

The Promise of the Rainbow

As kids, I think we *all* were delighted at seeing rainbows, and I, for one, never outgrew it. A rainbow is special enough that I want to stop, stare, and if possible, to share it with someone before it fades away. When I saw one out my window recently, I immediately took a picture to post on Facebook, so it could be enjoyed by many others too. Reactions fell into two categories – the standard “So beautiful!” remarks, and those that alluded to a deeper meaning:

Then God said to Noah: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature... Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth... I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant...” (Genesis 9:8-15)

To Noah and his family (the righteous remnant God had preserved), this promise meant they could come out of the ark and establish new lives without fear of another flood. They – and all humanity through them – got a fresh start, a second chance to get it right by loving and following God. God kept his promise: no more earth-destroying floods. Unfortunately, however, humanity has largely forsaken him and gone its own way. It’s no surprise, then, that some have even presumed to hijack God’s beautiful sign, the rainbow, and make it mean something else altogether.

I wondered about that last line of the passage above, though. Why should God, who never forgets anything, need repeated reminders of his own promise not to destroy the earth again? Then it hit me. No doubt it’s because his divine wrath is being every day provoked by the pervasive evil, corruption, and violence of this world, which is what caused him to unleash the waters of the great flood in the first place!

We should not take the comforting promise of the rainbow to mean that God has changed his definition of sin or the judgement it deserves. God doesn’t change, and judgement is surely coming. He is only holding it back for now. As in the days of Noah, God in his goodness offers advance warning and a way of escape for all who will listen. The warnings are throughout the Bible and preached in churches every week. And the way of escape? We don’t need another ark; we need Jesus Christ, whom God sent to save us. *His* glory outshines any rainbow.

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