

4. Be not afraid! - Our fragile church has a faithful God: Reach for God's promise

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd like to open your Bibles at Exodus chapter 2, that would be a help. One of the difficulties, the biggest difficulties, I think that we often have as Christians, is that God is not like us.

Thank God that he isn't like us. But I suspect that often we wish he were a bit more like us, a bit more predictable, more acceptable, more accountable in his ways to our kind of scrutiny.

But the truth is very different, as we've just been singing. God is other than we think. His ways are far above, far beyond reason's height. Not that God is unreasonable or irrational, but of course just because God is eternal and infinite, and we are finite and ephemeral, then God and his ways are always going to be beyond our feeble grasp.

And that's a problem to us, isn't it? Because, of course, we often don't understand him properly. And yet, the reality is that we are never going to be at peace in this life until we do understand that, until we do come to terms with that, much more than we often do.

Unless we at least begin to understand these higher ways of God, it'll be very easy for us to lose heart. And that's why the hymn says, Workmen of God, O lose not heart, but learn what God is like.

[1 : 37] And learning what God is like and getting a sense of these higher ways and trusting them, even when we don't fully understand them all, as we won't, that's what the Bible means by faith.

Seeing the invisible. And enduring as one who has the instinct that can tell that God is on the field, even when it seems that he is most invisible.

And that is the answer, and friends, it's the only answer to our fears, to our disappointments, to our disillusionments, even to our anger and resentments against God that rise up in our hearts.

Of course, it's not easy, is it? But that is why God has given us the scriptures, so that we can learn what he really is like. And we've been seeing that wonderful message, haven't we, in these opening chapters of Exodus, about what God is like and what God is doing, even when it seems he is totally invisible and doing nothing.

And he's hardly mentioned, is he, in these first couple of chapters of Exodus. Just a couple of times in chapter 1, and in fact not at all, all the way through chapter 2, until the last couple of verses.

[2 : 52] And yet he is there, as we've seen, even though he's invisible. And the message is clear, isn't it? We've seen that. God's people can rest in his purpose, because his purpose is unchanged and unchanging, even though it might not seem like that at all, with enemies in the ascendant.

That's what chapter 1 taught us. And God's people can rejoice in his providence, because he does and will always frustrate the worst efforts of his enemies to bring about, ultimately, blessing and glory for his own people.

We saw that, didn't we, in the first half of chapter 2, where God's deliverer, Moses, is rescued and is looked after and cared for and protected and paid for by the purse of God's great enemy, Pharaoh himself.

And we saw last time that God's people must recognize his pattern in their own lives, too. Because God turns the weakness and the rejection of his servants into ultimate blessing for his people.

God knows what he's doing. He knows what he's doing when Moses gets rejected by his people, because it's the pattern, in fact, for all of his servants. Because it is the pattern, above all, of his own Son, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 15] He won the world through shame, as we've just been singing. And he beckons on that same road for every single servant disciple who will come and follow him.

But these last three verses of the chapter have still one more very clear message for us. And they remind us that however slow God's working seems to be in bringing about the deliverance that we long for, and however deaf he seems to be, sometimes, in answering the prayers and intervening in the way we want him to, we need to know that what God has covenanted, promised for his people will always, without question, be fulfilled in his good time.

And so we're not to lose heart. And we're not to start looking elsewhere for the salvation and for the deliverance that we long for. No, we're to reach for God's promise.

Because it is always unfailingly alive in the eyes and the ears and the heart of God, even if, sometimes, perhaps often, the heavens may seem as brass to us when our prayers are unanswered.

You see the first words there of verse 23, during those many days. Days of groaning and slavery and desperate prayers to God.

[5 : 38] Prayers, it seems, that were never heard, were never answered. I think that's one of the hardest things we find, isn't it? Is trying to understand God's timetable. Don't you find that?

When you pray and you say to God, why don't you intervene now? Why are you so slow to act? Why don't you answer our prayers now for this need in this particular way?

These are real questions, aren't they? I'm sure you've asked them. I've asked them. So many people, of course, have asked these kind of questions. And alas, alas, because they haven't received the answer they look for, they've given up on God.

