

Why God Looks at Rainbows

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[0 : 00] Let's turn this evening to the passage we read in Genesis, Genesis chapter 9, especially verses 14 to 16 of that chapter. Genesis 9 at verse 14, 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 water 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.

How good is your memory? I am sure a lot of us would have different answers to that question. Some of us may say, I have got a good memory for some things, but I have got a very bad memory for other things.

I do not have a problem myself personally, too much of a problem remembering what I have studied in order to preach on the Lord's Day or at times. I have got a good memory for some things, but I have got a good memory for some things.

But the Bible very frequently uses the word remember, or words relating to that, remember, remembering. Not only as you find it in this passage where God is said to remember certain things.

[2 : 01] Of course, God doesn't have any lapse of memory. What this is emphasizing as other similar passages which speak about God remembering. What that's emphasizing for us is that God keeps in mind, that God has it before his mind, whatever it is is mentioned in this passage or otherwise.

He remembers his covenant. He remembers his people. He remembers his enemies. He remembers many other things that are mentioned in the Bible specifically to do with his people and his cause especially.

And we are called upon in the Bible to remember things in particular as well. Even children, young people, we're told, remember your creator in the days of your youth.

And we are also counseled by God to remember our redemption in Christ. And that follows through into remembering the Lord's Day as we tried this morning to look briefly from Genesis 2 at some of the important principles as they relate to the practice of keeping the Lord's Day.

We have to remember the Lord's Day to keep it holy to God. It's God's Day. We're told to remember the Lord's death. We do that in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a particular way.

[3 : 24] And so there are a whole host of uses of the word remember and remembering in the Bible. And we're going to take a look at some of those, God willing, over the next few weeks because they're very interesting passages and bring before us a lot of significant topics and subjects that we have to apply to ourselves.

And there's a great variety in it, as we'll see as we go through the different ways. We won't look at every single instance of it, of course, in the Bible. But look at the way remembering and remember is used in relation to some of the more important topics and issues that the Bible brings before us.

So here we have God remembering his covenant with Noah. Now bear in mind when this was. This is immediately following the Lord's destruction of the earth at the time, apart from those who were in the ark with Noah, both of human beings and creatures of different kinds, the remainder of the earth was overwhelmed with a flood.

And we're looking at that as we believe our Bibles. We're looking at that as a historical description of something that actually happened. It's not a myth. It's not just a story invented by human beings in order to convey something of meaning.

It is something which we take as factually correct. Just as similar things in the Bible are. And in the aftermath of the flood, when the Lord had directed Noah to leave the ark, here is what the Lord said after Noah had brought forth a thank offering.

[5 : 02] He offered sacrifice of offering of thanks to God. And the Lord smelt a pleasing aroma. The Lord accepted that. And this is what he then said.

That he would never again destroy the earth with a flood. And in order to confirm that for us as human beings, he took the rainbow and made that a sign of this covenant.

And God himself is saying, When I see this bow, I will remember my covenant. I will think upon my covenant. And what Noah has really brought to understand, and we understand from this, is that God always remembers his covenant.

But he has specifically appointed the rainbow, this beautiful aspect of nature as you see it, in order that we, as we look at rainbows, will actually think immediately, not just of its beautiful colors, but of God's view of it, and God's use of it, and God's appointment of it, to remember this covenant, where he spares, where he is giving, as we'll see, an interim for his grace to be at work, rather than giving us what we deserve, as shown in the destruction of the flood.

Now I like rainbows, and I'm sure you like rainbows. Most of us, if not all of us, like to admire rainbows as you see them. We try and capture them in photographs, and some are better at that than others, but than me certainly.

[6 : 43] It's difficult at times to get that. But it's such a thing of beauty when you see it. And it's difficult when you see a rainbow in a clear way, and when the bright colors of it stand out, it's really difficult not to stop, and just admire that, as a thing of exquisite beauty in God's creation.

But God is saying, this is just a sign of something even more beautiful, the grace of God, the patience of God, the way in which God does not mark our sin against us, as we deserve, but rather leaves this opportunity that comes through his grace, to come into a living relationship with him, and to know his forgiveness, and his acceptance, and his friendship, especially in Christ.

