

Sign of Covenant

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[0 : 00] What we're doing tonight is a much needed means of grace for the Christian.! For the strengthening and the confirmation of our faith, for the assurance of our salvation.

! It's such a rich ordinance because it's remembering such a precious thing as Christ! How can we ever exhaust that theme?

But the ordinance itself symbolizes and teaches so many things that it's my desire that we would be ever growing in our understanding of it, that each time we come to the supper we might benefit more than the last time. According to Jesus, the bread and the cup are signs of the new covenant. They're symbols of the gospel. In instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus said this is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you. It's the sign of my blood that secures the promises of the new covenant for you. This isn't the first time in the Bible that signs and symbols were used to seal the covenant, to make covenants. There's a whole biblical history about the use of signs to seal a covenant. And tonight I want us to look at God's use of signs in sealing covenants and see if it doesn't add something to what we're going to be doing here later this evening. And tonight I want to especially draw our attention to the divine side of the covenant signs and symbols. So let's begin in Genesis chapter 9. If you'd open there,

Genesis 9, by faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear, built an ark to save his family. And by his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

So we're picking up that account. Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives have just been saved from this catastrophic judgment of God, a global flood that's covered the mountaintops.

[2 : 23] These eight are the only survivors on planet earth. So after being cooped up in the ark along with the animals for one year and 10 days, God called them out, come on out onto the dry land, he said.

And they came out. Noah built an altar, made animal sacrifices on it, and God smelled it as a sweet smelling savor. And then God entered into a contract, a covenant with Noah in which he made solemn promises.

And we pick up the account here in Genesis 9 and verse 8. 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 cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

Now it doesn't mean that we'll never have floods that take the lives of people. That happens all the time in our world. But never again will there be a global flood of water that will cut off all life on earth.

[3 : 48] Now that's the promise, the covenant promise that God gave. Isn't that enough? Just a promise.

Can't you take God at his word? Will he go back on his word? No. We can take him at his word, yes. And yet to strengthen our faith and to strengthen our assurance that his promise will hold true because he knows the weakness of our faith, God adds a sign of the covenant.

A sign acts like your signature to a contract. So there in the contract you make promises. That should be enough. Indeed a handshake. Just a word should be enough.

But the signature at the bottom of the contract, that's even more sure that one is committing themselves to keep one's word. And so it's as if God is saying here, I'll put my name to it.

I'll sign this. I'll give you a sign, a signature, a seal of this covenant promise. Now what is the sign that God gave to this everlasting covenant?

[4 : 59] Verses 12 and 13. God said, this is the sign of the covenant that 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. All right. So that's the covenant sign.

When you see the rainbow, do you remember the covenant promise that it signifies, that it confirms? Well, I'm glad if you do, but that's not what God says that the rainbow is there for.

Notice carefully what God actually says in verses 14 and following. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, you will remember my covenant.

Is that what it says? Are you following along? No, it doesn't say you will remember my covenant. He says, 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.

[6 : 10] Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. And in case we didn't get it, he says it again. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all the living creatures of every kind on the earth.

So God said to Noah, this is the sign of the covenant I've established between me and all life on earth. So the covenant sign is given to confirm and to give assurance that this covenant promise will be kept.

But answer me this. Who would you rather not forget the covenant promise? You or God? Well, you say, if you put it that way, God.

Which gives you more assurance when the rainbow appears in the sky? Why? That God will see it and God will remember his promise?

Or that you will see it and remember his covenant promise? Well, that God sees it and that God remembers it. That's infinitely more comforting to me when I see the rainbow.

[7 : 23] To be assured that God sees that same rainbow. And God remembers his covenant and will act in accordance with it. But you say, God doesn't need signs to remind himself.

No, he doesn't. But the fact that he gives them is to make us even more assured of the certainty of his promise. It's God's way of stooping to the level of our faith.

