

Genesis 9:1-17

Somewhere over the rainbow

I dare say few among us has not seen *The Wizard of Oz*, the classic story of Dorothy, the Kansas farm girl who is blown by a tornado to the land of Oz. In the story, Dorothy follows the yellow brick road to the Emerald City. Along the way, she meets the Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man. Dorothy is also found doing the responsible thing along the way. While her goal is to return to Kansas, she also assumes responsibility for seeing that the Lion gets his courage, that the Scarecrow gets a brain, and that the Tin Man gets a heart. They overcome many obstacles along the way and finally return to the emerald city. Dorothy is to return to Kansas in a hot air balloon, but as the balloon is about to take off, Toto, her dog, jumps out. Dorothy leaves to balloon to retrieve Toto, but by the time she gets the dog, the balloon has left and can't return. Dorothy is heartbroken at not going home, but to save the day, an alternate route is provided. By clicking the heels of her slippers together and saying "there's no place like home" she'll be able to return!

The story of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* is really a story of responsibility. Responsibility has, I believe, almost become a four letter word today. Dorothy's storybook acceptance of responsibility really pales in comparison to what the true God calls us to. As we continue to study about Noah, we find here an important lesson about responsibility. The flood is over, the ark has rested, and those on the ark have exited. Now life begins again on a new earth.

Notice first the general provisions of life upon the new earth in verses 1-7. Noah and his family was given a stewardship. Stewardship, by its very nature, implies responsibility. Likewise, so have we been given a stewardship. As we examine several aspects of the stewardship given to Noah, realize this is still applicable to us!

We see first the **stewardship of childbirth** (vv. 1, 7). Notice we're told twice (in v. 1 and v. 7) to be fruitful and multiply. God did not bless Noah and say, "have two children." Granted, He only had three, but that was God's plan, not Noah's. The average person today has, I believe, all sorts of excuses for ignoring this stewardship. Many say they are not emotionally capable of having more than one or two children. If that's so, it may be that they're not emotionally capable for the one or two they do have! I've also heard folks who say they only have a three bedroom house, hence they can't have more than two children! Who says each child has to have his or her own room? We have friends who have seven children and only have a three bedroom house! To say each child "needs" or "deserves" their own room is about as logical as saying Karen and I can't have any children because we only have two toilets, one for me and one for her! There are also a host of other excuses offered often in this area!

Don't misunderstand. I'm not proposing that we indiscriminately keep having children. I believe we do reach a limit determined by multiple factors (income / mental health / sometimes physical health / peace in our heart / etc.). This is a decision each family must prayerfully make, and it will vary from family to family. But the reality is that many within the church have accepted the selfish thinking of humanism which is me-centered. That type of thinking which is concerned with "what I want," or "what's

convenient for me.” The truth is that many times children aren’t convenient! But are we slaves to convenience or slaves to Christ?

Honestly, I have to wonder about many even within the church. By their actions, they show a very me-centered attitude, looking out for number one! As a result, they miss out on the blessing of obedience to God’s command to stewardship in this area, and the blessing that each child is! I was reminded of this selfish thinking several years ago. We were visiting our parents in Florida on Vacation. We went to church with my mother on Wednesday evening. Her church has a Wednesday evening fellowship meal, and we were eating my mother was introducing us to people. At that time, our oldest two children had been born and Karen was pregnant with our third. As my mother introduced us to one lady in particular, she looked at our two preschool children, then looked at Karen, obviously expecting as she was definitely showing at that time. She asked, “are both of these yours?” Yes, we beamed. “And you’re expecting again?” she said. “In November,” my wife replied.” The she began to say “oh, I’m so sorry. It’s going to be so difficult for you.” Fortunately for her, my wife is a very gracious lady. She began immediately to encourage her to not be sorry for us because we believed each child was a blessing from God and we were eagerly anticipating the arrival of this blessing.

Some might say, but pastor, this was different in Noah’s day. They had to have lots of children because nobody was left on the earth. Well show me where Scripture repeals this command to multiply and replenish the earth? Over and over again, the theme is the same: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). And this is just one example of many!

I realize this is a sensitive area for many, but this IS what the Word says, and I’ve learned firsthand the blessing of obedience in this area. We’re responsible to be stewards in this important area!

But we also have a *stewardship of creatures* (vv. 2-4). This stewardship is in regards to two areas. First of all we this stewardship in regards to our **dominion** (v. 2). From creation God had given man dominion over animals (Genesis 1:28). The difference, however was that before the Fall man ruled by love. Now, however, he rules by fear. How do you house train a dog? You physically swat it when it has an accident, or put its nose in what it did and take it outside. Have you ever seen anybody trying to reason with their dog, saying, “now Fido, you know we have new carpet. You don’t want to soil it, so be sure to bark when you need to go out.” Of course not! We exercise dominion over animals, not by the use of reason, but by sheer brute force. This stewardship means we are to use animals but not abuse them!

Our stewardship of creatures is also in regards to our **diet** (vv. 3-4). I don’t mean to offend any vegetarians, but I’m sorry, the Word is pretty specific here; God intended for man to eat meat! One commentator even noted, “vegetarianism has no scriptural warrant.” Jesus ate meat, even in His resurrection body. There’s also an interesting passage in 1 Tim. 4:1-5: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received

with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

Hence, our stewardship here certainly allows us to eat any meat. I suppose that includes such oddities as cow tongue, monkey brain, and a host of other “specialty” items! But it is a stewardship which means we are not to eat in excess, it should be received with thanksgiving, and it should be shared with others. In a world gone crazy over diet and exercise programs, perhaps we’d do well to remember that we’re responsible to be good stewards in this area of our life!