So let's look at three things. First of all, that the rainbow connects the earth and the heavens. That's so in the natural rainbow, as you see it in creation.

And as God is speaking of it as a sign, that brings us to consider how, in the spiritual way of God, and a covenant with the earth, how he is actually saying, this is what connects me with you human beings.

This is what connects my grace with you. And that, of course, has come, as we've seen, I've said, in Christ, especially, to be made more obvious to us. But even then, God is saying, even back in those days of Noah, this is how you will understand, how I view the earth from now on.

[8 : 20] Not so as just to dismiss sin, as if it didn't matter anymore. But rather, that people will understand, that God's concern, is not destructively, to look upon mankind, despite the fact that they're still sinners.

But rather, to show the beauty, of his grace, of his forgiveness, of his call, to us to come to know him. The rainbow connects the earth, and the heavens.

Secondly, the rainbow is best seen, against dark clouds. Sometimes, it's not easy to see a rainbow, it's seen faintly, other times, it stands out brilliantly, and it stands out best, when you see some dark clouds, behind it.

We'll see that, and what it signifies as well. Thirdly, the rainbow is caused, by the rays of the sun. When the sun shines through, the clouds through, to the raindrops, through the raindrops, they act as prisms, so that, in that way, the light is refracted, into the colors of the spectrum, to form this beautiful rainbow.

But it's the light, light of the sun, that's transmitted, through, the droplets of rain, so that you come to see it, as the spectrum, of the rainbow, rather than just, white light.

[9 : 43] Three things, the rainbow connects, the earth, and the heavens. This, he says, God says, is how I will remember, my covenant. I am setting, my bow, in the clouds.

This is the sign, that I will, of the covenant, I make between me, and you, and every living creature. I have set, my bow, in the clouds, and it shall be, a sign of the covenant, between me, and the earth.

Now, when you see the rainbow, okay, sometimes you might see, a complete one, just a whole arch, but most of the time, you see it, just as a part of that. There's one, one end of it, always on the earth, the other end, which is up into the heavens.

And there's, an illustrative message, in that, that God is saying to us, this is a sign, of my covenant. And the covenant, in the Bible, is, or the covenant, between God, and the earth here, or God, and his people, is a covenant, that's made by God.

It's initiated, by God. It's the authority, of God, that lies behind it. He has decided, to make the covenant. He sets the terms, of the covenant. He actually ties himself, in a covenant.

[10 : 47] It's really, a very solemn, bond, or contract, that God himself, sets up, between himself, and here, as he says, the earth, and every living creature.

That bond, or contract, is God, establishing a connection, and showing in that connection, something of himself, something of his own beauty, some attributes of his, that are precious, to all who understand, what the Bible is saying, about God.

Because it's to do, with sparing, and with preservation, and with grace, as we'll see, as God reveals himself, in that way. And so it is here, that this, extends, from the heavens, down to the earth.

Now very interestingly, God is saying here, that he is, not establishing, a covenant, merely with Noah, and with his family. Bear in mind, that this, follows, what's, what you see, in the previous chapters, to do with, the flood.

And if you go to the previous chapter there, verses 21 to 22, as we've read through them, you can see that, this, is what God concluded, I will never again, curse the ground, because of man, for the intention of man's heart, is evil, from his youth.

[12 : 07] And instead of, cursing the ground, and bringing his judgment, instantly, upon, the sin of man, and the sin of mankind, though that's not gone away, as we'll see, it's not been eradicated, but God is saying, for the whole earth as it is, for the creatures of the earth, as well as even for you, for you especially, you human beings, never again, will I destroy the earth, as I did, in your days, in the day of Noah.

It's to do with God, providing, a long, interim, period of grace. Why doesn't God come, and judge the earth today?

Why doesn't God come, and judge our society, and our generation today, when you think of all the evil, that is evident, in our society? When you think of everything, that happens, that's so virulently, anti-God, and deliberately, anti-God, and flouts the laws of God?

