

Covenant Genesis 9:8-16

About seventy miles north of Toronto in a small rural town is a structure known as Ark Two. Ark Two is a 10,000 square foot underground bunker designed to sustain a cataclysmic, world-ending event. It was built by a guy from southern Kansas who moved to Canada and he constructed it by burying 42 out of service school busses and then pouring concrete and dirt over them. The builder, named Bruce Beach, designed Ark Two to sustain 500 people for several months. There is no cost to be a part of Ark Two. Beach's vision was that anyone could stay in the ark if they contributed to it, helped build it or maintain it. They schedule work days throughout the year you are expected to be a part of to secure your spot. Beach has since died but his creed was "Everyone is welcome in Ark Two, regardless of religion, race, nationality, political views..." And he believed that if the world ended that humanity would start again pouring out of his 42 buried school busses into the devastated world to rebuild.

Hollywood is in love with movies about the end of the world—whether it happens by an asteroid, nuclear war, zombies, a virus, aliens, rogue computers, or even a flood. In 2009 they released a movie called 2012. Makes sense, right? And it was about the end of the world. The plot of the movie was the earth's core was heating up causing tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions resulting in the end of the world. The world powers secretly build arks in the Himalayan Mountains to save a remnant of humanity. The movie ends with the arks sailing toward dry land in Africa to start over again.

The real-life Ark Two and the fictional 2012—as hopeful as they are—both are missing a key element. If the world ends, either because nature fails us or our sinful human nature betray us, what is to stop the very same thing from happening again? Having survived one apocalypse, living underground in a school bus of all things, how do the human beings left have any kind of confidence at all in the new world and not live a life plagued with fear and dread because the world ended once and who is to say it won't happen again and again and again? After something breaks once, don't we sort of expect it to break again?

Wouldn't it be nice if someone assured us, promised us that the new world would be okay?

That's exactly what the Lord God did and it is one of the most important yet least understood promises in all of God's Word.

The Bible tells us that Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives spent just about a year—somewhere around 370 days—with thousands of animals on a wooden ark. Now, the ark was big—450 feet long and 75 feet wide, but I suspect that was a *verrrry* long year. Lots of people know that story. But the focus of this series is what happened after Noah and his family's floating zoo found land. Genesis Chapter Nine tells us.

I want to do a deep dive into this chapter of God's Word because it is critically important to the entire Biblical story and it's one of the major turning points but its overshadowed because as kids in Sunday School we all learned about Noah's Ark. Genesis Chapter Nine is one of a handful of times in God's Word where God gathers His people, commissions them and makes a covenant to carry them.

And so just like when God spoke through Moses to the recently freed Hebrew slaves in fire smoke from Mount Sinai and Jesus did for His disciples on a hilltop in Galilee, God commissioned and made a covenant with Noah, his family, the whole of humanity and even the animals who lived with them in gopherwood ark for more than a year.

Then God said to Noah and to 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, 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.”

Genesis 9:8-11

It’s important to remember what caused the flood in the first place and what caused God to destroy the earth and begin again humanity anew with the family of one man.

Humanity, with the exception Noah’s family had become desperately evil and the world and they had corrupted the earth they were charged to steward and keep. It was a terrible situation. God’s very good creation was utterly broken and it broke Gods heart.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Genesis 6:5-8

Sin utterly corrupted all of humanity except for one man and one family. Outside of Noah’s family, every thought of everyone’s heart was always evil. And humanity grieved God because of their sin rather than gave Him joy. Humanity’s sin plagued creation. The land suffered because humanity was so wicked and corrupt.

All of humanity that is left is descended from Noah—the one righteous man, the one man who found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Noah, as we will see in a few weeks, was not a perfect man. He was sinful. And we are sinful too. As it says in Romans 3:23:

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But our thoughts are not evil continually. We are rarely as bad as we can be but we are never as good as we should be. And sometimes, by the grace of God, we bless our world rather than curse it. We are far from perfect but we are the descendants of the one righteous man amid a shattered world.

When God re-started the world He did not count on human righteousness or human ability, human gifts, aspirations, good intentions, good ideas, good works, perspicacity, creativity, righteousness, reason or anything else we as human beings might produce.

When God re-started the world—raising it from the dead, baptizing it in the waters of the Great Flood—He put its destiny, our destiny, in His hands—not humanity, not ours.

He made a covenant to never destroy the world or allow the world to be destroyed because of our sin. God made a covenant to sustain His creation, including you and me, despite ourselves.

And this is a basic covenants that shapes our perspective as followers of Christ. The idea that God is in control of this world and will not allow it to be destroyed and wrecked and ruined and that human beings will have no need for any kind of ark (including 42 buried school busses, a fortified bunker high on a mountain or a rocketship to another planet) is not only good news. It should be foundational our life and radically shape. how we live because we know how this world ends and its not in a smoking cinder. It ends is glory not gory.

This covenant in Genesis Chapter Nine is incredibly beneficial. Let's talk about just a few ways.

First, **God's covenant sets us free.**

Some of you will know the Greek myth of the Titan Atlas. Atlas was on the losing end of a battle against the gods of Olympus. As his **punishment**, Atlas was condemned to hold the skies on his shoulders for all eternity. It was a terrible fate for Atlas and the myths of Greeks are filled with stories of him trying to find ways to get out of it.

