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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 13th. February, 1957

Text: "And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." Genesis 9.16

The account we have in the Scriptures of Noah and all that took place in his day. is indeed familiar to all Bible readers. It is said of Noah that he found grace in the eyes of the Lord; that he was a just man and perfect in his generation; and that he walked with God. No one must question that truth because these are words recorded by the Holy Ghost concerning the Lord's servant; yet we have to see, even concerning Noah; that a very sad blemish marked his latter days. So viewing him as a man, we have to see him "a man of like passions with ourselves" as is said of others; but, as the servant of God, he was what the Lord made him, as in the case of all others. The Apostle Paul refers to him, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." A wonderful word to be said of Noah! The apostle Peter also refers to him as "a preacher of righteousness"; and in all probability, through the long period of time that Noah was building the ark, he may have suffered much scoffing and mocking, but he built the ark by divine command - built it in faith, putting his trust in God, in view of what the Lord had told him. As he was warned of God and moved with fear, so he warned others of forthcoming judgments - yet they regarded him not. Therefore, in due time, divine judgments were poured upon the earth, and, with the exception of Noah and his family, and a male and female of all species of living creatures, all were destroyed - so that the old world in its ruins, stands as a monument of divine judgment, and the present world in its continuance as a monument of divine mercy.

What could way say indeed if it should be the purpose of God

that another similar judgment should befall us? We find the Lord Jesus saying that in the last days it shall be as it was in the days of Noah, that people shall be indulging all kinds of wickedness, and there shall be little fear of God before their eyes. But the Lord's dear people have an abiding consolation in view of what the Lord said to Noah - that He would no more thus destroy the earth by a mighty flood. The prophet Isaiah was moved to write very sweetly concerning the Lord's covenant promise. "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." That is to say, to destroy thee. A very beautiful word this! It is connected with words after this manner - "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."...."with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord." So that we may rightly confide in the Lord's gracious word and promise, although at times there may be mighty floods, with much loss of life thereby, yet we know God will not fail of His promise concerning this - that all flesh shall never again be destroyed in this way. What a wonderful word this is! So sweeping gales, and mighty seas, and over-running floods are all stayed and controlled by the hand of a wonder-working God.

Moreover, in a remarkable way, the Lord has been pleased, from time to time, to confirm this to men by setting His bow in the cloud, which is like the voice of God reminding us of His promise made unto His servant Noah. So the covenant, which to a point there, is a covenant of nature, is thus demonstrated by the powers of nature - by the sun, the cloud and the bow. I know we often say there is no bow without a cloud, but we may also remember that there is no bow without the sun, for is it not made by the sun's rays shining on the cloud? The rays of the sun, we understand, bring forth these beautiful colours in the cloud, and usually at a stormy period, the bow is seen in a threatening cloud - not in an ordinary cloud or just a grey sky, or haze that may cover the sky. The sun must strike upon the cloud, a threatening cloud, to bring forth these beautiful

colours. O, but although they may say it is this effect of the sun's rays, yet believers in a promise-performing God, come to this word; the Lord says, "I do set My bow in the cloud!" Are there not some very sweet thoughts here? The Lord said to His servant Noah, I set it in the cloud, not it just comes there by natural causes. Whatever men may say, the Lord's word is this, I set it there! "I do set My bow in the cloud!"

But there is another sweet thought beside this - the Lord said It is My bow. He does not merely say, I set this bow in the cloud for a token. No, it is said more confirmingly to the child of God than this. He says, "I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth." "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud." We do not always see a rainbow; we do not see it in every cloud that comes over the earth. There may be many dark, threatening clouds without any rainbow. But the Lord says, It is My bow. It is His property then; and what have we to say concerning this? The Lord will set His bow in the cloud just when He disposes, and when and where He shall consider it needful for a particular purpose. So that sometimes, even naturally viewed, it has been very sweet to look upon a rainbow; it is like the Lord speaking and saying, I AM still the same God I was in the days of Noah; "For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee" - that is to destroy thee. Ah! these mighty waves, or these sweeping rains, can only go just as far as Omnipotence shall permit! And is it not to the comfort of the Lord's dear people to feel this? Have you ever looked upon a rainbow and felt a little comforted in your heart? It is the Lord's rainbow. "I do set My bow in the cloud."