Notice also that we have a *stewardship of conscience* (vv. 5-6). How fun it is to get in church and have a debate about capital punishment. Get three people together to discuss it and you’ll probably have four opinions! I remember debating both capital punishment and abortion in my eighth grade English class. The teacher allowed everybody to share their opinion on both. I gladly shared that I believed that capital punishment was wrong because the Bible said, “thou shalt not kill.” However, when it came to the subject of abortion, I said I had no problem with that. At that time I believed it was a choice that belonged to the woman. My teacher immediately picked up the contradiction in my immature thinking and asked how I could say it was wrong to kill on one hand, but allow it with an unborn child on the other. I’ve since changed my mind on both issues!

Why did I change my mind? Well obviously the scripture clearly teaches abortion is wrong! There are hundreds of passages we could go to in order to support such a position. It’s amazing today to me that God used a public school setting to show me that truth. But what about capital punishment? That’s an entire sermon, but suffice it to say that the teaching here is clear that it’s scriptural! And that right is still given to the state according to Romans 13:1-4: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” There are also a host of other passages which could be cited to support such a position.

The point of all this is to point out the sacredness of human life. This has implications even beyond murder. People different from us are made in the image of God. We should not treat them sub-human. Handicapped people are special to God too. We should open our heart to them, as hard as it is! In short, we should celebrate differences, not letting them divide! God knows we’re all different in some form or fashion. Regardless of the differences, we’re still stewards in this area of conscience. Human life is sacred - treat it such.

These areas of stewardship (childbirth, creatures, conscience) are all part of the general provisions of life on the new earth. But the responsibility was not man’s alone. God shared in it as well.

Notice then the great promise of life upon the new earth in verses 8-17. Here we see God's end of the covenant. This is seen in both the making of the covenant and the meaning of the covenant.

Notice first the ***making of the covenant*** (vv. 8-11). God says He'll never flood the earth again! There are many scholars who contend that the Flood of Genesis was a local flood. Remember the flood stories in other cultures, which we've discussed? These scholars say that because these stories differ, they are evidence of stories that grew up around great local floods. Such "scholars" can't believe a flood of worldwide proportion, but can accept a local one.

Well, if it was a local flood, God is a liar!! God said He wouldn't do again what He did in Noah's day. But there have been PLENTY of local floods since Noah's day. Yet there's never been another worldwide flood, and there never will be. God made a covenant with man. It was initiated by God. In verse nine God says, "I, behold, I . . ."

But what about other catastrophes? And doesn't Bible say world will be destroyed at end? In his commentary, Matthew Henry says, "this promise does not hinder . . . that God may bring other wasting judgments upon mankind; for, though he has here bound himself not to use this arrow any more, yet He has other arrows in His quiver. Nor but that he may destroy particular places and countries by the inundations of the sea or rivers. Nor will the destruction of the world at the last day by fire be any breach of His promise. Sin which drowned the old world will burn this (one)."

Thank God He made this covenant and gives us this earth to live upon without fear of Flood! It may not be paradise, but it's better than what we deserve. Bless God, it's not hell, which is what we really deserve! God made a covenant with man!

But notice also the ***meaning of the covenant*** (vv. 12-17). Who doesn't like to see a rainbow? Poems have been written about them, songs have been sung about them, and legends and fables have grown up around them. But the reality is that the rainbow is the sign of God's covenant with man. That covenant is that in wrath, God will remember mercy!

Just as a rainbow is a reflection of the beams of the sun, so Christ was a reflection of God's mercy. Jesus is described in Revelation 4:3 as having a "rainbow around His throne." To me, this pictures the mercy that flows from the throne of God. When we get to heaven, we don't stand before a God of judgment. Judgment took place at the cross. Instead, we stand before a God of mercy; one who, in mercy, sent His only Son to pay for the sins of lost man!

What a beautiful covenant - a great promise for life upon the new earth. With such a promise, how could Noah do anything but live responsibly as the steward God called him to be? But then again, how can we fail to be responsible in our service to God with such great mercy having been lavished on us?

Does the name David Rice Atchison mean anything? Atchison was the real twelfth president of the United States! At noon on March 4, 1849, Zachary Taylor was scheduled to succeed James Polk as chief executive. But March 4 was a Sunday, and Taylor, a devout believer, refused to take the oath of office on the Sabbath. Thus, under the Succession Act of 1792, Missouri Senator Atchison, as President ProTem of the Senate, automatically became president. Atchison was said to have taken the responsibilities of his office very much in stride. He appointed some of his cronies to

high cabinet positions, then went to bed to sleep out the remainder of his brief administration. The next day at noon Taylor took over the reins.

Many times I'm afraid we're not even as responsible as Atchison was. At least he was prepared for the brief time he was in office! Positions had been appointed, and if something had come up, he was prepared to deal with it. Yet, we're so often not prepared. And we serve an even higher calling - not just the people of a country, but the Lord of ALL! Just as Noah was given responsibility, so have you been given responsibility. I ask you today, will you be responsible?

When Dorothy said those words, "there's no place like home, there's no place like home," she awoke to find it was only a dream. But let me tell you today, responsibility in God's service is no dream. It's very real, and very much needed!