

As most of you know, my wife and I moved here in May for this job. Before we moved, we had to sell our house in Stillwater and before we sold it, we got a new roof. When we got this new roof which is exactly what we wanted, right? When you are selling your house you really want a new roof. We got this new roof, and they brought this big dumpster out and they put it in our driveway to throw all the shingles in and once they got done changing the roof and putting the new one up there, we asked our realtor, ‘Can we throw stuff in there?’ She said, ‘Sure! It’s your dumpster! You can throw whatever you want.’ So, we just started purging everything. Anything we didn’t want to pack, we hadn’t used, that we didn’t want to lug around or store, we just threw it all in the dumpster. Naturally I’m trying to clean out a decade of electronics that I never use anymore, and, in those electronics, I found this old laptop that I had. And I thought, I don’t need this laptop anymore, there’s probably not anything on there I want, I’m just going to throw it out and get rid of it. There’s probably a million pictures and that kind of stuff that I don’t want to go through. I just want to trash it. It’s junk. So, I threw the laptop in the dumpster and went on with life.

Well, not too long ago I was driving down the road and I was thinking about stuff, I was daydreaming, and I was daydreaming about that book that I wanted to write and I thought, ‘You know, I’ve got my master’s thesis on my computer and someday I want to turn that Master’s thesis into a book.’ And then it dawned on me that that master’s thesis was on the laptop that I threw in the dumpster and I no longer have the digital copy of my master’s thesis. 100 pages of research thrown into the dumpster. I had something that I loved, something that I cared for, something that I spent time and energy on, that I just threw in the trash.

What we see in this passage is that the earth is filled with something that God loves, that God cares for, that God wants to redeem and restore and use, and He does not want to just throw it in the trash, and that is people who are made in His image and creation He created to glorify Him. Even though sin had destroyed it and tarnished it and ruined it, God said, ‘I am not going to throw this in the trash. I’m going to redeem it and I’m going to restore it. I’m going to do it through this covenant that I’m going to make with Noah.’ This covenant is the covenant that we call the common grace covenant. And what I want you to see this morning is that it is God’s common grace that He extends to all of creation to preserve it and restore it, and it is common grace that points us to the saving grace that we have in Jesus Christ. So, we’re going to look at three things this morning. We’re going to look at the covenant of common grace, the necessity of common grace, and the sign of common grace. Kids, I love art, I love pictures, so, if you’ve always wanted to draw in the service, here’s your chance, okay? I want you to draw for me your favorite scene, the mountains, the beach, the ballpark, whatever, and I want you to draw a rainbow over the top of it. Draw a rainbow so I can hang it up in my office, okay?

First, let’s look at the covenant of common grace. So, last week we studied chapter 6 through 8, and like we said, the fall had corrupted everything in creation. Mankind was particularly sinful. It said that “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.’ So, God gave creation over to its destruction. He flooded it and He blotted everything out except Noah and his family and the animals who were on the ark with him. God promised to never destroy the earth again. Not because Noah was sinless, but because God had a plan and He had a purpose, and that purpose was redemption. What God is doing here is He is going to promise to restrain His judgement and to graciously preserve creation. He’s going to restore it, okay?

So, the first thing we see is that God restores man's purpose. In His covenant, God restores man's purpose. In verse 1 it says, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Now that language should sound familiar. Where do you see that language? You see that in Genesis 1 when God made Adam! He gave him this job. He said, 'I want you to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth!' Theologians call this the creation mandate. This certainly means have families, have children, that's probably the most direct application. But what it also means is to build civilizations, to build cultures, to build community! What God wants is for man, who He has created in His image, to use his time, his energy, his talents, his resources to spread God's image all over creation. So, no matter who you are, no matter where you are, whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian or if you're somewhere in between, because you are created in God's image, because He has given you this beautiful purpose and this beautiful job, you can be fruitful and multiply. You can fulfill your purpose on the earth.

