

Harvest

Harvest is a time for gathering in the crops from the fields. These crops have ripened and are ready for picking. If you live in or near the country you'll see combine harvesters or tractors in the fields harvesting the crops. It's a key time of the year for farmers. But as we'll see, it's a time when as Christians we need to be really grateful to God for what we have and for what Jesus did on the Cross. It's also about making a difference.

God's Promise – New Start

Genesis 15.15-22: Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."

So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

Noah and his family had been in an ark for around 370 days but now the time had come to leave the ark and settle on the land now dry after the flood. In response to God's command, Noah and family along with all the animals came out of the ark. God commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number on the earth. Noah and family were to re-populate the earth and be fruitful. This was the same thing that God had originally said to Adam in Genesis 1.28:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

But this time, man was no longer perfect. When God created Adam, the impression some people have is that Adam and Eve were effectively full of light (maybe translucent – now that would be amazing!) When Adam and Eve sinned, the Bible says in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve realised they were 'naked'. A more accurate way of saying this would probably be that Adam and Eve were no longer 'light' and were trying to cover this up from

God (impossible!) Then in Genesis 3.21, God clothed them with skin – this was prophetic showing that our sin would one day be covered by the skin and sacrifice of Jesus!

So, here's Noah ready to re-populate the world, to start over. But God knows the bad state of man's heart ('even though every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood) – even Noah who God described as being 'righteous' in Genesis 7.1. In Genesis 9, God made a covenant with Noah to say he would never again flood the whole earth – a rainbow. (By the way, this was the first time there had ever been a rainbow!)

A rainbow is a sign of a promise. Maybe God wants to say to you today that he has promises in his Word for you – he promises never to leave you or forget about you (no matter how you feel); he loves you completely and thinks you're amazing (although not all we do is right!) God may have said certain things to you – the rainbow is a sign that God will do what he has promised, just as he did with Noah. Recently I took a photo (OK so it's not a rainbow, in fact it's a 'circumzenithal arc') but it did make me realise that God was watching over. Look at the image and see what I mean – it almost looks like a cross or an angel !



God created and is looking after the earth

When we come to harvest, we thank God for all he's done in providing for us. In Genesis 8.1, it says that God "remembered Noah." Just like the crops gathered in during harvest, God had gathered Noah and his family, plus the animals into the ark. Just as food gives the body energy (fat and carbohydrates) and refreshes us (proteins and minerals) and gives water – so Noah was to refresh the earth under God's hand. God made this clear to Noah, saying, *"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."*

God has kept his promise. Even though we do see famine and suffering (predicted by the Bible and by Jesus in places like Matthew 24), we know that God is actually in charge of everything. He is personally and intimately involved with caring for the earth – even if it doesn't feel like it. The very fact that the earth exists is because of God. Psalm 104 is a brilliant Psalm explaining some of what God has done and still does today! Also Psalm 65.

Psalm 104.5-6 – He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.
Psalm 65.9 – You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.

Colossians 1.15-20 shows how Jesus holds all things together. So at harvest time, this isn't just a case of being happy that we've got food (although I have to say this is a major bonus!) It's also saying thank you to God and thank you to Jesus for what he's done for us.

Colossians 1.15-20 – He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Caring for others

Harvest is also a time that should remind us of what God expects us to do – care for others.

James 1:27 – Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Galatians 6.9-10 – Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Harvest is about God's provision for us. Our response in worship and love to God and others is that we help provide for others. It's called giving. It's one of the reasons that many churches encourage people to bring food and goods to church during Harvest – ready for these to be passed on to homeless shelters or other needy people in the community and church.

Psalm 37:25 – I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

How are people going to be helped? Through the church – the greatest giving organisation on the planet, bar none. We have a real responsibility for other people, especially Christians.

Action

Starting this harvest time, make it your mission to thank God daily and to be a generous person. We read from Galatians earlier that we should keep doing good and not give up. In the same bit of the Bible and in 2 Corinthians 9.8-10, God makes it clear that as we give, God will provide for us. The life of Jesus was about giving out to others, doing good and making wrong things right. This is our call too. For you it may be social injustice, poverty, homelessness. It may be wanting to put an end to human trafficking, modern day slavery or to fight for the persecuted church.

But listen up – harvest isn't about you getting. Just as God gives us food, gives us this world and looks after it; just as Jesus came and gave his life for us – so we are called to give our lives to God and to others. Today, make that commitment and make a difference. Just like Noah – your calling from God is to re-make the world, in the image of God. It's called God's Kingdom and it'll happen through people just like you!

Ask God what he's calling you to do and make a prayer of commitment to God now.