They've abandoned God. Because it seems God didn't seem fit to answer their prayers according to their timetable. It's one of the commonest things, isn't it? You find. I'm sure you have too.

People who once belonged to the church but now no longer do. Some crisis arose in their life, something happened, they prayed, and God didn't answer. At least, according to their timetable.

[6 : 40] And so they gave up on God. What they mean is not that God didn't answer my prayer, but God didn't answer my prayer my way. I've met so, so many people like that over the years.

I was just reading recently John Humphrey's book. Some of you will have read it. It's about, I've forgotten the title, but about his agnosticism. And that's really what he says. He was brought up in the church, used to go to church. But some things arose and he asked for prayer and he asked God for things and the answers didn't seem to come the way he expected.

So he concluded that God was either deaf or dead or both. Sometimes people say these things and there seems to be very little rationality about it.

I mean, just a friend of mine was telling me about somebody just like that. And he said, well, I stopped coming to church when my mother died. I asked God for her not to die and he didn't answer my prayer and so I gave up on God.

He said, was your mother quite young? No, she was in her 90s, he said. Well, did he expect his mother to live forever and ever? But no, he didn't answer the prayer that he wanted and so he gave up.

[7 : 49] But even as committed Christians, I think we find often God's timetable very hard to understand. At least I do. And of course, the New Testament recognizes that, doesn't it?

That's why Peter in his second letter writes and he says, in the last days there will come many scoffers scoffing saying, where is this coming of Jesus? The second coming that he promised.

Well, it's easy, isn't it, to begin to doubt when things that God has promised don't seem to be happening. Especially when we're overwhelmed by the evil, the wickedness that we see in our world, the intractable ills.

And that's why Peter says, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but he's patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

But he says, the day of the Lord will come. You see, don't lose heart. Reach for his promise. It's still unfailingly alive.

[8 : 50] Remember, says Peter, for the Lord a day is as a thousand years. His timetable is not the same as ours. And that can be very, very hard for us at times. But the message of the whole Bible is that regardless of that, we can trust God's promises.

And they will never, ever fail. They will never be forgotten. They're as real and as powerful today as the day they were very first uttered. Because as Jesus said, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

And that's the wonderful message, really, that oozes out of these last three little verses of Exodus chapter 2. When all hope seems gone, when everything around is dark, when heaven seems to be absolutely silent, God says to us, be not afraid.

We're to remember that our fragile church has a faithful God. We're to reach for his promise. And we will find that it is unfailingly alive in the eyes and ears and the heart of God, even when the heavens seem as brass to us.

Because God will never, ever fail to hear the prayer of those who grasp hold of his covenant promises. It's the psalm we began the service with. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

[10 : 16] He fulfills the desires of those who fear him. He also hears their cry and saves them. That's a promise from our God. So let's look at these verses and try and get clear what their promise is for us today, shall we?

The first thing that they do emphasize, I think, is the apparent slowness, the apparent failure of God's timetable. These many days, days of groaning and slavery.

Now remember, Moses is writing this book, isn't he, to teach his own people later on in the wilderness where they've been for 40 years. He's teaching them about God's timetable and about trusting God, to trust him for his promises despite the apparent failure of God to bring about what he had promised to them.

And that's why he's reminding them here of what God has done in the past and how God has worked in the past. And chapter 1, as we said, opens with the dire circumstances of slavery in Egypt and the genocide that's promoted.

And then in chapter 2, of course, in the beginning, there's a sort of ray of hope, isn't there? Perhaps God is doing something, after all, in the birth of Moses. And yet, well, it all comes to nothing, doesn't it? And 40 years pass between verses 10 and 11 of chapter 2.

[11 : 37] Stephen tells us that in Acts chapter 7. 40 years of nothing. That's quite striking, isn't it? But then you get to verse 11 and Moses, here he is, coming to stand with his people, to reveal himself as a deliverer.

And perhaps now, after all this time, God is actually going to do something. But again, it all seems to come to nothing, doesn't it? God's deliverer is rejected by his people.

God's defeated again, it seems. And Moses is out of the picture. He was a prince of Egypt. Now he's just a peasant in the desert. And for God's people, it just goes on, says verse 23, many days of groaning and slavery and unanswered prayers.