In the verses I have read there are three choice points. In the first place, the bow that shall be in the cloud, by the Lord's setting - that is an important point always to remember. "I do set My bow in the cloud." There is another beautiful point - the Lord

says, "And I will look upon it". Perhaps you have looked upon it. But we may take this word in the light in which it is set here. May we not say that when His dear people look at the rainbow in the cloud, they may know that the eye of their Lord is upon that same bow? that it is the Lord's rainbow? There is another point too, and that is, the Lord has said, "I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." I will set the bow in the cloud, and I will look upon it for this reason, that I may remember the covenant made betwixt Me and thee. There is a setting, then on the part of God - and there is a looking - and there is also a remembering. If we take a spiritual view of this, it may be confirming to us amidst the changes, burdens, trials, and afflictions that attend the Lord's living family. There is this beautiful point - "I set My bow in the cloud". Many clouds have come over the earth since God created the heavens and the earth. It must have been a wonderful creation! It is a wonderful creation still! The majesty of God is before our natural eyes in the beauties of creation. Moreover the creation stands as a witness to the being, wisdom and majesty of God, whatever infidels, atheists, modernists and agnostics may say. Here it is! Every day man has to learn his dependence, although he may not acknowledge it. How beautiful is God's creation! But it was not long before a cloud came over it all, when God's first creation of human beings, Adam and Eve, fell from their first estate. What a beautiful estate it must have been, in their innocence, when Adam walked with God and enjoyed communion with Him in the garden! But, eventually, listening to the subtle serpent, our first parents fell from their first estate and a cloud came over everything; they were sent forth from the garden of Eden and a flaming sword was at the entrance. Yet, even so, there was a bow in the cloud, was there not? That cloud brought such a darkness over everything, but in the Lord's word to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" what a bow was set in that cloud!

Was it not a heavy cloud that came over the children of Israel when they came to the Red Sea? But the Lord set a bow in that cloud - using this as a figure, of course - when Moses, with divine authority said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." O, what a wonderful bow the Lord set in that day!

So, when the Lord is pleased to speak a confirming word in your hearts in a time of trouble, it is like His setting His bow in the cloud in our experience. Have you ever seen the Lord set His bow in your cloud? O, perhaps you say, I have had many clouds and there seems no light, no voice; I feel as though the Lord has forsaken me and forgotten me. Yes, there may be many clouds in the natural sky, without a bow; but when the Lord sees it needful, He will set His bow in the cloud, and bring into your heart a sweet and blessed confirmation that He is just as much a promise-performing God now, as He was in the days of Noah, when He set His bow in the cloud there. When the dear Redeemer was crucified at Calvary, a darkness came over the earth for three hours. What a cloud that was! Yet, you see, later we find the Lord saying just before He expired, "It is finished", and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. What a wonderful bow that was, in the dark cloud! So, indeed, I believe, it has often been to us, and the darker the cloud, the more brightly does the bow shine in it! It is through the Lord's setting it. It is very sweet when faith can view all things in His hand, designed for good, even when they may thus seem to be working against us. When these threatening clouds come in the sky, in a stormy season, nature may give rise to fear as to what may happen, but that which makes nature fear, gives hope to faith. The Lord sets a bow in the cloud, and says I AM the same God, the same Jesus, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. I believe we have not the slightest reason to doubt that now and again, when the Lord disposes, while the world stands, the bow will be seen in the cloud; the Lord will set it there as a token, a seal of the covenant made with Noah, which may be as a figure of the

covenant made with all His redeemed family. For as He spared, and saved, and delivered Noah and his family from death by the flood, so will He spare, save and deliver all His redeemed people from eternal death. He will be the same performing God. Perhaps we think more about the cloud and the bow than we do about the sun, but the sun is just as necessary to shine upon the cloud. O, how sweet it is when the great and glorious Redeemer, the Sun of righteousness, arises with healing in His wings! When He shines in a poor sinner's heart in the time of trouble, affliction or distress, when the threatening clouds rise, it is like setting His bow in the cloud. Ah! have there not been many occasions when the Lord's sweet voice, His still, small voice, has silenced your fears, strengthened your faith, inspired your confidence, and enabled you to say, "He hath done all things well"? "I do set My bow in the cloud."

Another choice point here consists in the Lord's looking upon it. The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it. Beautiful thought this! The Lord says He will look upon it, that He may remember the covenant He has made. We are not to understand by this, that it is possible for God to forget things, in the sense that we may forget them, although sometimes even godly men have spoken as though they felt the Lord had forgotten them. It may be some of you have felt like that too. Good Asaph did when he said, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Poor dear man! Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever come to such a pass, that when you have tried to pray, it has felt more like mockery than anything else, when you have been over-run with infidelity, unbelief, rebellion and fretfulness against God? Has it ever been like that, that you have said, Hath God forgotten to be gracious? or like Jeremiah - another godly man - "Wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" But all this comes from our reasoning about things. The Lord says, I will look upon it.

We read a little in the Scriptures about the Lord looking upon things. It is said when the children of Israel came into their time

of trouble at the Red Sea, that the Lord looked upon them, and had respect unto them, and remembered His covenant; heard their groanings and delivered them. He looked upon them. This may, of course, be considered as a figure of speech, but it shows the Lord's tender regard for His people. But did it not seem as though the Lord had forgotten them and forsaken them? The Lord uses the word 'remember' sometimes, not to indicate that it had gone from His memory, but to show that He had regard, took compassion, had pity upon them in their distress. O, it is sweet to see the bow in the cloud! One good hymnwriter says,

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood;
His loving-kindness, O how good!"

and I believe it is those very people who may sometimes say, Hath God forgotten to be gracious, who eventually can add their Amen to that beautiful verse. O what a mercy it is to get a glimpse of divine lovingkindness!