Engineers fulfill this purpose by designing chairs that you can sit in during worship or designing roads that are good for you to drive on. Teachers fulfill this purpose by teaching people how to live and function in God's world! Parents fulfill this role by creating hope of love and safety and security. Students can fulfill this job by going to school and learning and living at home with their parents and making a place of love and joy. Artists and musicians fulfill this creation mandate by creating art that captures beauty and truth and goodness. No matter who we are, no matter where we are, we can praise God, we can worship Him, we can serve Him by fulfilling this job, by being fruitful and multiplying, by fulfilling the creation mandate. So, that's the first thing God does, He restores our purpose.

And then, He restores our position. Notice in verses 2 and 3 it says that God put man over the plants and over the animals. Again, going back in Genesis 1, right? All the plants and animals are there to serve man. God provided everything of new through the plants and the animals, right? But He also wants us to steward it! Creation is there for man to steward. So, Christians, Bible-believing Christians are people who want to care for the earth, who love the earth because God has created the earth, so they want to use earth's resources as best as they can. God restores our purpose, God restores our position, and then God promises that He is going to create this stable world for us to live in. He promises to preserve this world.

He says that while earth remains, God will ensure that its seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall never end as it did during the flood. Despite thousands of years of pandemics and natural disasters and all kinds of other stuff, sun came up and sun went down, and the seasons changed. We've all kind of experienced that last year, didn't we? We went through this cataclysmic pandemic that changed all of our lives and it threw off all of the safety and stability of our lives, but what happened every day? The sun came up. The sun went down. And what happened when we got through the summer? It went to fall and then it went to winter and then it went to spring, and the clock just kept on moving because God promised that He is going to preserve all of creation.

Theologians call this the covenant of common grace because it extends to all creatures in all of creation through all of time, even though we're sinful and broken, and this world is sinful and broken, God has promised to be graciously with it to preserve it, to transform it, and to redeem it. This grace declares God's goodness and His glory. So, when we drive on a road that is well-paved, we can praise God for it. When we go to class and we're learning or teaching, we can praise God for it. When we're working at home, or in an office, we can praise God and thank Him for the grace to be able to do that. Christians aren't the only ones that recognize this. Non-

Christians recognize this as well. Albert Einstein, obviously one of the greatest scientific minds in our world, would have by no means claimed to be a Christian, but listen to what he says about creation. He says, "Human beings, vegetables, and cosmic dust, we all dance to the mysterious tune intoned in the distance by an invisible player." He saw in creation God's handiwork. He saw the order and stability, and the glory of it. So, why didn't he believe? Well, he said the reason he couldn't believe was because of the problem of pain and suffering in the world, and that's the second thing we see in this passage.

We see the necessity of common grace because there is pain and suffering and brokenness in this world. There was only one righteous person on the planet at this time, and that was Noah, and the passage says that God would never destroy the earth again because there was evil in his heart. Remember, we talked about evil being the opposite of good, evil being that which severs relationships and harms people. The pain and suffering exists in this world because it runs right through every human heart. Most of you probably know that this week there was a whistle blower who blew the whistle on Facebook and said there's all kinds of stuff going on behind the scenes that people don't know about, and I don't want to get into all that, but there was one thing that I thought was interesting. She said that what they figured out was that posts that generated anger got the most views, and so, what they did was they created algorithms so that more and more posts would show up that elicited anger. What does that say about our hearts, that those are the posts that we're drawn to? It shows that the sin that was in Noah's heart is still in our hearts today. And so, what God had to do was He had to create laws to protect the image of God. He had to put rules in place to protect us. That's why it says here in verse 6, if you look at 9:6, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." God established this law to protect life. Every person in here and every person out there, no matter what race, what class, what age, what intellect, no matter what, we're all created in the image and likeness of God and so, we all have a dignity that cannot be taken away because of that. We're all designed that way, but sin has distorted that.

I read a newspaper article this week called "The Irony of Being Human," and this newspaper reporter told a story about a hotel that one night had two totally different views of man in it. In one room there was a woman who had left her family to pursue her lover and then her lover left her and then when she decided to leave, she wrote a note that said, 'Don't cry for me, I'm not even human.' Sin had so degraded her she didn't even see herself as a human. Well at the same time downstairs there was this new age religion that was having a meeting in the hotel. At the end of the meeting they were chanting, 'I am god. I am god. I am god.' The author said the irony of being human is that two people in the same place can have such drastically different views of humankind. That's because sin has caused us to either deify ourselves or destroy ourselves. What God's covenant with Noah says is no, every person in here has dignity and worth because they're made in the image of God, but we are not to elevate ourselves as God. Only He is God, but we are valuable because we are created in His image.