Another 40 years, in fact, Stephen tells us in Acts. Decades. Two generations further on and absolutely nothing to show of God's working.

No sign of any mighty revival of God's kingdom in the world. No evidence even of God being there at all. Well, how long can you keep on going out and calling to God for help before you conclude that he's either dead or he's deaf or he's not interested or he's refusing to answer your prayers?

[13 : 00] Well, naturally, isn't it? Before long, you begin to look elsewhere for your deliverance. You begin to seek the future that you long for in other ways. Put your hope and your trust in things and in people and in initiatives of this world to bring about the changes that God doesn't seem to want to bring about or doesn't seem to be able to bring about.

Isn't that true? See, so often to us, God's ways seem to have failed and so people turn to the world's ways instead and they put their hope and their trust in politics, in economics, in social policy, in psychology, in any number of things.

We're hoping to find the answer to our prayers in these things far more quickly than in the slow and deaf and apparently absent God who, well, he's just failed to show up, who hasn't performed according to the timetable that we would expect.

And you see, what Moses is telling us in these three verses is that that is to make a huge mistake. A huge mistake. And that when we are faced with a choice of putting our hope in the politics of man, however auspicious they might seem, or the promises of God, however ancient they seem to be, our true hope is always to be found in the ancient promises of God.

Because the auspicious politics of man will always, in the end, always prove empty and vain. Whereas the ancient promises of God will always, always, they'll prove to be glorious and certain.

[14 : 45] And that's the contrast that's being flagged up for us here in these few verses. It might not be immediately obvious, but let's think first about what we're told in verse 23 about an apparently bright hope for the Israelites in the auspicious politics of man.

It's there in that little detail we're given in verse 23. During those many days, the king of Egypt died. Now, if you were an Israelite oppressed in Egypt under a tyrannical regime, under a monumentally evil ruler who decreed genocide on your people, wouldn't you be longing for him to be removed or to die or be assassinated?

Wouldn't you be desperately hoping that when the new regime came there would be a new hope, there would be the possibility of respite? You're bound to think that, aren't you? The very prospect of it would excite hope in your heart just to hear Pharaoh has died.

And we see that just the same today. We see it in our world. I was just reading recently in the newspapers about people in Cuba, especially exiles from Cuba living in America, who have their hopes excited the more they read of the failure of Fidel Castro and his health beginning to decline.

They saw the same thing in Iraq, didn't we? Where people longed for the end of Saddam's regime and remember the initial joy and the dancing and the happiness and the very beginnings of the Gulf War.

[16 : 09] Alas, it was pretty short-lived, wasn't it? The hopes for that new regime in Iraq haven't really been met, have they? At least not yet. Very likely not for a long time.

But you see, the Israelites were surely longing for the hope that a new king would bring a new regime, something that would be far better, especially when the scholars tell us that it was established patterns in Egypt for a new king to celebrate his accession to the throne by granting an amnesty to those who were guilty, by releasing prisoners, by freeing slaves in their droves.

There's abundant evidence of that kind of thing from documents of ancient Egypt. One scholar says this, this being so, the Israelites had good reason to expect that the change in regime would bring with it some amelioration to their condition.

But this was not to be. Hence the stress in verse 23 of the intensified misery of the enslaved Israelites. New king came, but the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery.

Despite all the apparent hope that there might have been in the auspicious politics of man, it proved to be an absolutely empty hope. And if God's people look to political change, some fortuitous change in their earthly circumstances, some improvement in the institutions, the governments of this world, then friends, in the end, all such hopes will be disappointed.

[17 : 40] All such trust in man and man's ways and man's world will be proved to be an empty hope and nothing but folly. The change of government in Egypt didn't bring any answer to the problems of God's people.

In fact, it just seems that the text is telling us it got worse and worse. Now friends, that is a very, very important lesson for the church of Jesus Christ today.

We are not to put our trust in the auspicious politics of man. That's what the world does. It's what the world has always done, of course, but it's sheer folly. Man has been seeking for his earthly answers, his earthly utopia, right from the very beginning.

