

“GOD PROMISED - THE RAINBOW”

READING: *Genesis 8 verse 20 – chapter 9 verse 17*

Over these past weeks, we have been aligning our thoughts with those of the original “lockdown” – Noah and his family, and of course the animals. We have seen how God shut the door, but were reminded also of how God opened that door again, We were also reminded of how God remembered Noah and his family on that rudderless floating “coffin”, and how they never were forgotten. This week we come to the part of the story when God made His promise and sealed it with the sign of the bow in the clouds.

I was reading this week of a dream that someone had. In their dream they saw a huge, beautiful double rainbow in the sky. The person was in awe at the sight, but everyone else failed to see it, because they kept looking at the dirt on the ground. The person tried to describe the beauty of the sight, but although a few lifted their eyes to take in the sight, many others refused to do so. The dreamer was reminded of a verse from scripture from **Luke’s** gospel, **chapter 21 verse 28**, where after Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, gave words of hope and Luke records **“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”** The hope that the people had longed for, God had not forgotten them.

We are surrounded by streets festooned with bunting – some of it national flags and some it rainbow flags. Rainbow flags, rainbows drawn by children and posted in windows, windows painted with rainbows. All very colourful. But I wonder why they are there? Why a rainbow? Is it some homage to the wonderful wizard of Oz, that “somewhere over the rainbow” is a perfect world?

In the Bible there are 3 references to rainbows.

In **Genesis 9 verses 8 – 17**, we read that the same God who looked on His creation, saw its evil and regretted that he had ever made mankind, now made a new covenant – a promise – with humanity, albeit just Noah and his family for starters. It was a promise that never again would God destroy the earth with a flood. Ok, there have been many terrible natural disasters since, but never on the scale of that original flood. God has kept to His word. He has honoured His promise. As a seal on that promise, God placed a bow in the skies that when He looked down He would remember that promise made. But also for humanity who would look up and see the bow in the skies, would be reminded of the promise God had made to them.

The second place we read of a rainbow is in **Ezekiel 1 verse 28**. Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of God as he was amongst the exiles in Babylon. He describes the One in his vision as **“like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.”** Another reminder in colourful fashion of the glory of God, but perhaps more importantly looking at the description used **“like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day.”** One day I was travelling to Trealaw to conduct a funeral. The day was rather wet and the clouds were dark and heavy with rain. As I approached Trealaw, suddenly there was a shaft of sunlight which caught the raindrops and there appeared the most beautiful double rainbow. When I met with the bereaved family, I told them about it and went on to say about hope and love shines in the darkest and most desperate of times. For Ezekiel, his description of God’s glory, came in the darkest of times. Diamond traders will tell you that in order to see the true beauty of the cuts and colours from a diamond. It is best seen against a dark cloth. Sometimes, it is in those darkest of times that we see the glory of God at work. As God placed the bow in the sky as a reminder of a promise made to Noah and humanity, so the most brilliant rainbows are seen against the darkest of skies where the sunlight breaks through.

The third place where a rainbow is referred to in scripture is in **Revelation chapter 4 verse 3 – “And He who was sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.”** John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos by the Romans and in these days of exile and imprisonment, he had a series of visions which we have outlined in the book of Revelation. His glorious vision of the risen Lord is followed by a series of messages to the 7 churches of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Following on from that comes his vision of throne room of Heaven itself and he describes what he sees and hears – a reminder that God is still in control. Despite all he has and will experience – God was and is still on His throne, still in control. In his book “Prophecy’s Last Word – an exposition of the Revelation”, Frederick A Tatford looks at the various stones referred to and says how they reflect the glory, the wrath, and the justice of God. He goes on to say how the emerald rainbow around the throne demonstrated the perpetuity of the covenant made with Noah, and that the emerald colour suggested the promise of hope and mercy in the face of wrath and judgement. Another commentator, Warren Wiersbe highlights the fact that the rainbow in this instance completely encircled the throne, not just an arc in the sky, but completely surrounding, signifying the completion of all things in heaven, that the promise made to Noah was now seeing its completion. For Noah and his family, God showed mercy in the midst of the wrath being poured out on a sinful world, and in the throne room of Heaven, this grace and mercy would see its completion in the face of final judgement.

When I was in Sunday School we sang a chorus which said “Whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love.” It may sound very simplistic, but sometimes we overcomplicate some of the most straightforward and simplistic messages God wants us to learn.

As the lockdown continues and the weekly and really daily appreciation of all those who are keyworkers and we continue to display our rainbows, are they merely a colourful display reminding us of Dorothy’s wish for a better place, somewhere over the rainbow where bluebirds fly, of a place that we dream of once in a lullaby and all the dreamy hopes contained within the song, or, as we have seen, can they remind us of so much more.

The rainbows of scripture remind us the promise of God never to destroy his creation as in the time of Noah; a reminder of His glory in the darkest of times, that we are not forgotten; but also the assurance of the ultimate glory in the courts of heaven when all things come to completion, once again. On the cross at Calvary, the wrath and mercy of God met in Jesus, so at the final judgement, once again wrath and mercy will meet.

In these ongoing difficult times, let us lift up our eyes and see that promise of God’s grace and mercy in the darkest of times. Let’s stop looking in the dirt and lift our eyes to the glory of our God and be reminded of the promises of His word.

*My Lord loves me
and oh the wonder I see!
A rainbow shines in my window:
my Lord loves me.
He died for me,
on a cross at Calvary,
he bore my sin and my shame
when he died for me.*

GENESIS chapter 8 verse 20 – chapter 9 verse 17

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though^[a] every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²² “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. ³ Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴ “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

⁶ “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. ⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² And 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: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I 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.

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.”

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

FROM THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN [EVERY PROMISE]

From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.
For Your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure,
I can stand on every promise of Your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of Your word.
Guilt to innocence restored:
You remember sins no more!
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice,
I will listen for Your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of Your word.
Through this dark and troubled land
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of Your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,
Love that casts out every fear,
As I stand on every promise of Your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of Your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe,
We will stand on every promise of Your word.

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