

Hanging by God's Promises

Genesis 8:15-22 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ 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 on it." ¹⁸ So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. ²² "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

It's pretty bad out there. Hurricane Ian caused an estimated \$30-40 billion worth of damage. We had the hottest summer worldwide on the books. The drought in Utah is not letting up. Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, trying to annex parts of it. And that's not even getting into the political scene, especially as midterm elections are coming up. Practically speaking, should we get one of those cat posters to put up in church saying, "Hang in there"?

It was pretty bad out there in Noah's days too. There were millions if not billions of people, and God observed "how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5) If God would let the world continue as it was, all believers would have died out, consumed by the unbelievers. The line of the Savior would've been lost. God's promise to save the world would've failed. Everyone would be lost forever in hell.

Instead of damning all people who would ever exist, God judged the world of Noah's day with a worldwide flood. Yet even this he did with great patience, giving 120 years of warning of the impending flood, 120 years for people to turn away from their wicked and evil ways. In the end, there were only 8 believers left in the world at that time: Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives. Along with them in the ark, God saved 2 of every land animal and bird along with 7 pairs of the clean animals and birds.

It's been a year since God sent the floodwaters of judgment upon the earth. Then God commands Noah to come out with all the animals and people "so that they can multiply on the earth, be fruitful, and increase in number on it." (verse 17) Life, practically speaking, was hanging by a thread, kind of like one of those cat posters, and what does Noah do when they come out of the ark? "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." (verse 20) Woah. Hold up a minute, Noah. What are you doing? Everything that came off of that ark is now an endangered species! I mean, did you just forever ruin the ecosystem, aid in a few species going extinct? Their life, your life, is hanging by a thread!

Now, I don't classify myself as a hoarder, but I always like to know where my next resources are – even before COVID shortages. We have one jar of peanut butter open right now that we use and another unopened jar in the pantry for reserve. I have one opened laundry detergent and another unopened one nearby. Once I use up the current one, I buy another, even though I have one in reserve. That way, if we have a random peanut butter or laundry detergent shortage, I have a whole other container to work through before it's a problem. I don't like hanging by a thread. I like to always see how I will be provided for after what I have is used up.

Do you find a similar thought when you're inundated with news of devastating hurricanes, climate change, war, and politics? Do you grow concerned, feel like things are hanging by a thread, if you can't see how these crises play out? And what do you do? Maybe you don't buy just one reserve jar of peanut butter, but 50. You don't only make a donation to disaster relief; you share the links to get more funds raised. It's not just that you switch to watering 1 time a week, but you call up Layton City when you see your neighbors have lush, green lawns. It's not just that you switch to using public transpo, but you tell everyone you know to do it too. It's not that you do your research and decide who you're going to vote for, but you put up lawn signs anywhere you can to get the right candidate in. While these can be good things, they tempt us to turn inward, to turn to ourselves, to solve the world's problems.

As we turn inward, we start to lose hope because what we can do feels too small to enact any significant change. The problems continue to linger. The world feels like it's a turn away from falling apart into an insane desert Mad Max apocalyptic wasteland. We can't fix it. So, practically speaking, isn't the world just hanging by a thread?

After Noah witnessed a worldwide apocalyptic event that nearly wiped out all human, land animal, and bird life, why was he not wringing his hands after coming off the ark, thinking about how he's going to have to preserve every single animal until their population size was over 2,500 adult specimens (and thus no longer endangered)? Why did he not hole up his family away from other dangers and smother them with care to make sure that the human population multiplied and survived? Why did he build an altar to the LORD and kill some of the very few remaining animals in the world?

It's because Noah trusted that the world was not hanging by a thread, that God would provide, and he wanted to thank God for that. We want to see what's in reserve. We want to know how the devastating storms, the climate change, the drought, the war between Ukraine and Russia, the politics, all of these things play out before they do. Until we do, we are afraid. Satan wants to make us afraid of how things are going in this world, to believe that it is all delicately hanging by a thread, about to come crashing down as soon as our strength gives out. He wants us to turn to ourselves for the solutions because it will spiral us further into despair since we can't fix these things. Satan wants us to lose faith and confidence in God because he wants us to suffer and be destroyed.

Noah trusted that he and the world was not hanging by a thread because God had promised: "I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you." (Genesis 6:18) God was saying that the world would continue. The animals would thrive. What's more is that God would keep this one-sided agreement, this covenant, to send the offspring of the woman into the world to crush the serpent, the devil, and the despair he sows among us. The Savior would come from Noah's family, from his son Shem and his wife. God would make it happen.

Although it took thousands of years, God delivered on his promises. Life continued. Jesus was born into this world, and, by doing so, he crushed the fear that Satan had been using against us, a fear that everything is hanging by a thread, that God won't actually bring the Savior or save us. By living a life of perfect trust in God, Jesus crushed Satan's accusations against us that we don't perfectly trust in the Lord when we don't see how it all plays out next. By his sacrifice on the cross, he removed our sins of not trusting in God. His resurrection from the dead makes this payment for our evil thoughts paid in full. Satan and his fear mongering has been defeated by the covenant God kept to Noah and his family.

After Noah sacrificed those animals and birds to the LORD immediately after disembarking from the ark, the LORD gave another promise assuring Noah, his family, and us that this world does not hang by a thread. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human 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." (verses 21-22)

It is bad in our world, and it is going to get worse. There will be more hurricanes, more droughts, more climate change, more war, more political fighting, but the world will never be hanging by a thread. Instead, the world is held safely and securely, strapped into God's hands and his care because he said so with his unchanging and always faithful Word. What he says actually happens every single time. He said that our world will continue until he decides its time is done, until Judgment Day, the Last Day of the world. No one can thwart him on this, not by our best or worst efforts. Our past, our present, and our future are firmly in God's hands.

If you still feel uneasy about this world that we live in, like it is still hanging by a thread, consider then what you're being filled with. Are you filling up on the worst-case scenarios, the practically speaking threatened outcomes? Or are you filling up on the secure, unchanging, unfulfilling promises of God? Have you ever counted the minutes, the hours, you spend listening to those who tell you the world is hanging by a thread vs. listening to God tell you that he's got this? If you are spending 1 hour a day listening to people say that the world is hanging by a thread vs. 5 minutes of listening to God's promises, what is going to dominate your thoughts?

Consider now how you can purposefully fill up more on God's promises. Can you post Genesis 8:21-22 on your steering wheel, on your bathroom mirror, on your tv remote? Can you adjust your website and podcast feeds to go to places that will put before you more of God's one-sided promises of how he is going to take care of everything for you and this world? When you fill up more on God's promises, this will help take away the fear and instead increase your faith in God's constant providence that has happened all throughout time and will continue throughout the rest of the time of the earth and beyond.

Like Noah, we have God's promise that our world does not hang by a thread. It is firmly in God's hands, and it will always be there. Consume God's promises to you. "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human 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." (verses 21-22) We hang on God's promises. Amen.