

Sermon for Sunday, September 14, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"WHAT'S REALLY AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW"

Genesis 9:9-17

Text: "I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."
--Genesis 9:13

Lately we have had a great deal of rain. The other afternoon as I left the church, there in the east was a rainbow. Its huge arch stood out over the city in a magnificent splash of color that was breath-taking. I heard the sounds of birds across the street and then I saw them. They were perched on the top branches of the trees, apparently watching with me the awe-inspiring handiwork of God's paintbrush across the sky. As I watched the lovely scene, the lines from Genesis came to my mind, "I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." As I thought about the meaning of the rainbow, some thoughts came into my heart and mind, and I want to share them with you today.

When I was a little child, I was told--as I suppose you were--that there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. But, of course, no one could ever reach the end of the rainbow and it was unattainable. Then, a little later, we all followed the yellow brick road to the other side of the rainbow where bluebirds fly. But then, that was only make-believe, for no one ever gets to the other side of the rainbow. For that reason, my favorite story about the rainbow is the story in the Bible. It is a story that tells us that the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant with us. And the other afternoon, as I watched the beautiful display in the sky, I had a new appreciation of what it means.

I suppose most of us remember the story in Genesis of how the rainbow came to symbolize God's covenant with the earth. After God created the world and then crowned His universe with His last and best efforts--man--man had rebelled against God. Last Sunday in my sermon I was sharing with you how God made man different from the rest of creation. Man alone was made to have fellowship with God. Man alone had the capacity to live in loving obedience with His creator. Yet we saw how man used his freedom to say "no" to God. As a consequence of that rebellion, a brokenness occurred in every area of man's life that the Bible calls sin. After his fall, man grew progressively worse. His sinfulness grew until God could stand it no more. Man had become an abomination in the sight of God. Thus, God determined to destroy the wicked in the earth. Of all the men in the world, only one was righteous enough to be saved. His name was Noah. Well, you remember that story! God commanded Noah to build an ark. Into the ark, Noah was to bring two of every kind of animal, bird, and living creature. Then, for forty days and nights the rains came. (Out in west Texas where I lived before coming to St. Louis, it was mighty dry. People used to laugh and say that when Noah had his flood, west Texas got two inches of rain.) And you know, it is an amazing thing, but all of the ancient civilizations tell of a great flood that covered the earth. And the Bible says that after the water had gone down, God made a covenant with Noah. Part of that covenant was that never again would there be a flood to cover and destroy the earth. The rainbow in the sky was to be a sign of that covenant.

A rainbow is an amazing phenomenon. It takes two things to make a rainbow. It takes sun and it takes rain. A rainbow is a spectrum of color formed by the prismatic effects of rain in the air upon the light beams of the sun. The drops of moisture, struck by the rays of the sun, break down those beams into the seven components of

the color scale. The rainbow was an appropriate symbol for God's covenant. When the rains came--rains reminiscent of the rains of the flood--the rainbow meant that the Son had already broken through.

As I stood watching the rainbow that afternoon, it reminded me of the immutability of God's law. From the beginning God had required of man that he be obedient to His moral laws. Yet, as the wickedness of man increased, God's laws stood in judgment over man's sinfulness. God brought the rains upon the earth because He took man's sin, man's rebellion seriously.

In the physical world in which we live we have certain laws. Unless we obey those laws, we cannot do anything. For example, take the laws of flight. When the Wright brothers began their experiments, they did not fully understand the laws of flight. Only as they discovered them and observed them did flight finally become possible. By the same token, God has set moral laws in the universe. Only as we are obedient to them and observe them can we live the best possible life.

Look for example, at a person like Helen Keller. Blind from the time she was a little girl, having great difficulty in learning to speak because she was deaf, Helen Keller proved to be one of the great personalities of this century. The secret of her life is revealed in her biography. There she tells us that she determined to live close to God and to try her best to live by His commands. Such greatness becomes possible only when we obey God's laws. Or look at a man like Abraham Lincoln. The story is told of him that once as a clerk in a store he overcharged a customer a small amount of money. When he discovered his error, he walked five miles through the cold winter snow to return what was not rightfully his. He realized that God's law required absolute loyalty and fidelity and he tried to live by that law. Lincoln became great as a man because he was great in the spirit--a man who obeyed the moral laws of God. And incidentally, what our nation needs so desperately today is men and women of fidelity who are living life in obedience to God's laws. Had our leaders today been characterized by such spiritual loyalty, we would have been spared the trauma our nation has experienced in recent months.

