

Lord God, heavenly Father, You gave Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to become Man and to come into the world that He might destroy the works of the devil, deliver us poor offenders from sin and death, and give us everlasting life: We beseech You so to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may seek no other refuge than His Word, and thus avoid the sin to which we are by nature inclined, in order that we may always be found among the faithful followers of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him obtain eternal salvation ... Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, by Veit Dietrich, p. 147)

Then God said to Noah, "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 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--that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And **when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."**

In Christ Jesus, whose coming prophesied thousands of years before His appearing was never to be doubted, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you ever noticed in the Old Testament often prophecies were expressed in such a way indicating they were already accomplished? For example, Isaiah, writing about seven centuries before Christ, wrote about Christ's first Advent this way: "The people who walked in darkness **have seen** a great light". Then this was their glorious response: "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given." You see, when God promises to do something, it is as good as done in the minds and hearts of His people.

Now imagine being Noah or a member of his small family – the only humans left in the world, facing daunting tasks in what now would appear to them to be a "new world". God speaks His promises to them as they disembark, promises likely repeated to one another as they commenced with their daily living fulfilling their vocations. So we need to learn well how it is that God intends for us to respond to the world around us in our daily lives of struggle and uncertainties: **Especially When in Doubt, Hear God's Promises.**

I

Notice how faithful Noah immediately responded in praise by taking from the limited remaining clean animals and birds offering them as burnt offerings to God who spared their lives. When God smelled the sweet aroma of faith coming from these eight believers, He was pleased and rewarded their trust in Him with more promises.

Consider John in our Gospel lesson. Being so faithful in his vocation as the forerunner of Christ, he was now confined to Herod's dungeon soon to be executed just for the pleasure of wicked unbelief. When he sent his disciples with the question for Jesus, asking if He indeed was the Christ who had been promised to save all sinners, Jesus sent them back quoting promises recorded by Prophet Isaiah.

When in doubt, believers are strengthened by the promises of God, which as noted, are as good as accomplished. God never is unfaithful, but always keeps His word to us. As Paul observed to Pastor Timothy: "If we are faithless, [God] will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself."

As believers in this one true gracious Lord God, even though we are sinners, we believe the promise of forgiveness of all our sins. Though facing death, we believe we will never die, but live forever. Though daily repenting of sins, we believe we are dressed in the perfect righteousness of our Savior, Jesus Christ. None of this can you and I observe in this life. But because our Lord promises it, we believe it is so and accomplished forevermore.

Our divine services are built around all such promises from God to us. We confess our sins and He declares we are forgiven. We desire not to be abandoned by our Creator God, and we repeatedly hear the Lord is with us; we hear we are blessed with His face lifted up in joy upon us; we receive in our very mouths the holy body given and the holy blood shed for our forgiveness. Far from abandoning, our Lord draws near to us blessing us with His gracious presence.

II

Have you noticed how the unbelieving world is fond of continually proclaiming its world-wide doom and gloom with its frightful apocalyptic predictions – whether it be the nuclear holocaust or climate devastation leaving our world uninhabitable? Now this is not to say we should not pay attention to such threats at all, but to cower in fear from such worldwide destruction certainly is not in accord with the promises of God given to Noah and his family.

What did God promise after that worldwide destruction of the Flood? "I will **never** again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever

again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

While this sin-filled world deserves to be destroyed because "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth", God is the one who will finally bring an end to the world. Man will never have that power. "While the earth remains" things like the variety of seasons and temperatures, the fixed heavenly bodies' orbits and revolutions will be part of God's plan for us, His beloved creatures He sent His Son to save. Remember our Lord informs us that the world will be destroyed not because of man's evil design, as evil as we might be. Rather because God's very elect are in jeopardy of losing faith and thereby losing life everlasting, God will bring an end to this world.

III

The greatest promise of all for these eight believers was found in that one son of Noah, Shem. The promised seed of the woman was passed from Noah to Shem. It would be passed on down from generation to generation until the Virgin Mary would conceive in her womb by the Holy Spirit the Christ Child promised from the very beginning after man first fell into sin.

This promise was not forgotten by Noah and his family. Rather they were among the few who still believed it. They were awaiting their rescue from this wicked world and their sinful selves through that promised Seed of the woman. When the doors of the Ark were closed and the rain started pelting it and it began to be tossed about by the waves, certainly Noah led his family in hearing a devotional recounting of the promises of God, especially in the coming Christ.

We read prior to the account of the flood these sobering words: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." Noah, through his faith in the coming Christ found favor with God. So Noah, trusting in this promise of the Christ, was spared from destruction.

This same promise is what sustains us and causes us to trust all the promises of our Lord. He keeps them all. But you and I are plagued with doubts coming from our sinful natures, just like Noah and his family battled the same sinful flesh and needed to hear those

promises again and again. We are forgiven for all our doubts through the blood of Jesus and His perfect trust in His Father is credited to us as righteousness.

The menacing threats voiced by the unbelieving world will never diminish. They continue to feed our doubts just like they did in Noah's day mocking him for building such a big boat on dry ground for about 100 years. Likely Noah and his family wondered with society becoming increasingly wicked, if they would even survive.

The one true God who never goes back on His gracious promises to you will never disappoint you. Trust His voice, His life-giving voice. Fear not the ugly threats of the world and whatever you may perceive as impending doom. You are safe, not just here in this life, but for everlasting life, for the sake of the Christ, promised of old. John was sustained by all such promises to the day of his beheading. The wickedness of the world will only increase. Take heart, Jesus has overcome the world for you. You are rescued everlastingly. Amen.