Why doesn't God come, to destroy, as he did in the days of Noah, is it that we no longer, deserve it? Of course it's not. Is it that sin, has ceased to be sin, in the eyes of God? Of course it's not.

Is it that God, is saying sin, is not as serious as it was, in the days of Noah? Of course it's not. It's that God, is concerned, to show us, human beings, that he is a patient God, that he is a long, suffering God, that if he were, to mark iniquity, as Psalm 130 puts it, none of us, could stand, because he would do, what he did in the days of Noah, but, as that Psalm says, there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.

[13 : 48] How many times, do we thank God, for his patience, for his forbearance, for the fact, that he is prepared, if we can use this language, carefully, that he's prepared, to put up with, the ungodliness, of human beings, in order, to demonstrate, that he has, a gospel emphasis, an emphasis, on grace, and forgiveness, and his extending, opportunities, to human beings, like you and I, instead of giving us, what we deserve, to destroy us, for our sins, and as the rainbow, naturally, connects the heavens, and the earth, so God is saying, this is my sign, a sign, that I'm going to be, a sparing God, right through to the end, of the world, in the day of judgment, which will come, you see,

God is not saying, I will never again, destroy the earth, full stop, he's saying, I will never again, destroy the earth, with a flood, that I, as I did in the days of Noah, this world, is going to be, burned up, the elements, will be on fire, with fervent heat, as second Peter, puts it, where God comes, in Christ, in his judgment, at that last day, of judgment, it's an awesome thing, to read these things, in the word of God, but right up, to that moment, the rainbow, as a thing of beauty, emphasizes, God's patience, God's grace, God's forgiveness, available to us, in Christ, God extending, the hand of mercy, God calling, human beings, to repentance, it connects, the earth, and heaven, secondly, the rainbow, is best seen, against the dark, clouds, the darker the sky, as we've said, the clearer, you tend to see, a rainbow, and its colors, and it seems here, that we should understand, when God is saying, when I bring, clouds over the earth, remember that, that's in the aftermath, of the flood, and you associate, the flood, with rain, and with heavy rain, and with a massive, deluge of water, from the heavens, and even the fountains, of the deep, so, the clouds, coming over the earth, after Noah, had come out of the ark, would be, a thing that would indicate, threatening, he had seen all that, before, before he went into the ark, and after he'd gone into the ark, these clouds, as they poured out, their contents, onto the earth, to destroy life, from off the earth, they might indicate, to Noah, is God again, going to destroy the earth, as he did, a short time ago, and God is saying, no, when I bring, my clouds, again, over the earth, it's not going to be, for another flood, it's not going to be, for another, destructive, application of my judgment, you will see, my bow, in the clouds, and not only so, but God is saying, when I see the bow, in the clouds, you know, that's an amazing thing, itself, isn't it, that that's the emphasis, in the passage, we like, to look upon rainbows, they're a thing, of beauty to us, we long for, a rainbow to appear, when the clouds, come over the earth, and the sun, shines through the clouds, through a gap, in the clouds, or whatever, you want to see, that rainbow, you want to see, that thing of beauty, well God is saying, it's beautiful to me, when I see the rainbow,

I will remember, my covenant, you could call, our study tonight, something like, why God likes, to look at rainbows, because, it's to do, with, this emphasis, of grace, so all of these, dark clouds, the darkness, of the clouds, as they symbolize, the destructive, anger of God, you see back, in chapter 8 again, how he emphasizes, I will never again, curse the ground, because of man, for the intention, of man's heart, is evil, from his youth, now what's that saying, well he's saying, something like this to us, God is saying, to Noah, and through these, things that he's instituting, and emphasizing here, he's really saying, effectively, I destroyed the earth, with a flood, but it hasn't changed, man's heart, God's judgment, itself, and the threat, of his judgment, does not, in itself, change, any of us, inwardly, change, it's the grace of God, it's the power, of the spirit of God, alone, that can do that, and it's in order, to provide for that, that God is saying,