He knows our faith is weak. And yes, a promise should be enough, but I'll give you this sign. And when you see this sign, you remember that I see this sign. And I remember what I've promised.

Turn to Genesis 22. We're coming here to this covenant that God made with Abraham. It was right after Abraham was obedient and going to offer his son Isaac.

And you remember how God gave him a ram instead of his son to sacrifice. And this is right after this has happened on Mount Moriah. And in verse 17 and 18, God says to Abraham, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

[8 : 36] Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies. And through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. Now, these very covenant promises of descendants like the stars, like the sand, those have been made and repeated over and over ever since Genesis chapter 12 when God first made his covenant with Abraham.

And he keeps repeating those promises. And that's what we have here in chapter 22. But what's new this time is that God adds to the promise a sworn oath.

Verse 15, the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself, declares the Lord. And then follows the repeated promise about his descendants.

Now, when do men use a sworn oath? Well, the Bible says to confirm that their words are true, to bring an end to all argument and doubt. So in a court of law, men will put their hand on a Bible and swear an oath to tell the truth and nothing but the truth and all the truth.

That's this sworn oath. And so again, we could say, well, isn't God's promised word enough? I'm going to give you descendants like the sand and the stars.

[9 : 59] That's enough. But he adds an oath. And it's for the same reason that he adds signs to the covenant promises, the same reason he put the bow in the sky.

It's that we might be encouraged as to the certainty of the promise. Hebrews 6 is commentary in the New Testament on this very thing of God swearing an oath.

It says that an oath confirms what is said. That means that it makes more certain what is said. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised.

He confirmed it with an oath. He made it even more firm than just his word. He firmed it up with swearing an oath. And since there was nothing higher to swear by, he swore by himself.

And God did this so that by two unchangeable things in which it's impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

[11 : 04] Why did God swear an oath? That we might have two things to hang our hope upon. His promise, he cannot lie. But he swore an oath.

He surely can't go back on it when he swears an oath. So that by two impossible things, two unchangeable things, we who have fled to lay hold of the hope that we have in the gospel could be greatly comforted and encouraged.

So the signs, the oath, it's for the encouragement of our faith that we might know of a certainty that God will do what he says.

It's to strengthen our assurance of salvation. And so with God's promise to never again destroy all life on earth by a flood, he adds the sign of the rainbow that we might be doubly assured that he will keep his promise.

Because he'll see it and remember his covenant. And remember not just in the sense of, oh, I've recalled it, but remember to do what he said that he would do.

[12 : 17] So according to God, the rainbow is for him to see and remember. And secondarily, for us to see and remember that he sees and remembers.

Blessed assurance from God to encourage our faith with the sign of the covenant. Now, when does a rainbow appear, kids? On a day like today?

On a cloudless day? No, it's when the rains are falling. When it might threaten and look like, oh, no. Noah and his wife and his children might be thinking, are we going to have 40 more days and nights of this?

No, look at the promise. Look at the rainbow, the sign. And remember that God sees that and God has promised to never flood the earth again. So, yes, it's for us.

Yes, seeing the rainbow strengthens our faith, but we have to remember how it strengthens it. It's strengthening it by way of seeing that God sees it and remembers. Matthew Henry says, As God looks upon the bow that he may remember the covenant, so should we, that we also may be mindful of the covenant with faith and thankfulness.

[13 : 32] Now, let's go forward in history to Exodus chapter 12, where we find another similar situation at Passover night in Egypt.

And again, God's wrath is going to visit the earth. To punish sinners with death.

Now, at the flood, when he came to punish the earth, a merciful provision was made for Noah and his family. It was the ark. It's a picture of Christ, isn't it?

The one safe place to be when God's wrath comes calling. It's in the ark. He is an ark for all gods know us. Well, here in Egypt now, God's wrath is coming again.

Now coming to visit Egypt for oppressing and not letting his people go. And God says, I'm going to kill the firstborn in every home. But again, God had a merciful provision for his people, didn't he?

