

## **“LIVING A BLESSED LIFE IN A CURSED WORLD”** **(Genesis 9:1-17)**

When you walked in to church this morning, you likely had someone say to you, “Good morning,” and then asked, “How are you?” The most common answer that question is something along the lines of “I’m fine or I’m good, how are you?” But sometimes people who are in a particularly good mood will say, “Couldn’t be better.” Just last week someone said to me, “If I were any better, I’d be twins.” I hadn’t heard that one before. Other times people are a little less enthusiastic and say, “I’m pretty good for the shape I’m in,” or “I’m hanging in there,” or sometimes they’ll take their hand and rock it back and forth, as if to say, “I’m so-so.” Others give a philosophical answer and say, “I’m still above ground” or “I’m still alive and kickin.” It’s a way of saying that while things may not be entirely great, as I still have a pulse, life is good.

The truth is that life is a mixture of good and bad, ups and downs, highs and lows – and we live in a world that is both cursed and blessed at the same time. Because of the fall we daily live with the curse of sin and death, but we also daily enjoy many blessings that we often take for granted. Your answer to “How are you?” may vary depending on if you are enjoying the blessings of this world or feeling the effects of its curse. This morning I want to talk to you about living a blessed life in a cursed world, and appreciating and enjoying God’s blessings even in the midst of pain and sorrow.

For the past four weeks we’ve been looking at the life of Noah and his amazing journey of faith. In chapter 6-8 we saw the worldwide destruction of life, and how God – after being grieved by the rebellion and depravity of humanity, decides to destroy every living being in creation by a flood. It was a monumental decision, but one that comes after a long period of grace in which God gives mankind an opportunity to repent of their ways and turn to Him for salvation. But the day comes when God acts, He sends the flood, and everyone on earth perishes except Noah and his family.

In chapter 8, after a year of floating on water, the ark finally rests again on dry land, and Noah and his family step into a new world – a much different world. There are no roads, there are no familiar landmarks, there are no cities or businesses, and there are no people. Everything in their previous life has been destroyed. It must have been a surreal feeling. Everything is a big unknown. They have a lot of questions, and in the first 17 verses of chapter 9 God gives Noah four instructions for living in the new world, and each instruction speaks to wonderful blessing given to us by God.

The first instruction is to **REPRODUCE LIFE**, which speaks to the **blessing of family**. Verse one says, Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” He repeats the command in verse 7... “As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

This sounds very familiar, doesn’t it? In chapter one, God tells Adam the same thing... “Be fruitful and multiply. I want you to have babies – babies that will bear my image, and image-bearers that will go out and fill the earth with my glory.” Now 1600 years after Adam, all of the earth’s population – except Noah and his family – have died, and God repeats His command to Noah, “I’m starting over with you – you are the new Adam – you are the new head of the human race – and like Adam, I want you and your family to get married, have kids, and fill the earth with people.” It tells us that God has not given up on creation, but is preserving it through Noah.

It also tells us that as God recreates the world through Noah, he once again establishes the family as the foundation of civilization, and the building block of what He wants to do in the world. Each family, someone said, is a mini-civilization and as the family goes, so goes civilization.

Don't miss the fact in verse one that having children is a blessing. It's not so much a command to have as many kids as you possibly can, but a statement that you are blessed to have been given children. Psalm 127:3, 5 says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him... Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." We live in a unique period of human history where kids are not always seen as a blessing, but an obstacle to personal goals, comforts, and conveniences. Raising children is the hardest job you'll ever have, but they are a gift from the Lord, and He wants us to celebrate each gift He gives us.

In a cursed world, every family is going to have problems – husbands and wives will have conflicts, sometimes there will be divorce, kids will rebel, and family members will die. This is reality. But we should do everything possible to uphold the sanctity of marriage and family.

