

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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Under Construction

Holy Communion
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The Text: Genesis 8:13-22

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.' ¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD smelt the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'

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I have not yet had the opportunity to travel on the new highway and bridge that was opened last year near Golden BC. However, I do remember driving along the old stretch of highway when the extension was being built and marveling at this remarkable engineering accomplishment. I was thinking of this highway the other day as I was preparing to preach on this morning's text. In a minute I will explain to you how I made the association between Genesis 8 and the Golden Highway Bridge. But before I do this consider with me the engineers who planned the highway.

Before they had broken ground and removed the first load of dirt from the site, they would have already planned in detail how the project would unfold. They would have known the project's end before it had even started. With each passing day, as the workers prepared the ground, constructed the bridge, widened the road and attended to countless details there was a goal in mind. That goal was the finished highway. Therefore the end product influenced every decision made along the way.

One of the basic doctrines of Christianity is that history is God's highway to an appointed future.¹ God himself is the highway commission and the chief engineer and the head foreman on the job. History is not a random path cut through the countryside by people without a compass. It's a highway that leads from creation to consummation,

¹ This idea comes from a sermon by John Piper entitled "God's Covenant with Noah." The context of the idea can be studied by going to the sermon at:
http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/12/414_Gods_Covenant_with_Noah/

engineered by God who directs everything from his sovereign standpoint in the future. History is going somewhere. God appointed the goal before the foundation of the world, and under his over-arching providence all events serve that goal.

Consider how in the middle to the highway construction things appear to the observer who does not have an engineer's eye. The project would look like it was in utter chaos and so disordered. Cranes and other equipment everywhere, a bridge half completed and mounds of dirt as high as mountains. All of this, not to mention crews maneuvering equipment that repeatedly snarl traffic.

This is how history can appear to us. We are not at the end point yet and so as we find ourselves in the middle of a work in progress it can at times suggest that no one is in charge. However, listen to what Isaiah says:

"I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" (Isaiah 46.9-10)

At the beginning of history God saw the end of history. He saw what he aimed to perform, and he knew what had to be done to achieve it, and he decreed that it be: "My counsel shall stand, I will accomplish all my purpose!"

In a very real sense, then, God runs history from the future. He stands, as it were, already at the destination and guides the road crew so that his highway reaches its desired end. This means that when you want an explanation for some historical event, you don't just look at the past like most historians; you also look to the future. If God, who is the ultimate cause of things is running history from the future, then the ultimate explanation of things is found in the

future. If the road crew builds a sweeping curve to the west, the ultimate explanation may be that there was a rock to the east that they could not bore.

In Genesis 8 we discern three things about God's future that this text anticipates.

1. The goal of history will be one where life is new and abundant.
2. The goal of history will be one where worship will always delight God.
3. The goal of history is one where we will understand the present properly.

Let us now take some time to consider each of these turns in the Old Testament road.

1. The goal of history is one where life is new and abundant.

Do you remember that Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it abundantly? Here in the Genesis chapter 8 we have a word picture of what this life is like. We are told in verse 13 that in the 601st year of Noah's life that the flood waters dried up. Those of you who have studied the Pentateuch will know that the numbers six and seven are significant. The number 6 is symbolic of the life that is lived by humans under the labour of work and toil, while the number seven is representative of a Sabbath rest. There are numerous examples of this in the first five books of the Old Testament. Verses like:

Exodus 16: 26:

Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

This verse is a reference to the gathering of the Manna in the wilderness, For six days Israelites were to gather it but on the seventh day they were to rest.

Exodus 20:9 -10:

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

This verse is an extension of the command read previously. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest and renewal.

Exodus 23:10 -11

"For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 11 but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

Here the principle is applied to the land. For six years it is to be cultivated but in the seventh year it is to lie fallow and the poor and the wild animals are to glean from what is still in the ground.

Deuteronomy 5:12

If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free.

Here we are told that a Hebrew who sells himself as a slave is indentured for six years and is to then be set free at the beginning of the seventh year.

What is important to notice is that in each of these verses labour gives way to rest, work falls into grace as we move from the sixth to the seventh day or year. Now in verse 13 we read that the flood waters dried up in the 601st year of Noah's life, right at the beginning of his seventh century.

Noah spent his six hundredth year in the ark, as symbolic of what man alone produces -- nothing but a hiding from judgment. But at the very beginning of the seventh century of his life (seven is the number of perfection), the first year, the first month, and the first day, he looked out on the world and prepared to leave the ark so as to embark on a new beginning.

This is symbolical of the beginning of a Christian life. It marks the end of the old; the end of our dependence on man, on ourselves, and the beginning of our dependence on God. It is to be lived in a world which is yet a mixture of good and evil, truth and error, but it is a new beginning. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that:

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things become new."

This is something that not only speaks of our present life in Christ but it also points to the future. Noah's new beginning anticipates the resurrection. For just as the flood was a great judgment and the cross a greater judgment still, the judgment was not the end. The flood gives way to cleansed ground and the cross leads to the empty tomb. Therefore if history is a highway that is to be understood from its future fulfillment we need to remember something very important. God is in the process of making all things new. This means that we are to be a people whose hope rests in the truth that highway will be completed.