[14 : 42] Just as he did for Noah and his family. And this provision is the Passover lamb. Another picture of Jesus Christ, just as the ark. So they were to slaughter a lamb, take some of the blood, put it on the sides and tops of the doorframe of the houses where they ate the lambs.

And there they were to eat. Eat it as the Lord's Passover. Now in verses 12 and 13. On that same night, God says, I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn, both men and animals. And I will bring judgment on all the God, on the, all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when you see the blood, is that what it says? When I see the blood, I will pass over. It's a sign on your house. And when I see the sign, I will pass over you.

No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. So they too are sinners deserving of God's wrath. As we heard this morning, if we've offended in one point, we're guilty of all the law. They too were obnoxious to God's wrath and could have been destroyed.

[15 : 58] But they will know that the reason that the plague of God's wrath passed over them was because it fell on their substitute sacrifice. Their Passover lamb, whose blood on the doorframe was

a sign that judgment has already fallen here.

It's fallen on our substitute lamb. And therefore, God will see it and pass over. Again, notice the sign of blood is what I will see and I will pass over you.

Just like the rainbow is a sign that I will see and remember my covenant promise. We're looking at the divine side of the signs here. Now, there is a human side as well.

It's not always stated, but it's no doubt real that we have real comfort when we see the sign of the rainbow. And think if you were one of those families in Israel that night.

And Moses gives you the instructions of what you're supposed to do. And you do what they did.

They all got up and they did exactly what Moses said. And they killed the lamb and they took his blood and they put it on the doorframe.

[17:05] And then at midnight, they begin to hear the loud wailing and cries coming from the Israel or the Egyptian houses where God was striking with death.

Do you think the blood of your Passover lamb on your doorframe would be comfort to you? Of course it would. Yes, that sign is for you.

But, but why would it be a comfort? Well, only because God will see it and pass over you. And so we see the way that the sign is for us, but, but it's, it's to point us to, to God seeing the sign and passing over us.

And that's why it's such a comfort to us. When I see the blood, I'll pass over you. So we're, we're looking at the divine side of the signs that God has given the promises, the covenant promises.

And so the instruction is given to Israel. Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.

[18:15] And when your children ask you, what does this ceremony mean to you? Daddy, why do we kill this little lamb? Then tell them it's the Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.

Yes, there's a divine side, or yes, there's a human side, a real comfort for the family to gather around and remember how God had spared their forefathers.

So now we fast forward 1500 years and we're in the upper room with our Lord and his disciples and, and they're gathered together on the night of Christ's arrest.

And why are they here? They're here to, to eat the, the Passover supper together. They're here to do what every family was to do for 1500 years in Israel.

To remember that night long ago. And Jesus takes this, this role of servant and he washes their feet and he tell, and he says that I'm, I'm, I'm doing for you to what, what must be done.

[19:27] And he was pointing to what he would do tomorrow. On the very morrow, he would, he would cleanse them from their sins. As the suffering servant of the Lord.

And then they eat the last supper together or the last Passover together. He himself, the Passover lamb eating with his disciples, uh, the Passover that God had provided to be slain for them the next morning so that God's wrath might not fall on them, that God might see him and pass over them in mercy, that his blood shed and his life given in death as their substitute might enable God's wrath to pass over them. So they ate the Passover supper together. The last Passover supper. First Corinthians 5, 7, Paul says, Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

Christ. The one lamb that actually did what all those 1500 years of Passover lambs could never do has taken away our sins.

So he's the fulfillment of every other Passover lamb. They were the signs. He's the reality. They were the shadows. He's the substance. They were the temporary types.

[20:42] He's the permanent provision. Achieving our eternal redemption. So it's only fitting, isn't it? That the old covenant ordinance of Passover should be replaced with a new covenant ordinance.

marking this momentous event of Christ, our Passover lamb, being slain. The crucifixion of Jesus. So that's what we have in the Gospels.