- If you are not yet married, you can honor marriage by remaining sexually pure until marriage, and resolving to only marry someone who shares your commitment to Christ.
- If you are married, you can resolve to be the kind of husband or wife God commands in scripture and stay committed and loyal to your spouse.
- If you are divorced, you can seek God's forgiveness and healing for the past and bloom where you are planted.
- If you are a widow or widower, you can thank God for the gift He gave you, even as you grieve and mourn their loss, and look forward to the day you will see them again in glory.

Not only was Noah to reproduce life and enjoy the God-given blessing of family, but in verses 2-3 we see that he is to **SUSTAIN LIFE**, which speaks of the **blessing of food**... "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. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything."

Animals play an interesting role in God's creation. In the original creation, he made animals to fill the sky, the earth, and the water – in every part of creation. Part of the reason I think God made animals is that they glorify God in their variety and originality and colors and shapes and sizes. Some animals fascinate and scare us – lions and bears and tigers and alligators – we don't want to ever meet one in the wild, but we love seeing them in zoos and watching documentaries about them. Some animals we fall in love with – how many of you have a dog? Dogs are great... cats, well, I don't want to put cats down, but I'm not just a cat person.

Then there are some animals that provide food. The implication in verse 3 is that people were vegetarians before the flood – no one knows for sure – but after the flood God blesses Noah with a vast source of food to sustain life... you can eat plants, you can eat fruit, and you can also eat food from animals. Some folks have a hard time with animals being eaten, but verse 3 says they are God's provision to us to sustain live.

One thing the Bible makes clear from the beginning is that there is a difference between human beings and animals. On day seven of creation, when God makes man, He says, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, that he may rule over the fish and the bird and over the animals." There is vast difference between man and animals – man is made in God's image and animals are not.

Animals share with us what is called conscious or sentient life. The word sentient is a Latin word that means the capacity to feel, sense, and perceive. Plants and trees and grass are not sentient, but birds and fish and animals have the capacity to move and see and hear and smell and taste. But they do not have a soul or a spirit that relates to God as we do. Psalm 42:1 says, “As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants after God.” Animals pant after water, but they don’t pant after God. They’re different.

They’re also different in that they don’t rule over us – we rule over them. In Genesis 1 God tells Adam to “Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish and the birds and over every living creature.” God says, “Adam, you’re in charge. Take care of the animals and treat them with respect, but you rule over them – they don’t rule over you.” This is reflected in verse 2 where God says that animals have a “fear and dread” of man. Very few animals are aggressive towards humans unless provoked. If they see a person, especially with a gun or crossbow, they will usually run or hide.

God has given man dominion over the earth, and that includes animals. And part of the blessing God gives us through animals is food. Think of all the good food that comes from just a cow – you get milk and cheese and butter and ice cream... and you get a nice, juicy steak – all of it is given by God for our sustenance and enjoyment. It’s a gift God gives us, and each time we eat, we should take time to thank the Lord for His provision and blessing of good food.

As Noah and his family enter the new world, God instructs him to reproduce life and enjoy the blessing of family; he instructs him to sustain life and enjoy the blessing of food; and third, He instructs Noah to **RESPECT LIFE**, which speaks of the **blessing of protection**. Verses 4-6 say, “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 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. “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.”

God says, “You are free to eat anything you want, but there is one restriction: don’t eat the blood of the animal.” In other words, “Don’t eat uncooked meat. Make sure the blood of the animal is fully drained from its body before you eat it.” God knew, from a health standpoint, that eating raw meat can make you sick. It’s just common sense to cook the meat first.

But more than that, God is teaching Noah an important theological lesson, and that is to respect the sacredness of life. Throughout the Bible, blood is pictured as the symbol of life, and the shedding of blood as the loss of life. This principle was later taught to Israel in the sacrificial system God gave them. In Leviticus 17:10-11 God says, “I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

God is teaching His people that the forgiveness of sin comes through the shedding of blood, and the blood of every animal sacrificed in the Old Testament looked forward to Jesus, who would sacrificially shed His blood in our place – as an exchange – He dies so that we might live – He gave of His blood so that ours would not be required. Since blood is the only atonement for sin, it is something very sacred and precious.

