

Lord of the Earth

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[0:00] Well, good morning, church. It's good to see you all here. And yes, I concur with Jess. Christmas is a great time of the year. It's fantastic. Well, today we're going to continue to look at these early chapters of the book of Genesis, and we're resuming with the story of the flood and Noah.

It's a story of second chances. The flood is about the fact that God is committed to creation and he's ready to give new beginnings. This is real and obvious from verse 1 of chapter 9.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. Does that sound familiar? I hope so.

At the start of Genesis, that is what God said to Adam and Eve. These are exact words. And so it's almost as if God is saying, one more time from the top. Let's start again.

And what's actually interesting about this passage is in some ways it gives us a little more detail into what kind of life we're called into.

[1:06] Noah and his family, just like Adam and Eve, are templates for what God is calling all human beings to do. He's calling us into a life of three great relationships.

And we're only really living fully human life if we're getting all three of these right. And we're maintaining these three relationships. God's calling us into a relationship with the earth, a relationship with all the people of the earth, and a relationship with the Lord of the earth.

He's calling us into a relationship with the earth, which brings up the issue of care of the environment. He's calling us into a relationship with all the people of the earth, which brings up the issues of justice and compassion.

And finally, he's calling us into a relationship with himself, which brings up the issue of grace.

Environment, justice and compassion, and grace. The more we understand these and how they interrelate, the more we're really going to live the life that God has created us to have.

So let's take a look. First of all, he calls us into a particular relationship with the earth. Verses 2 and 3.

[2:17] If we took them all by themselves, they'd be misleading. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you.

If that's all we had, you might conclude that God is saying, you have power over nature and power in nature, and that's kind of obvious.

Actually, there has to be a balance. If we just took verses 2 and 3, we'd be left thinking, well, you can just do whatever you want, which some people do. Anyway, then we have verses 10, 12, 16, and 13.

God actually says, I will establish my covenant with you and with every living creature that was with you. And this is the sign of the covenant I am making between you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come.

Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all the living creatures of every kind on the earth, and a covenant between me and the earth.

[3:24] Not only that, so in verse 13, that covenant between me and the earth, it's clear what God has made matters to God. What we see here, God never calls anyone or anything into a covenant relationship unless it's a saving relationship.

God's saying, you're in trouble because of evil and sin, and I'm going into a relationship, I'm going to enter into a relationship with you and be your saviour and a saviour from sin.

He's doing this with the animals, he's doing this with every living creature, he's even doing it with the earth and the physical environment. He's obviously not saving the world from the sin of the plants, or even up to you naughty plants, or the sin of the seas or the animals.

Genesis 8, 21 makes it clear. Noah comes out of the ark and God says, never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood, and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done.

When God says I'm calling the earth and every animal into a saving relationship, he's saving the world from our sin, from your sin, from my sin, from humanity's sin.

[4:41] Paul spells this out in Romans 8. The creation, that's all of nature, waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into glorious freedom of the children of God. And that's why we know that all of creation has been groaning right up until the present time, awaiting our salvation.

This means that nature doesn't work well in general because of our sin. You notice everything's a bit out of whack. It also means human beings sadly exploit nature.

What Genesis 9, 2 and 3 is saying is a realistic approach to nature. There's no one ideal environmental equilibrium. Every so-called balance of nature is hostile to some forms of animal and vegetable life and friendly to others.

There's no one perfect balance. Just think of the cane toad or the rabbit or the fox or privet. I just wish there was someone out there that could do something about this.

[5:51] Maybe take up arms and shoot from a helicopter or something. Anyway. There's also no one perfect balance without us involved. We're part of nature too. Here we see God knows nature isn't what it should be and is committed to saving it, to resurrecting and renewing it.

And that's the reason why the Bible calls us into a personal relationship with nature, just like God has. We see it in the biblical pattern of creation, fall, redemption and in the promise of the new creation.

In the new creation, God's not only going to give us new bodies in the resurrection. He's going to give us a new nature and a new self. He's not going to just renovate us.

He's going to actually renovate everything. That's the meaning of Christmas. God becomes flesh. The path of Christian salvation is not God saving us out of earth into heaven, but heaven coming down to earth and God renewing everything that's here.

God's committed to his creation. And if you believe the doctrine of creation and fall and redemption and new creation, here's the kind of relationship you'll have with nature, with the animals, with the earth itself.

[7:09] Psalm 19, verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim his handiwork. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they display knowledge.

Their voice goes out to the ends of all the earth. Well, around two months ago, some of you might know, I did the Camino, a pilgrimage in Spain. And there were waterfalls and there were mountains and there were rivers.

There were oceans and rainbows and sunrises and sunsets. I journaled on that Camino pilgrimage. And I started with James chapter 4, verse 8. Draw near to God and I will draw near to you.

I was in some pretty remote areas and I found myself by myself often. Hiking with a pack on and singing. Heaven's declared the glory of God. The skies proclaim his word.