I will never again, destroy the earth, with a flood, because it's not going, to achieve, any change, in man's inner character, because the thoughts, of man, he says, of man's heart, is evil, from his youth, and so because, not that God, didn't know this, before the flood, of course, but for Noah's benefit, and for our benefit, he's emphasizing this, for us tonight, that it's, not the threat, of judgment, that changes hearts, and that even God, was supposing, God were to bring, the same kind, of flood, on the earth, that happened, in Noah's day, and preserve, just a few people, from destruction, in a similar, type of way, that would never, of itself, change, if you or I, were in that ark, and had seen, that flood, of itself, that will never, change people's hearts, you often, find people, in a crisis, promising, themselves, and promising, others, that, they're going, to turn to God, they're going, to be different people, after this, and if God, takes me through this, then,

I'll start going, to church, and I'll start, seeking earnestly, how often, does it last, why does it not last, because none, of these things, themselves, even though, they speak to us, so powerfully, are sufficient, to change, our hearts, to change us, inwardly, for that, God is providing, this wonderful, period of grace, for the gospel, for an emphasis, not merely, on judgment, though that's not, absent, but for an emphasis, primarily, on forgiveness, on acceptance, on friendship, with God, in Christ, and because, of Christ, that's where, you see, the brightness, of this rainbow, and you know, the more, you understand, the gravity, of sin, the seriousness, of sin, that's your sin, and my sin, the more, you come to appreciate, from the Bible, something, of the nature, of sin, and especially, how nature, how in its nature, sin, is itself, so antagonistic, to God, it's then, that you begin, to marvel, that there's such a thing, as a rainbow, in the skies, it's then, that you begin, to see, the beautiful colors, of God's grace, in Christ, because the darker, you see, the hue, the color, of your sin, the blackness, of your heart, the more, you're able, to admire, the beauty, of this grace, it struck me, preparing this, that it's rather ironic,

[21 : 41] I'm not just picking this, just to, pick on it, as some people, might think, but as you know, the flag, of the, LGBT, movement, is a rainbow flag, and nothing, of what I'm saying, is an indication, of what, those people, themselves, and that movement, would call homophobic, or hatred, or racist, or whatever, our heart, has to go out, to these people, who are living, these lifestyles, not in a, condemnatory way, even though, there are aspects, of that, that we cannot accept, they need the gospel, they need, God's rainbow, not the rainbow flag, of the LGBT movement, which if you look it up, on Wikipedia, or wherever, will tell you, why they chose, the rainbow, why is it, because, lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender, rights, are things, to be proud of, that's what it stands for, pride, in what God himself, in the Bible, reveals, as unacceptable, to him, our hearts, must go out, to that community, our hearts, must say, these people, need the gospel, we're not here, to hate them, we're not here, in any way, to find, a condemnatory, attitude to them, dismisses them, utterly, but it's ironic, to say the least, that that, beautiful rainbow, and its colors, the colors of the spectrum, have been turned, from a sign of grace, to something, which is indicative, of pride, in a sinful lifestyle, it's inverted, what God has set, and established, that's not accidental, it's just the ways, of sin, one of the ways, in which sin manifests, its opposition, and hatred, and antagonism, to God, the rainbow, connects, the earth, and the heavens, the rainbow, is best seen, against, the dark clouds, of sin,

John chapter 3, verse 16, that wonderful verse, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life, but there's another verse, then following, for God did not send his son, into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world, through him, might be saved, when Christ came, God didn't send dark clouds, so as to condemn us, in our sins, he sent his rainbow, in the person of his son, to emphasize his grace, and his concern, and burden, if you like, that we would be saved, and not destroyed, for our sins, thirdly, the rainbow, is caused by the sun's rays, now this come across, I'm sure already, from what we've said, it is in fact, the rays of the sun, breaking through, and coming through, the droplets of rain, each of these little droplets, forms, what you call a prism, through which light is refracted, and it's broken up then, into these colors, of the spectrum, indigo, violet, blue, green, yellow, orange, red, the seven colors, of the spectrum, and as you find that, in the natural world, so you find it, in what it indicates, and what it is, illustrative of, here in a spiritual sense, remember, the Bible says, in John's writings, in first John,