That's what we've seen in the book of Genesis, isn't it? Trying to build his own citadel, his own city of safety and prosperity, but it always ends in ruins. Just think.

Think of Marxist socialism that promised power to the people until the people discovered that they were expendable to the system. Or fascism, with its dreams of purity and progress, it all ended in total catastrophe.

[18 : 52] And global capitalism is hardly a rock of stability today, is it? Well, of course, it does have to be said that it's protected individual freedoms much more than any of these other philosophies.

But I hope that your hope isn't in the Bank of England or the U.S. Federal Reserve. If the world looks for these things, but it ends always in nothing.

And yet, you know, there is a very real danger for the Christian church to be tempted to do exactly the same thing. To lose our focus on the one true source of hope that we have, the ancient promise of God, and the certain fulfillment of that in the future, in his good time.

There's such a tendency, such a temptation for us to look to the auspicious politics of man, to bring about the kingdom that we long for, to try to do it now, to try and do it our way.

And that's the root of so many of the church's problems throughout its history, right from the New Testament times right up to now. Frustration with God's timetable.

[20 : 00] Frustration for God's future bringing in of his kingdom. And temptation to want now things that the Bible clearly tells us are not yet to be for the people of God.

And you see, when the church is and when a Christian's focus is lost from God's timetable, a timetable that has a focus firmly on the future, the new creation in Christ, when we lose that focus and we move more and more onto the present, that's when we begin to substitute real hope in God's covenant promises for hope and the power of the auspicious politics of our present day and our world.

Because we start to think that we can bring in God's kingdom our way according to our timetable. And at the same time we forget altogether about the primacy and the power of God's promise of the future, his gospel, which is always what the church really needs and always what the world really needs.

Now that is the story, isn't it, of liberal theology. It's a story of the loss of the true gospel of hope, the ancient promises of God and its replacement with a mere social gospel about the relief of poverty and social justice and political intervention in the world and all sorts of things like that.

All these kind of things to try and make this world a better place. That becomes the real focus. Not proclaiming the coming kingdom of God which alone will transform this world forever.

[21 : 36] into a wonderful place. Of course, it all starts well. It's all very well-meaning, well-intentioned. And of course, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ assumes that his followers, that's us, that we will have a care for the poor and for the oppressed and for the mistreated and so on.

In Mark 14, verse 7, he just assumes his followers will always do good to the poor but he also makes very, very clear two other very important things. The poor you will always have with you, he says.

In other words, this is a fallen world. This world will never be turned into a utopia, however much good we seek to do in Jesus' name. And we're fools if we ever begin to imagine that we can.

And second, Jesus is clearly saying there that there are some things that are even more important than caring for the poor. Honouring the saving death of Jesus Christ on the cross for sins, which is just exactly what the woman who anointed him with perfume was doing, much to the anointing of all the others who'd rather she spent it on the poor.

This is a beautiful thing, says Jesus. And it's going to be told wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world. Why? So that people will see and understand the absolute priority of honouring and welcoming the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for sins.

[23 : 05] Because that's where our true hope is. And where that priority is forgotten, the only source of true hope for the whole world, and where the proclamation of that message is set aside and sidelined, everything is lost.

Everything is lost. That's why I object so greatly to the new slogan that Christian Aid has adopted. We believe in life before death.

That might at first look very clever, but that is a sneering slogan. That is saying we do not care about the gospel of Christ, which is all about the conquest of death and the new creation.

There's nothing Christian in the slightest about Christian Aid anymore. It's anti-Christian Aid, actually. It's a classic example of losing the plot of the gospel and seeing hope only in the auspicious politics of man.

That's why it disturbs me also when other agencies that are apparently evangelical, or at least began that way, increasingly wanted to get on the bandwagons of the latest auspicious schemes of man.

[24 : 12] It's a big mistake to make. To think that putting all your efforts into global campaigns about making poverty history or ending HIV and AIDS or stopping climate change or whatever it is, that these things will ever bring in the kingdom of God.