We're not the only things that are broken, creation is broken as well. As it says over and over again, all of creation was corrupt. All flesh was corrupt. Everything was broken. If you go to the New Testament, in Romans 8 Paul says that creation is groaning, it's longing for the sons of God to be revealed. What's going on? Well because God made Adam to rule over creation, when Adam sinned, this force called sin went into creation and destroyed everything. There isn't harmony, there isn't peace, there isn't shalom the way that creation is supposed to be. There's violence.

An author named Annie Dillard who wrote a book called “Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,” captured this really well. Annie did not believe in a god, she just believed that there was nature. One day she was out observing that nature, she was observing all of the beautiful, loving, wonderful aspects of nature she could. But while she was sitting there observing nature, she saw a fly bug suck the life out of a frog, and it startled her. She realized that either mother nature is a monster, or humans are freaks because somehow, we evolved out of nature with a conscience that believes that death is wrong. So, in her book called “Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,” she wrote this. She said, “Evolution loves death more than it loves you and me.” She saw the pain and suffering in creation, and she said, something is wrong, either this world is built around death or there has to be something greater, that lead her down the path to pursuing God and at least believing that there was a Creator. The brokenness of creation wasn’t restored through the covenant with Noah, it was restrained. God knew that at some point He was going to have to restore creation, He was always going to have to renew it, and the sign of the covenant points to that, and that’s the last thing we see in this passage, this sign of common grace.

Look back at verses 12-13. It says, “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.” So, three times God tells Noah that He has made a covenant with Him and He has put His sign in the cloud, and that sign is a bow. Now we know based on the context that it’s a rainbow, but in the Hebrew, it just says, ‘bow,’ like a bow and arrow, or a weapon. So, what God is saying now that instead of the rainbow being a symbol of war, or the bow being a symbol of war, it is now a symbol of God’s grace. It is a symbol of God’s kindness. He knows creation is sinful but He’s not going to destroy it, He’s going to redeem it. He’s going to renew it. He’s going to restore it. Every time we see that rainbow, God wants us to remember His promise that He’s not going to throw this thing out, He’s not going to chuck it, He’s going to redeem it.

When the internet first started going, and first got big, and when YouTube first got going, there was a video that went viral called the Double Rainbow video. Did anybody ever see the Double Rainbow video? There’s this guy walking through Yosemite park and there’s clearly been a storm and he notices that there’s a rainbow and he says, ‘Oh! The rainbow! It’s so vivid and so beautiful!’ And then he realizes that there’s two! It’s a double rainbow! And he goes, ‘Oh! It’s a double rainbow! What does it mean? What does it mean?’ And his cry, his prayer turns into literally crying and weeping he is so overcome by the beauty of this rainbow. Now, if he was overcome by the beauty of that rainbow, how much more should we be overcome by the beauty of the rainbow. Every time we see it, God is declaring to us that ‘I will preserve creation for my people. This home will always be here. It will never leave.’ It is a sign of God’s goodness to us, to all of creation.

But it’s not just a sign of His common grace, it’s a sign of His saving grace as well. You’ll notice, if the rainbow was a bow, if it was a war bow, which way is the arrow pointing? Which way is the bow pointing? The bow is pointing up. The bow is pointing up because in the rainbow, God made a promise that He’s never again going to judge the earth, He’s never again going to point His war bow at the earth. He’s going to point it at Himself. He’s going to take the judgement on Himself. Despite God’s common grace, Noah’s sin, and our sin, and the sin of all creation had to be paid for. God couldn’t just leave it alone. There had to be atonement. And so, what Jesus did was, on the cross Jesus took the sin of all creation and our sin, onto Himself, He took the judgement that we deserved onto Himself so we could experience God’s grace. Listen to what Peter says, 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the

unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” Jesus gave His life for ours. By faith in Him we not only experience this common grace every day, but we experience saving grace.