I could sing it for you now. But anyway. Oh, I will. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim his word. Do you know that song? Or this one? The heavens shall declare the glory of your name.

[8:14] Anyway. Sing as if no one's watching. So I was singing and I was marvelling at creation. Creation sings a loud song testifying there is a God.

Most people feel this. They look out and they go, there's something more. There must be something behind all this. The Bible says creation is speaking to you. It's teaching us something.

It's one giant arrow pointing us to our maker. It's actually referred to theologically as general revelation. Creation is telling us the story about the glory of God.

And it's our job as stewards of creation to make sure they keep speaking. To not let the voice go out. So we don't destroy, chop down, build out, poison, hunt into extinction.

Instead we respect. We honour. We maintain. We care. In Judaism there's a term for this. Tikkun olum. Excuse me. It's the repair of the world.

[9:15] By the way, I did mention this last week. That's the t-shirt. That was the symbol when I first met my future father-in-law. My hair was actually this long. I didn't bring that photo but I turned up to his farm with that t-shirt on.

No environment, no economy. It was a wilderness society shirt. And he just was stunned. So anyway. Christians should be the biggest environmentalists. I'm not saying vote green or be a hippie.

But we should really care about the land and animals. But sadly sin leads us to exploiting and demolishing the environment. And it's a major signpost pointing us to God.

A covenant relationship requires us to care for the air quality and the fresh water. The land and the oceans and the animals. This stewardship keeps God's creation singing.

And it's also good for us because we actually need those things to survive. Not sure if you're aware but we just take bees out of the equation. No bees left on the earth. There is no human life in four years time.

[10:23] Everything is incredibly knitted together. We need to help nature continue to glorify God. To not let the voice of the environment cry out, be dulled out.

But to cry out. There is a God. We need to go out. The attitude that God gives us is by saying, I'm in a covenant relationship with nature, is the basis for our environmental stewardship.

And echoes the created order of Genesis 1.28, which said, fill the earth and rule over it. But this was always to be with the intent of ruling over it under God's rule.

I'm just going to have to cough. Excuse me for a sec. Sorry. Anyway, the second thing we're called into is a relationship of justice with all the people of the earth.

Here in verses 5 and 6. And for your life, blood, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal and from each human being, to I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

[11:23] Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed. For the image of God has God made humankind. This isn't about capital or corporal punishment.

What this is telling us is God's attitude that all human life was made to image God in a special way. Nothing else in nature is made in this way.

Every single person and every individual life, whether a good person or a bad person, whether a weak person or a strong person, whether a young person or an old person, whether rich or poor, God says, I have put my honour and glory and dignity into every single one of you.

You are my image bearers. And anyone who raises their hand to violate this life, to abuse this life, to degrade this life, anyone who does that to any human being, I will take that as an assault on me. An assault on my glory, an assault on my honour. The point of verse 5 is to try to show us the value of every human life. We are precious to God, and regardless of what we believe, or whether we are moral or immoral, God says every human life is utterly precious to him, and has dignity.

[12:46] Human life is different than the rocks and the trees, or your pet dog or cat. We're not just a fluke of random chances over time. Human life has value.

Because this world matters, we need to consider how we distribute the treasures that God has given us. What are you doing with your time, with your talents, with your financial and material treasures, and your testimony?

This world matters. The physical world matters. This means, in our giving practical and material help, it's for all people.

Because every human being is in the image of God. We have to show sacrificial service to the safety, protection, quality of life, for all human life.

We have a biblical basis here for tirelessly working for the sacredness of every human life. Taking care of the elderly, taking care of the sick, the disabled, the unborn.

[13:47] Seeking racial justice, social justice, international justice. One quick example, linking some of these two topics. environmental damage falls disproportionately in the third world countries and on the poor.

Because they're open to corruption. They're open to bribes. They're exploited. So if we're genuinely compassionate to our neighbours, we need to speak out about this and source ethical produced goods.

Excuse me. We know about God's covenant with every living creature and even the earth, and we know how valuable people are. We know what God is doing for us and we know what God has done for us.

So in response, we aren't to judge whether someone is worthy or not of our attentions or gifts or we are to do good to all people without exception.

I'm just going to have to have a drink. I've got really a cold. It's just a bit of a croak. Sorry. Great. Great. Thank you. So we do good to all people without exception.

[14:57] We're called into a relationship of love, compassion and justice with all the people of the earth. And thirdly, we're called into an intimate personal covenant relationship with God.

We're called into a relationship based on grace. and we learn about this relationship from the rainbow, the biblical rainbow. Genesis 12 says, this is the sign of the covenant I'm making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come.

I've set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. This covenant sign is a symbol of salvation.

Just like the Lord's Supper, which we're going to celebrate in a moment, it's a covenant sign, a symbol of salvation. Jesus actually said, this cup is the sign of what I'm doing for you.

This cup poured out is a sign of my death. The bread broken is a sign of his death. The eating and drinking are a sign of faith. The rainbow tells us everything we need to have a relationship with God.

