 : 15 ] God has made you if you obey him and do well you will be blessed if you don't you will be punished. God has made the world to say I have made you none of you have done well.

And I'm going to provide a way of salvation for you through Jesus my son. I'm going to take it on myself trust me follow me live in me.

You know I wonder if as you think about this you know this is the gospel and it's easy for us to take this in and then just kind of drop it as soon as we walk out our doors and check our email get on our Instagram feed watch whatever you know show you're binging right now as we deal with our kids that are dealing with this in a much more powerful way than you know old people like me I wonder if it's possible for you to begin telling yourself something different.

Maybe you could begin telling yourself that the American dream really isn't enough for your soul. That maybe the drive to belong to yourself and to not be beholden to the obligations to other people maybe that's actually not good for your soul.

Maybe that maybe what you need more than anything else is to submit to the God who's made you who's defined your life. Maybe that's the only way that you're going to find any sense of meaning.

[ 32 : 57 ] If that's you you have an opportunity because as we come to the Lord's table what God has said is that when you come the bread and the wine or juice because you know we do juice it's Tennessee and we're in an Adventist church so that's part of it but when you come those are signs signs of the covenant Jesus said on the night in which he was betrayed.

He said this is a sign of the covenant and so when you partake of this in a moment you have the opportunity to submit yourself again to turn away from all these false visions and to submit yourself to God's vision again.



Let me pray for us. Lord we ask that you would empower us to submit ourselves to not just to the vision that's given to us in our culture but to the vision of a renewed humanity that you've given to us through Jesus.

Show us your grace and invite us to follow it we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.