But there is another side to God's moral law. You see, not only does life become significant when lived in obedience to that law, but when you break and violate the laws of God, it has its terrible consequence. Here is a letter from a young girl to a national magazine editor. "Dear Sir," she writes, "I drink, I gamble, I run around with men. I have lost the respect of my friends and my parents and I have lost respect for myself. I am afraid I will take my life. Please, can you say something that will help me or I will surely go mad." Here is a picture of someone who has broken the laws of God, and in doing so, is destroying herself. This can happen to you--or to me. When we live life in total disregard of the laws of God, it has its inevitable consequence. Do not think we can ignore God's moral laws.

For example, I have been amazed in recent years at the development of the so-called Gay Liberation movement within the church. This is a group of homosexuals who are working to gain recognition and acceptance within the denominations. Now, it is true that the church must speak a pastoral word of compassion and love for those caught up in this sexual aberration. Yet, the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments explicitly states that the practice is offensive to God. It violates the structure of nature as God intended it. The church can and must accept the sinner who seeks forgiveness and healing. But if the church condones the sin as well, it violates the laws of God.

So, the rainbow reminds us of God's immutable laws. But note secondly that the rainbow also symbolizes God's love. It not only takes rain to make a rainbow, it takes the sunshine as well. No matter how dark the clouds, when the sun breaks through we know that God loves us. I think above all else we need to know that we are loved and cared for. Catherine Marshall, writing of the death of her husband, Peter, said, "I thought all was lost when Peter died. Yet, slowly, surely, there came into my life the knowledge that I was still loved, still cared for." Yes, the sun broke through and she saw the rainbow.

I have a young friend who spent many months in Viet Nam. He told me of the despair so many of our young men felt there, never knowing when a hand grenade or a sniper's bullet, or a booby trap on some jungle trail would wipe them out. When they went back from the lines to a rest and recreation area, he said it was so tempting to do all the things that many of the soldiers did. After all, he thought, what will it matter? "But," he said, "I knew God was in Viet Nam, too. I knew He cared and I knew He loved me." With tears in his eyes, he said, "That was all that kept me going--knowing that God loved me."

Perhaps you have heard me tell the story of George Matheson. As a young man in England he began to lose his sight and the doctors told him he would soon be blind. The girl to whom he was engaged broke the engagement and soon married someone else. Seemingly he stood alone in the world as the darkness closed forever about him. Yet, in the midst of sorrow and loss, he discovered that there was a rainbow in the clouds, for God loved him. He wrote a hymn that has endured across the years and it goes like this, "O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee." Yes, the rainbow not only means God's law and judgment, it also means God's love and His mercy.

There is one final thing. The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant with the earth. A covenant is an agreement. Quite simply, it means that God has a plan for our lives. I have a friend who was a captain in the Air Force. He resigned his commission and a promising military career to enter seminary. I asked him how he came to that decision for his life. "God always meant for me to be a preacher," he said, "but I've been fighting Him. I went to three different colleges running away from God before I went into the naval academy. After I got my commission I was still undecided and unhappy about what to do with my life. Finally, I applied for naval aviation and became a pilot, but still I was not happy. At last I got down on my knees and said, 'Lord, I've been trying to run my life long enough without success. I'll turn the controls over to you.'" And then he said, "God had a plan for my life and now that I've found it, I have also found happiness."

There are a lot of unhappy people today. They are doing the things they want to do, seeking fame or wealth or whatever. But they are not very happy. You see, God has a plan for every life. We will never find true happiness until we find God's plan for us. What is God's plan for you? You may be far along life's road, but whatever time you have left, God has a plan for your life--do you know what it is?

"I will set my bow in the cloud," said the Lord, "and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." You see, God is at the end of the rainbow. His law stands forever. His love arches over the earth. And God has a plan for you.

One of the great religious leaders today is a psychologist named Keith Miller. Let me share with you what he says about finding God's plan for his life. This is what he writes: "I used to walk down the streets, I remember, and suddenly would break out in a cold sweat. I thought I might be losing my mind. One day it was so bad that I got in my company car and took off alone. I pulled up beside the road and stopped. I remember sitting there in complete despair. I was like a man on a great treadmill going no place, in a world that was made up of black, black clouds all around me. As I sat there I began to weep like a little boy, which I suddenly realized I was inside. I looked up toward the sky. There was nothing I wanted to do with my life. And I said, 'God, if there's anything you want in this stinking soul, take it.'" Dr. Miller goes on to say, "Something came into my life that day which has never left...I realized that God did not want my money, nor my time; He wanted my will."

Yes, the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant--He has a plan for your life. Have you found it?