Think about the sin in your life. Think about the darkness. What do you always have to have to have a rainbow? You have to have a storm, right? You have to have darkness. Where is the darkness in your life? Is it in your family? Is it in your work? Is it in your health? Is it in your internet browsing? Where is it? On the backdrop of that darkness is God’s promise of grace, that if you come to Him and confess your sins, that He will forgive you in the name of Jesus. He has forgiven you in the name of Christ and you can be washed and renewed and given a new life in the Spirit just as Jesus was resurrected in the Spirit. God adopts us into His family and restores our dignity. He restores our dignity. He gives us a sign!

What Peter does in this passage is fascinating. You know, Peter references the flood of Noah more than any other book. So, right after He talks about Jesus paying for our sins, listen to what he says. He says, “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.” He’s talking about Noah, and talking about the ark, talking about the flood. Then he says, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” Peter draws a parallel between the flood and the sign of Noah, to our baptism. Our baptism is a sign of God’s grace to us that we have been washed, we have been cleansed, the judgement has been paid, that God has adopted us into His family, that we have been united to Jesus, and that even though we sit right here, right now, we really, truly in a spiritual way are ascended into heaven through the person and work of Jesus.

Think about the darkness you were just thinking about a few seconds ago. Your truer identity is that you are united to Christ. You are not defined by your darkness. You are defined by your baptism. Amen? Amen. That is God’s promise that He is always going to love you and care for you and provide for you so that you can have everything you need. He’s going to give you everything you need.

There’s a movie called “Blindside.” It’s based on a true story about a pro football player whose name was Michael Orr. Well, Michael grew up on the streets, never knew where his next meal was going to come from. Eventually he befriended a family, and that family took him in, they loved him as their own son, they cared for him, they provided for him, but Michael could never get over this feeling that he was always going to be missing something, that he was always going to go without a meal. So, what Michael would do was when he would go to Taco Bell, he would get tacos and he would get as much as he could, he would eat them, and then whatever he didn’t eat then he would hoard them, and he would bring them home and put them in the fridge. He was always hoarding tacos. All the time. One day, he was getting tacos out of the refrigerator and his dad came up to him and said, “I own every Taco Bell in this town. You do not need to hoard your tacos. You are never going without tacos ever again.”

So, what sin in our lives brings this insecurity where we feel like we’re never going to have what we need? That insecurity brings this pain and this suffering and this anger into our hearts, and our baptism is a sign that we are never going to lack what we need. Just like every Taco Bell sign that Michael could see in that town was a sign that his father was going to provide for him, your baptism is a sign that your Father is always going to provide for you. One day, someday, He’s going to eliminate all the pain and suffering in this world.

Yes, where else do we see a rainbow? Revelation 4:3, John is swept up to a vision of the heavenlies and this is what he says, “And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.” There is a rainbow around the throne in heaven. God’s promise to you is that your home, your ultimate home is not here in a world of sin and suffering, but in the new heavens and the new earth with your heavenly Father, a world that has been restored and redeemed and is fit for God’s children. He’s not going to junk it, and He’s not going to junk you. He’s going to turn you into something beautiful.

This summer my wife took our kids to the City Museum in St. Louis, if you’ve never been there, I highly recommend it. If you need a place to go on vacation with your kids, take them to St. Louis, take them to City Museum. The City Museum was created by Bob and Gail Cassilly and it was a ten-story, six hundred thousand square foot shoe factory, but Bob had a vision to take this shoe factory and restore it and renew it. So, what they began doing was collecting broken pieces of junk from all around different cities all over the world and they brought it to the museum, and they turned it into a city within a city. They got Ferris wheels, buses, they got gigantic dinosaurs, a planetarium, a gigantic praying mantis, an organ built in 1925, and they transformed this stuff into miles and miles of tunnels and slides and caves and caverns and bridges and climbers so that kids old and young could go in there and experience the joys of God’s creation. They had a vision for restoring creation, not just destroying it. That’s what God’s vision is for our creation, it’s a vision for restoring it and redeeming it so that we can live in it and experience His goodness and grace. Let’s pray that God would help us do that every day by His grace. Please pray with me.