Not only must the blood of animals not be *eaten*, but God goes on to say that the blood of humans must not be *shed*. And anyone – whether it be an animal that kills a person, or a human that kills another human being – they will be held accountable – because human life is precious to God.

In the book of Exodus, the law of Moses said that if an ox gores a person to death, the ox must be put to death. And likewise, God says in verse 6 that every human who kills another human will be held accountable... “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.” A life for a life. If you kill, you will be killed. If you show such disrespect for human life that you murder it, then you have forfeited your right to your own life.

Before the flood, the world had become an incredibly violent place. Cain killed Abel, and then in chapter 4 we read about Lamech who killed someone who offended him and then bragged about it. And at least three times violence is mentioned as one of the reasons that God sent the flood. Before the flood there was no police force or court system. It was pretty much every man for himself. But now in the new world God establishes human government as a way to bring stability to society, to enforce law and order, and carry out justice by putting the murderer to death.

When a person murders another person, he or she robs someone of something that can never be repaid – the gift of life. Capital punishment is a way of saying, “What you have done is a direct attack on God – who made man in His image – and is the only one who has the authority to take it away. What you have done is so heinous, so vile, that it cannot be minimized. Murder demands justice.”

Often we see murder trials on TV where the defendant sits before a judge in a courtroom, and behind him – sometimes just a few feet away – sits the victim’s family. And they are heartbroken and devastated, they are angry, and they want justice. They want the justice system to validate the life of their son or daughter or spouse by holding the murderer accountable. I remember so well the father of Ronald Goldman – in the O.J. Simpson trial – beside himself after Simpson was acquitted. He was outraged that the life of his son was not validated, and that his murderer walked out of the courtroom a free man. We know instinctively that there is something very special about human life, and to kill another human being is an attack on God.

This is not the last word God will speak on justice. The law of capital punishment will be repeated in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But the law of Moses will also specify that not all killing requires the death penalty. In cases of accidental killings or manslaughter, such persons could run to cities of refuge to be protected from those seeking his death. Our justice system today follows these same guidelines in determining whether a killing is accidental, in self-defense, if it’s second-degree murder and committed in the heat of passion, or if it is first-degree premeditated murder. The goal is justice and each case should be evaluated individually.

One might argue that the whole idea of capital punishment is an Old Testament law – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – and that the New Testament teaches grace and mercy and forgiveness – it teaches turning the other cheek. This is certainly true in our personal relationships – we are not to seek revenge against those who harm us, but leave vengeance up to God – and God has ordained human government to be the instrument of vengeance.

Romans 13:4 says, “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” This means that if you break the law, you’re going to be punished. If you steal something and you get caught, you’re going to face the law and be punished.

The number one priority of human government is to protect its citizens and maintain law and order – and when citizens know they will be punished for doing wrong, it becomes a deterrent for doing wrong. When you’re driving down 101 and you’re going over the speed limit and you see a state trooper, his presence becomes a deterrent. You hit the brakes and slow down because you know that he has the authority to give you a ticket and you want to avoid punishment.

Romans 13:4 says government is given authority to “bear the sword” – that is they have the God-given authority and responsibility to punish wrongdoers and even to take life. Scripture stresses, however, that extreme caution be used in carrying out a death sentence. Deuteronomy 19 required that there be at least two witnesses to confirm a man’s guilt before he is convicted, and Numbers 35 makes a distinction between premeditated murder and accidental killings, and making sure that someone is not falsely accused.

As God establishes a new world under Noah, He places a high value on the sanctity of life – that life is precious and valuable from womb to tomb. Ultrasounds show that life begins at conception, and you can hear the heartbeat of a baby at twelve weeks. It is beyond and affront to God to take its life. God is the giver of life, and each life is precious to Him. Therefore, the life of the unborn must be valued and protected, and any society that allows the killing of the unborn will be held accountable.