The Greeks knew something here didn't they? They knew that holding the earth on our shoulders is not a good thing. They knew that we are not created for that kind of responsibility—and taking it on will crush us.

Today I am not sure we are as smart as the Greeks. How often do we hear "We need to save the planet?" How many times have we heard someone announce that they are trying make sure their kids and the grandchildren have a world to live in? How often does a politician or an actor, a singer, or a billionaire act like a savior of the world?

How often even do we act like our little corner of the world depends upon us?

Our world doesn't need saving. Our planet doesn't need you and me to ensure its survival or the survival of humanity because the Lord God has made a covenant with us. And most often people who seek to save the world or live like the fate of the world rests on their shoulders do far more damage than good.

Now, that doesn't mean we aren't supposed to be good stewards of the world and the environment. It doesn't mean we shouldn't try to leave our neighborhoods and our cities, our countries and even the globe a better place than where we found it. We shouldn't treat the world like a rental car on which we sprung for the damage waiver.

God put us in this world to work and keep it and be fruitful and multiply. We'll talk about that next week. That is our God-given job.

We're here to serve the world not save the world.

God has already promised to do that. And when we try to save the world, we don't just not take God at His Word—we place ourselves on the throne because it means God isn't real enough or powerful enough to do what we presume to do.

Second, **God's covenant gives us courage.**

We spent Christmas Break with family in Kansas City and one day we took a day trip up to Atchison, Kansas which happens to be the hometown of Amelia Earhart—the first woman to fly an airplane across the Atlantic. She disappeared in 1936 somewhere in the Pacific trying to circumnavigate the globe in an airplane.

They have a new museum to her in Atchison and it was filled Amelia Earhart's quotes and philosophy of life. And she talked about courage and doing the impossible, risk, overcoming obstacles, not letting circumstances get in your way, trying hard and embracing adventure and hardship. My favorite quote of hers was: **Courage is the price life exacts for granting peace.**

That's a good quote. It almost sounds Biblical.

But I realized how different she sounded to the way we sound today. And she wasn't alone for that era where they lauded risk and praised courage.

That daring philosophy of life, the conviction that fear is the enemy, that fear stops us from doing great things is so different than how we roll today. There is a campaign today. There is a concerted effort. There is a movement (and it has been going on for decades) to make us afraid. Fear is not the enemy anymore. It's become an excuse, a rationale. We no longer fear fear.

We don't risk. We don't embrace uncertainty. We put our thumb on the scale when we calculate costs and benefits. We stay home and live safely ensconced behind our screens.

We use phrases like 'out an abundance of caution' and 'better safe than sorry.' We consult risk management professionals, alarm our homes, and make our kids sign waivers to swim in a pool or play laser tag.

Fear sells and that anyone who sells fear is undoubtedly also selling you something to make you safe—usually your freedom, usually our independence.

It takes courage to be free. And that is why individual rights and liberties are always tied to God because if God gave us our liberty, if our rights come from God and they are our best legal mechanism to honor the fact that we are made in the image of God—we will need enough trust in God to have the courage to live as free people under His plan and His protection.

And God's covenant to never destroy the world, to preserve and protect and keep this world through His work rather than ours should give us that courage. Go's covenant should give us the courage to say anyone with delusions of being our savior, "No thank you. I trust in a God already and you are not Him."

Finally, **God's covenant leaves Him one choice.**

So after the flood, after the rain and the clouds parted, God gave a sign of His covenant.

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, for all future generations: I have 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.

Genesis 9:12-15

We see the rainbow symbol a lot today and it has very little do with God’s covenant. The rainbow has been co-opted to make sexual brokenness look happy and friendly and carefree. Religious movements co-opt the symbols of the people they seek to displace or conquer and the rainbow has been co-opted. But the rainbow is a great sign and symbol of God’s covenant to not destroy the world.

And we call it a rainbow but, you probably rainbows are not really bows. Rainbows are circles. We can only just see part of them from ground. And the fact that the rainbow is really a circle is significant.

The rainbow is complete, not partial, and that’s exactly what God covenants to do—finish His creation. **(Insert rainbow pic)** The Lord promises to finish, to complete what He started, to bring it full circle.

Here is the thing about covenants, they limit our choices. They bind us to a particular course of action—no matter what the cost. Marriage is a covenant. In marriage we commit ourselves to one person—come what may. We make a covenant in having children, we commit ourselves to love them unconditionally and provide for their future no matter what.

Covenants are costly.

And when God splashed a rainbow in the sky after they cleared, He committed Himself to a costly course of action.

When God splashed a rainbow in the sky to affirm His covenant to make all things new rather than destroy the world for its sin, He drove the nails into the wrists on His only Son.

When God splashed a rainbow across the sky of the resurrected and reborn earth, He saw Jesus descending from Heaven astride a throne declaring:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Behold, I am making all things new. Write this down, for these words are trustworthy. It is done!

Revelation 21:3-6

God’s covenant leaves Him one choice.

And He chooses you.

So the question is not, “What will He do or what will happen or how will we make it?” That’s already been decided.

The question is “How will we live? How will we respond? What does life look like under the amazing protection of God’s covenant?”

To that we’ll turn next week.