[16:10] It tells us everything we need to know about the gospel because it's a symbol of relationship with God based on grace. The raindrop shows us the backdrop to grace.

We see a rainbow. People like seeing a rainbow, I'm assuming. It's not a pot of gold at the end, but anyway. We see a rainbow and it's often after a stormy weather.

Darkness. And so often we can see a rainbow in our own personal life if we want to use it metaphorically after we've experienced stormy times. God sees how flawed we are.

He sees our weaknesses. He sees our troubles, our insufficiencies, our neediness. And when we recognise our need to repent and admit our sin, this is the dark backdrop to allow our lives to experience God's grace.

The rainbow shows the promise of God's grace. If you see a rainbow in the sky, you know it's shaped like a bow. The Hebrew word here is kasuet.

[17:19] And it's actually the word for rainbow, but it's actually also the word for war bow. What God is saying when we see the rainbow, I've put down my bow.

There's now no condemnation. You're getting a second chance. And as they leave the ark, God provides them this. He lavishes on them grace.

We can be in a relationship with God where there's no more judgement for our sin. As we see the dark backdrop of God's grace, our sin, the rainbow shows us the sweeping promise of God's grace. There's now no condemnation. It also shows us the astonishing truth of God's grace. This doesn't mean God is no longer a God of judgement, a God of wrath.

It means instead of aiming his arrows at us, they're going to go into someone else. In fact, when you look at that rainbow bow, if we were to load it up with an arrow, it would be pointing not at us, but to the heavens, to the maker of the heavens.

[18:27] We also see a rainbow where the sun and the storm come together, where the light and the darkness come together, where mercy and judgement come together. That's where you find the rainbow.

We know where those arrows went. Isaiah 53 talks about about the servant who came and says, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. God is holy, justice had to be served, someone had to die, Jesus got the arrows.

On the cross, we see the love of God. The Father, so infinitely loving, he offered up the Son. In other words, on the cross, the storm of eternal justice and the Son of God's love come together.

Jesus went into the heart of God's wrath out of love for us. He got the lightning so we could have the rainbow. And that's why we have a rainbow. And every time we look into the heart of the storm, we see the rainbow of grace.

[19:34] It's a sign of God's lasting covenant. God's calling us into three things. A relationship with the earth, relationship with the people of the earth, and a relationship with the Lord of the earth.

Unless we get these, this third one, this third relationship right, our motives for the other two, while having the appearance of being noble, can only be selfishly altruistic.

Unless we understand our relationship with God is based on grace, doing good works will achieve nothing. And we know why. If I tell you to go out and care for the environment and help the poor and feed the hungry and do justice, if you're just going out there and doing it for your own sake, it's to feel good about yourself or in the hope that people will notice and think you're a great person or hoping God will bless you and take you up to heaven.

In which case, you're not doing it for them or for God, you're doing it for yourself. It's meritorious. It's not full of grace. And the rainbow is a thing of beauty.

Religious people use God and try to get things from God. But gospel-filled people find Jesus beautiful.

[20:49] The Christian is a person who says, I want to serve God for the beauty of who he is, not what I can get out of God. And then it becomes the dynamic for all your life and you're helping people because of the beauty of who they are.

You're caring for nature because of the beauty of what God has made. You're not trying to prove yourself or get something from God. We say it here all the time. St Paul's is a church in Chatswood glorifying God as we treasure Jesus together for the joy of all people.

There should be really something attractional about Christianity as people go out into life filled with joy and love and care and serve like Jesus.

Unless we have a grace relationship with God the motivations of our heart will be all wrong. The first two relationships will either be inconsistent, burdensome or actually crush us into the ground. If there's anyone here who wants to be sure they're a Christian it's all in the rainbow. Step one admit you're on the dark backdrop of grace your sin your deep need for forgiveness.

[22:02] Step two study the truth of Jesus Christ on the cross knowing that he took the arrows for you what he's done for you. Thirdly rest in the promise God has put down the war bow the new creation is coming.

So is judgment but not in flood but in fire. So we need to be on the right side of history as we resurrect into new life and we want other people there as well.

And lastly live life with the dynamic of which is beauty the dynamic of which is gratitude. If anyone here right now is in the middle of a storm please keep this in mind there's grace in the middle of the storm.

If you're a Christian in the middle of a terrible dark cloud don't forget God's wrath is not on you that's already fallen on Jesus. All of creation is groaning it awaits the new creation.

Because there was grace in the heart of God's wrath there's going to be mercy in the heart of this dark cloud. Mercy is in the heart of the storm. At the very least if you hold on to him if you hold on to Jesus if you truly see and focus on him it will make you like him sympathetic wise tender confident compassionate just loving and forgiving.

[23:31] In the heart of every storm once you grasp the grace of Jesus when you see that he went into the middle of God's wrath so there could be a rainbow for us what that means is at the heart of every storm that comes into our life now we know there's mercy and we know there's grace and we know there's grace.

Thank you.