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head."

It is hard to believe that sometimes, is it not? When the heavens seem like brass, when you try to pray and get no response, when you feel to be almost overwhelmed by opposite powers, a roaring devil and a frowning God, it seems hard to understand, and we should sink, never to rise again, were it not for the bow the Lord is pleased to set in the cloud. It is His bow, and He knows just when to set it there.

"He never is before His time
He never is behind."

"I will look upon it." Sometimes the Lord looks with wrath and indignation on people, for although it is said, the Lord looked on the children of Israel - it is also said, He looked upon the host of the Egyptians and troubled them, when they were pursuing the Israelites. He looked upon the Israelites to help them, but on the Egyptians to destroy them. He caused the chariot wheels to come off, and the waters to overwhelm them. O, what a wonder-working God He is! We find the Psalmist, in one Psalm, praying to the Lord to look upon him. "Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins."

Have you ever asked the Lord to look upon you? It is said, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." What a wonderful thing for a poor sinner to prove! Perhaps we may distinguish between the eye of omniscience and the eye of tender pity whereby the Lord looks upon His people in their times of distress and need. We might go to a poor thing somewhere at the point of death, and look upon him and say, O, you are in a sad case; I am sorry I can not do anything for you. I would if I could. There is only One who can. We may say things like that, but the Lord has never yet had to look upon a poor sinner in need and distress, and say, You are beyond My power, there is nothing I can do for you; yours is a hopeless case. No, I will look upon you. What a mercy! But have there not been occasions when the Lord has looked upon you, that is upon your circumstances, your difficulties, the burdens that may be pressing you down, looked upon the cross you may have to be carrying? But here it is, I will look upon My bow that I have set in the cloud - I will look upon it. Sweet thought this! But there is something much more than merely looking upon it. This looking upon it, is a token that the Lord will surely fulfil His word; will never fail of His promise; will keep His covenant that He has made. He will keep His covenant that He has made. He will keep His promise!

This brings us to the third point - "I will remember." Remember what? The covenant made betwixt Me and thee. What was the covenant? Was it not that the Lord would never again destroy the earth - that is the creatures upon it - by means of water? Never again! It will never be so again; this is His covenant. This is a choice word then to an exercised child of God, because it can reassure him, that He is still the same God; that He does not forget the word He has spoken, the promise He has made. He has thus, so to speak, committed Himself. The bow in the cloud and the Lord's looking upon it, seem, in a way, to set forth these two immutable things we read of in the epistle to the Hebrews, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who

have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." The Lord does say He will remember things. In the prophecy by Jeremiah He says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." As though He would say, I have not forgotten it. He will not forget you. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." I will remember thee. "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." O, could He forget thee, then? O, think of that engraving. Think of the cost of thy redemption, of the price the Redeemer paid, of the debt He cancelled, of the responsibility He took upon Himself. Could He forget thee, sinner? "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands - not written it with a pencil - I have graven thee on the palms of My hands."

Yet there is something the Lord will forget, it is wonderful to say, for by the prophet Isaiah He says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins" "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Blessed thought, this! May the Lord have regard to us in these things. O, it is sweet to be remembered in mercy by this wonderful God! The Psalmist prayed after this manner, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O, visit me with Thy salvation; that I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance." He never forgets us, although there are times when He may withhold the manifestations of His grace and goodness. Nehemiah prayed, "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy." This remembering then, on the part of God, does not suggest any infirmity, as to the possibility of His forgetting things, forgetting His word or His covenant, but that He will have regard to the same, and will surely fulfil His word - will never fail of His promise. May the Lord make it a seasonable word to some of us!

"And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." This covenant was, to a point, a covenant of nature in that there should never again be a widespread destruction by water; but how beautifully it sets forth that blessed covenant of grace made with our great Redeemer and with all His people in Him, of which David speaks, "Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure". The Lord says He will make it with His people and He sets His bow in the cloud.

What is it for Him to set His bow in the cloud in your case? Is it not for Him to come and bless your soul, seal home to your heart a seasonable promise, cause you to hear His voice, and give you a clear token that He will never leave you nor forsake you? Have you ever seen the Lord's bow in the cloud? Have there not been times when His voice has, as it were, pierced the dark, pressing cloud? Did not the voice of the Father come out of the cloud when He said, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased"?

So here are these three things; there must be the sun, and there must be the cloud, in order for the bow to be set in it. What a wonder-working God He is! May the Lord confirm us then, even by this covenant of the rainbow, and enable us to put our trust in Him even though there may be threatening clouds, according to those wonderful words to those who walk in darkness and have no light. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon His God." Has the Lord ever set a bow in the cloud for you and spoken in your heart by it, saying, "I AM the Lord thy God, I will not fail thee; I will bring thee through; thou shalt not be destroyed, here is My promise?" O, what a mercy to feel an interest in that blessed covenant! So we find the prophet saying, in the chapter we read, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."