God is light, and in him, is no darkness, at all, God is pure light, there is no darkness, in God, there is nothing, there is nothing, in the light, that God is, that is impurity, he is, as he describes himself, pure, and holy, illustrated by, light, that is dazzlingly, white, if you like, light, but, that light, that light, that God is, has come, if you like, to be refracted, it's come to be broken up, into the colors, of the spectrum, of his grace, in Jesus Christ, you see the colors, of it, the rainbow, that's in the clouds, naturally, is something, that illustrates, for you, all that's come, to be revealed, in Christ, yes, God is revealed, in Christ, but you see him, not just as pure, white light, you see him, in all the things, that are revealed, about God, in Christ, his love, his mercy, his grace, his forgiveness, his long suffering, his forbearance, a lot more, than seven things, that you could itemize, but the fact is, that the refraction, of light, into these colors, these colors, of the spectrum, are themselves, in a way, illustrative, of all that's come, to us, in Christ, in the colors, of God's salvation, and God's grace, and God's,

God's, long suffering, and forbearance, with us, you remember, in Revelation, chapter four, where you have, a grand description, of the throne, of God, in the heavens, as John was led, to see it, well, it's describing that, in terms of God, sitting upon his throne, but there is a rainbow, surrounding the throne, and that inevitably, is meant, to cast our minds, back to Genesis, and Genesis nine, and the way, that God speaks, about a rainbow, as indicative, of his grace, and his patience, the very throne, of God, is represented, as being surrounded, by a rainbow, the grandness, the greatness, the majesty, the immensity, the holiness, of God, is refracted, for us, and for our benefit, in Christ, so that you see, these beautiful colors, of forgiveness, and acceptance, and the other things, we've mentioned, we all still, deserve, to be, destroyed, for our sins,

I have to believe, that tonight friends, I believe that, I have to believe, that of myself, that's what I deserve, for what I am, for what I am, as a sinner, against God, but that's not, where I leave the matter, that's not, what I dwell, on most, as I bring, that darkness, to the gospel, and I see, in the gospel, the pure light, of God, reflected, in Christ, into these great colors, of his grace, I take hope, and I take refuge, and I find myself, and you find yourself, saying, thank God, for his grace, thank God, for this interim, of grace, thank God, for this period, up to the end, of the world, where the gospel, has come to me, and appeals to me, to come to know God, and the beauty, and warms, of fellowship, with him, and something else, we all have some troubles, some problems, some cause of anxieties, all of us, in this building, tonight, and they'll be very different, a great variety, of anxieties, and troubles, and things, that causes troubles, from week to week, and day to day, personal issues, family issues, societal issues, issues, but there is a color, in God's rainbow, that corresponds, to each, and every one, of them, are you worried, tonight, about something, are you anxious, about someone, or about yourself, or some issue, in your life, look at God's rainbow, in Christ, and you'll see, among those colors, one that corresponds, to your need, something like, perhaps, the competence, of God, to deal with, your problem, as revealed, in Jesus, as he went about, in his ministry, how often, he showed, that whatever needs, were brought before him, he had something, to give, and something, to cure, something, completely, relevant, to that situation, every time, you see a rainbow, if you haven't, said this before, you can say it, from now on, that reminds me, that there's nothing, in all the variety, of my need, for which there isn't, a corresponding color, in the grace of God, do you feel, your guilt tonight, do you feel, unclean, in the presence of God, because of your sins, well as you look, into that rainbow, you see the color red, you see the death, of Christ, you see his resurrection, you see his completeness, what's it all about, why did that happen, it's for sinners, it's for you, and for me, how beautifully, those issues, are illustrated for us, in the song of Solomon,

[31 : 22] I know that there are, different ways of, interpreting the song of Solomon, but, there's that beautiful passage, in song of Solomon, chapter two, where, the beloved one, comes to, his loved one, as he, speaks to her, and appeals to her, to, to follow him, so as to, enter further, into the relationship, of love, this is what she, first of all says, it's the voice, of my beloved, behold he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills, and this is what he then says, arise, my love, my beautiful one, come away, for behold, the winter has passed, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear, on the earth, the time of the singing, of birds has come, the voice of the turtle dove, is heard in our land, the fig tree opens, its figs, the vines are in blossom, they give forth, their fragrance, arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away, come away with me, is what he means, and you, imagine, as you read these words, of, and you'll just imagine, but you think about, these words in Genesis, chapter eight, and into chapter nine, where this, terrible winter, of God's destructive, anger is over, and gone, and instead of that, the clouds have, begun to break, and there's a wonderful rainbow, the promise of grace, and of life, and of God's, long suffering, in his place, and there's the appeal, of the gospel, where God is saying,