Jesus went even further to say that it’s not only sin to murder someone physically, but to have hate for that person in your heart. And the reason, He says in Matthew 5, is because that person is made in the image of God. James says that we are not to curse someone or spew poisonous words towards someone because they are made in God’s image. Respect life, God says, value it and protect it from womb to tomb.

God says to Noah, “As you enter into a new world, I want to bless you – I want you to thrive and prosper. I want you to reproduce live and be blessed through marriage and family. I want you to sustain life and be blessed by my provision of food. And I want you to respect life and be blessed by governing authorities that will hold up the sacredness of human life and help maintain and lawful, peaceful society.

Now in verses 8-17 God tells Noah to **APPRECIATE LIFE** and enjoy the **blessing of His grace**. As Noah starts his new life in a new world, he’s no doubt apprehensive about the future... “Should I build a house? Are you going to send another flood, Lord? Should I plant a crop? The next time I feel a raindrop hit my head, should I be worried?”

Verses 8-11 says, Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 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. 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.”

This is the first of several covenants God will make in the Bible, and a covenant is basically a promise or a pledge that God will do something. God not only makes this covenant with Noah, but with all people. He says, “Never again will I destroy all living things with a flood. Therefore, Noah you can relax and live your life in peace. Build a house, plant a crop, and enjoy life.” God doesn’t promise there will never be any storms or hardships or difficulties. The world is still fallen and broken, but God is going to bless mankind with a stable, working world to live in.

God not only gives Noah this promise, but He gives him a sign by which to remember His promise. Verses 12-17... 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: 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 between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 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. So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

God says, “Whenever you see a rainbow in the sky, remember my promise to never again send a flood.” Rainbows are amazing. Whenever we see one, we stop what we’re doing – if we’re driving, we’ll pull off to the side of the road – and take in the amazing array of colors and marvel at its beauty. Most rainbows appear only after a storm – and Noah has just experienced the world’s greatest storm. Now as he looks up at the rainbow, he says, “You have seen me through the storm, Lord, and now the sun is shining through the rain particles, and I have hope that there’s life after the storm.”

But there’s even more God says in the rainbow, because the Hebrew word for rainbow is the same word used of a bow used by a warrior, and a rainbow is formed in the shape of a bow. Only there is no arrow. Jewish rabbis taught that the arrow has already been shot in the flood, and God promises to hang up his bow and never again point it in the direction of humanity as long as the earth endures.

The earth, according to the Bible, will not endure forever. One day, 2 Peter and Revelation say, the Lord will destroy the earth – not with a flood, but with fire – a fire which will reverse the curse the world is under and restore the earth to its Eden-like conditions. Until then, God promises to withhold a worldwide, cataclysmic judgment as an act of grace. One theologian put it this way, “God’s covenant with Noah is His pledge that He will preserve the stability of nature – a stability that allows His people to flourish, and provide an arena for Him to enter history and bring salvation through His Son Jesus.” By this covenant, God is extending His grace to the entire world, withholding His judgment so that the good news of the gospel will spread to every nation and every person.

In this covenant God is going to see to it that the rhythms of nature will continue. As He said at the end of chapter 8... “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” There’s an amazing rhythm and balance in nature – there’s a warm season and a cold season – there’s nighttime and there’s daytime – there’s planting time and harvesting time. God keeps everything humming with amazing stability so we can flourish and fulfill His purposes on earth. He keeps the earth rotating perfectly on its axis and He keeps the sun just the right distance from the earth so that we don’t burn up or freeze.

So often we don’t stop to consider all the blessings of grace we have from God. We like to focus on the curse, on the storms, on the struggles of this life – but we also need to count of blessings and thank God for His many gifts.

If someone after church ask how you are doing, you can be honest and acknowledge the struggle of living in a world curse with sin – you don’t have to deny it – but you can also say, “God is good. He blesses me with family, He blesses me with food, He blesses me with those in authority to protect me, and He blesses me with a stable, consistent world – while not perfect – allows me to thrive and do what God wants me to do until the day He comes back to renew the world and make it perfect for all eternity. So, all things considered, I’m doing pretty good today!”