That's what we read. That the old Passover supper is replaced with the new Lord's Supper. to remember the blood and body given. The blood and body of Jesus given for us as a sacrifice on the cross.

So this new covenant ordinance has two elements that are signs. Pointing to new realities. Christ, his body, his blood given for us.

He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Then he took the cup and gave thanks and offered it to them saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.

[21 : 58] So the bread and the cup are signs. They're signatures. They're assurances of God's covenant commitments and promise to forgive our sins and to remember them no more.

You know, that's the crowning, the last promise of the new covenant. That their sins and iniquities, I will remember no more. And here's the sign of it.

The body and blood represented in the bread and the cup. So tonight, at the command of our Lord, we will take the bread and the fruit of the vine and we'll, we'll touch and we'll taste and we'll see and we'll consume them.

But always what is required is faith that discerns the body and blood of Jesus in the signs.

My body given for you, my blood poured out for you on Calvary for the forgiveness of sins. We do this remembering him.

[22 : 59] But what I want us to walk away with tonight is that we dare not forget that there's a divine side to this covenant as well.

And to this covenant meal with these signs. You see, God too is looking on tonight. And he not only sees these signs that he's given, he also sees the realities in heaven.

And he looks upon the real body of Christ, the living Lord Jesus at his right hand. A man there is, a real man with wounds still gaping wide, from which rich streams of blood once ran in hands and feet and side.

And I saw a lamb looking as if he had been slain. He's there tonight at his father's right hand. And he's there for us. And the father always sees him as the lamb that was slain for us.

And therefore he always remembers him. And the covenant promises that he's made to us in Christ. And therefore he will always act according to that promise of the new covenant.

[24 : 11] Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. So much like the rainbow in the clouds, it's for him to see and remember his promise.

Like the blood on the door frames was for him to see and pass over us. So in the bread and the cup, he sees the body and blood of Jesus given for us in death.

Now risen, now ascended, reigning at his right hand. As the ever present reminder of his promises to us in the gospel.

Promises to not treat us as our sins deserve or to repay us according to our iniquities. Promises to accept us as righteous in his well-beloved son. To treat us as he deserves.

To forgive our sins. To pardon and justify. And save us completely. So tonight as we take these elements here below. We look upon Christ by faith.

[25 : 12] But the father above sees Christ there. As our once for all sacrifice. And so he looks on him. And pardons us.

That's the divine side of this supper tonight. As we look and remember him. The father looks and sees him. And remembers his promise.

To forgive our sin. At before the throne of God above. I have a strong, a perfect. Do we remember what's going on in heaven? There before the throne of God. A great high priest whose name is love. Whoever lives. And pleads for me. My name is graven on his hands. My name is written on his heart. And I know that while in heaven he stands. No tongue can bid me thence depart.

And because the sinless Savior died. My guilty soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied. To look on him.

[26 : 14] And pardon me. I will look and remember. I will look and see. And pass over you. He's looking on him tonight.

And he's there as our representative. He's there as our righteousness. He's there as our obedience. Our perfect obedience. To that law we spoke of this morning. We heard of this morning.

He's there as our redeemer. Our substitute. Our sacrifice. Does that not. Increase your assurance of salvation. To know that he's there.

To know that he's there. You see my looking in faith to Jesus is imperfect. And often so very weak. And I get distracted.

And my eyes get off of Jesus. And onto the world. And onto myself. And onto this and that. But not so with my Father in heaven. Jesus is always before him.

[27 : 12] And he always sees him. He always sees him. And remembers his covenant promise. To forgive us. And to remember our sins.

No more. So these signs of the new covenant. That we'll take tonight in our hands. They're God's signature and guarantee. Of the promises he's made. Do you see then how the Lord's Supper. Is meant to strengthen our faith. To confirm it. To make it more certain. To give us greater assurance. For he's stooped. To give us these signs.

To assure us that he sees and remembers. And he will not go back on his promise. With glory in Jesus Christ together as we partake.

Amen.