Read through Revelation with the idea of it depicting a highway construction and see how chaotic the project is. But

then read chapters 21 and 22 where we have a picture of what the end result will be. Embedded in these chapters is this promise at 21:5

"Look, I am making everything new!"

Today, you may be feeling and thinking this highway is going nowhere or I am done with all of this mess. I was feeling this on Friday, so overcome was I with a sense of life's futility that I felt trapped and despairing. It has been so helpful for me to hold on to the promise of God who says "Look, Jonathan I am making everything new."

As we live with this future in mind we see in the present signs of God re-creative and renewing purposes.

We have in verses 14 -19 a picture of fecundity. There is a vivid depiction here of prolific life that is busting at the seams as it expands and multiplies. Not only is this a picture that is pertinent for the present but it is also a picture of what God will do when there is a new heaven and a new earth. There will be a superabundance of life which will include every imaginable creature. This is something that we rejoice in as we mark the Festival of All Saints this morning. In the new creation, it will not just be humans who are there. It is a fully redeemed and renewed created order that will embrace the breadth and diversity of God's created order.

What a wonderful sign we have here in the 601st year of Noah's life that reminds us that the end does not result in labour and endless toil, but in liberation and a new beginning. As we live in the middle of God's great highway project this is important to remember.

In this first point we have considered how one of the goals of history will result in new and abundant life.

ii) The second goal of history is seen in the text as one where worship will always delight God.

At verse 20 we read:

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD smelt the pleasing odor.

This is the first time in the Bible that reference is made to an altar. It is significant that the first recorded act of Noah upon leaving the Ark is the construction of an altar where he can offer sacrifices to God. We are then told that the odor was one that pleased the Lord. This tells us something about the goal of history. Worship is that which we will one day experience in all of its fullness. The worship that pleases God now is that which is offered in Spirit and truth and in honour of Jesus Christ. Because it is ultimately his perfect sacrifice on the Cross that is anticipated in these Genesis 8 verses. There is no sacrifice that we can offer that will please God other than the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the death of Jesus. What a grace it is to be those who can worship in the present with a clear understanding of what the future will hold. We anticipate that in the life of glory we will join with the whole of creation in the worship of Jesus. This is made clear to us in Revelation Five, where the picture is given to us of the Lamb Slain for the Sin of the World. Of this Lamb it is said:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

Do you notice that the language used in this quotation is the language of value. Jesus, we are told, is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise. Why is he so valued, because He is the

sacrifice pleasing to the Father and as we see him more fully we too value him more. With each worded of added value it is like we are ascending the stair case into the nearer presence of Jesus.

Beloved never undervalue how important it is for us to be a people who know the one whom we worship. The God who is at the end of history is the God who in the midst of history wants our worship and allegiance. As we do this, is it not a grace to know that such worship is to God like the smell of freshly baked bread or freshly brewed coffee? Just as these aromas delight our senses, so the worship of God's people brings joy to God.

So far we have considered:

1. The goal of history will be one where life is new and abundant.
2. The goal of history will be one where worship will always delight God.
3. Thirdly our text tells us that the goal of history is one where we will understand the present properly. At verse 21 we read:

'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'

Next week we will consider the covenant promise of God in more detail as we turn to chapter nine. What I want to say in closing is this. There is much that we do not understand

about life in the present. There is so much pain that is caused to us as humans, so much pain that we cause to others and harm we do to the planet because of the nature of the human heart. Our hearts are inclined to evil from our youth and this means that we have a predilection to wound and damage others.

Because of this we can at times think that God must be like this too and we lash out at him in confusion and anger for the deep hurt we experience. However, God is not like us. This text reminds us of God's faithfulness and purpose to never again do what he did in Noah's day. How thankful we are as Christians that instead of sending another flood, he chose the way of the Cross in order to address the evil of the human heart. Let us remember that to see clearly the character of God it is not to the state of the world we turn for understanding, but to the Cross. For it is here that we see the True, Good and Holy God dealing with the heart's inclination towards evil.

What mercy we find at the cross, what hope we find at the cross, what grace we find there. And then as we experience life in the world we can give thanks to God for the rhythm that he has established in creation. Yes it is true that at times the song of creation skips a beat or misses a bar as we experience a changing climate, violent weather and tectonic shifts in the earth's plates. Yet we can also see that the promise of verse 21 holds fast:

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold
and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'

Notice the qualification in this verse: "As long as the earth endures..." For the earth as it now exists it not the earth as it will one day be. At present the creation is under construction that is not yet complete. So we find ourselves

frustrated and at times overwhelmed with the messiness of it all. But by grace and the revelation of scripture we are people who affirm that there is an engineer who knows what he is doing. The highway will be completed because we understand that history is God's highway to an appointed future. Therefore we can affirm with this text from Genesis 8:

1. The goal of history will be one where life is new and abundant.
2. The goal of history will be one where worship will always delight God.
3. The goal of history is one where we will understand the present properly.