I've dealt with the winter, I've dealt with your sin, I've dealt with, the darkness, that you dread, I've done it, in my son, he has borne it, he has actually carried it, he's paid the price of it, he's experienced, the darkness of it, in his own soul, he's taken the condemnation, now he says, rise and follow me, come into the warmth, of the sunshine, look at the beauty, of the rainbow, and come and enjoy, the glorious sights, of redemption, which, the Bible is, in its imagery, reminds us of, if you're into classical music, something, like Beethoven's, wonderful symphony, usually called, the Pastoral, where you have a country scene, and where the music, is so illustrative, of that country scene, and where the celebration, and the vibrancy, of the music, gives way, to, tremendous, clashing, of cymbals, and timpani drums, and the wonderful boom, of that, as it represents, the storm, and the thunder, and the lightning, and the violins, as they come, to crash together, to bring to you, that sense of, a tremendous storm, taking place, and that lasts, for a while, and then, it begins to fade, and the drum rolls, just, in the timpanis, begin to sound, as if they're, in the distance, it's just like thunder, just receding, into the distance, and onto the horizon, and then the music, changes, and out comes, the shepherd song, as it's called, a final part, of the symphony, that has to do, with a celebration, of sunshine, the sunshine, after the rain, where the shepherds, again, take delight, that the storm, didn't last forever, that there is sunshine, replacing it, tonight, come away, with Christ, into the sunshine, of his redemption, come away, with him, and follow him, into the summertime, of his salvation, salvation, your troubles, will not all go away, you'll still have problems, but when you have them, look to the rainbow, look to its colors, look to the richness, of God's grace, look to the relevance, of it, for your exact needs, forgiveness, and as you do so, thank the Lord, that there is forgiveness, in abundance, for us in Christ, let's pray,

Lord God, we come before you, to acknowledge, our sinfulness, we acknowledge, the sinfulness, of ourselves, as a people, for truly, we are like Isaiah said, a people, of an unclean heart, and we dwell, among people, of an unclean heart, with unclean lips, and minds, Lord, we are thankful, for your sparing, mercies, we are thankful, for the indications, that you have placed, even in the very, natural heavens, of the way, in which your own, face is directed, towards the world, in forbearance, and mercy, and forgiveness, and we pray, Lord, tonight, that we, will take advantage, of this interim, of grace, that we will indeed, come to know, the warmth, of your redemption, that we will, every day of our lives, be turned, to look upon, the rainbow, of your affection, hear us, we pray now, for Jesus sake,

Amen. Let's conclude, our service, this evening, singing to God's praise, Psalm 105, 105, verses 1 to 11, that's on page, 138, give thanks, to the Lord God, and call on his name, his wonderful deeds, to the nations proclaim, sing praises to him, and his exploits record, let all those, who seek him, rejoice, in the Lord, Psalm 105, verses 1 to 11, these four stanzas, to God's praise, give thanks, to the Lord, God, and call on his name, his wonderful deeds, to the nations proclaim, sing praises to him, and his exploits record, let all those, who seek him, rejoice, in the Lord, you chosen ones, to the Lord, and his might, seek ever his face, and his wonders beside, his miracles too, and his judgments divine, you children of Abraham, take up so mine, the Lord is our God, and he rules all the earth, remembering his covenant, the word he said for, he had for the ages, to come to make good, his promise to Abraham, to Isaac renewed, to Jacob, his sovereign, he three was made sure, with Israel, his covenant, would always endure, to you I will give, last year portion to stand, the country of Eden, the beautiful land.

I'll go to the main door this evening, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.

[40 : 04] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.