No genuine hope for this world, genuine hope for the Christian church is not in political change of any kind. Real hope is in the one place it's always been, in the ancient but unchanging promises of God, the gospel of God fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's what we're to remember. And that's what we're to reach for, the true hope of the gospel of Christ. As the organized church of Christ, when we're trying to think about what our strategy should be in this modern world, a world that so apparently is uninterested in the way of truth.

But God's ancient promise of the gospel is still what this world needs, even if it's not what this world wants. And we're to reach for that promise of the gospel and we're to proclaim it, because that is the hope and the only hope for our world.

It's true for ourselves, too, in times of struggle and hardship, perhaps disillusionment, times of discouragement. That's what you need, too. Reach for the promise of God.

[25 : 36] Keep hold of his promises. Don't be tempted to think, well, if only I could get this thing or that thing or have this experience or that thing, my life would be so much better. Don't think that if only you could get that better job, or if only you could get married, or if only you could have a baby, or if only you could have that new experience, whatever it is, if only.

No. Listen to the psalmist, Psalm 146. Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation, but blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

And that's what verses 24 and 25 are emphasizing, isn't it? The sheer certainty and hope that there is still in the ancient promises of God.

Unlike the politics of man, which every time proves vain and empty, God's promises, although they seem to be ancient, although they seem to be forgotten, although they seem to be feeble, God's promises do not fail.

Not ever. You see something very striking in these two verses, such a contrast with the rest of the previous two chapters. In those two chapters, God is virtually absent, isn't he?

[26 : 58] He's unheard, he's unseen, he seems impotent, he seems dead. But in these verses, they show us that that is totally wrong, do you see? Suddenly the veil is lifted, isn't it?

And we see right into heaven, we see the reality of what has been true all the time, but just unseen. That God is not absent. That God is present. That he's near to those who call on him in truth.

Even though all the time, for those decades and decades, it seemed like he wasn't. Look at all the mentions of his name there. Their cry for rescue came up to God, and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Japheth.

And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. God is alive with his people. He's there. And God is attentive to his people.

He hears. He sees. He knows. And God does act for his people. He remembers his covenant. Now, you know that the word remember of God never just means recalling in his mind.

[28 : 04] No, for God to remember is for God to get into action. to come down, to act in deliverance of his people. Remember, God remembered Noah, and he saved him from the flood.

And he said to him, after the flood, whenever I see the rainbow, I will remember my covenant, and I will preserve the whole world. God remembers his covenant promises. They're ancient.

Yes, they are. But there's no sell-by date. They never go bad. God. The promise of the covenant to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

What was that about? Well, he promised God's land, didn't he, to Abraham's descendants in Genesis 12. We read it this morning. He promised God's liberation for them out of the land of Egypt, to enter the land and to enjoy it.

Read that in Genesis 15. He promised God's own leadership for his people, to be with them as their God forever. That's the covenant again in Genesis chapter 17.

[29 : 07] And none of it has been forgotten. That's the point of these verses. None of it has fallen by the wayside, even though God's timetable seemed to his people to be totally incomprehensible.

God's promises may be old, but they're never ever defunct. And friends, those ancient promises of God are the only things that you need to reach for, the only thing you can reach for and hold on to, even when darkness and blackness is all around, even when the heavens seem to be as brass and it looks like to you that God is not answering your prayers.

Because those promises are alive, unfailingly, in the eyes and the ears and the heart of the Lord our God. God's promise is to be a God's promise. And maybe you just need to be reminded of that tonight.

I certainly do. Maybe tonight you feel as though you've been groaning all these many days. Maybe you've had hopes dashed.

Maybe you were looking to a change in circumstances, a new Pharaoh, a new regime in your life, whatever that was. Your hope was just going to make that change. And it's come and it's gone and your hope was shown to be empty.

[30 : 30] Well, sometimes it is, isn't it, when our hopes have been shown to be empty and false, that we're just forced back onto these old, old promises of God. Promises of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years old and more. But not forgotten. Not one of them. Maybe you've forgotten them. We can do that so easily, can't we?

But God hasn't forgotten. They're in his eyes, his ears, his heart. And they're not diminished in their power or their certainty, not one bit. God never forgot his promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And the book of Hebrews tells us that as New Testament Christians, we have better promises even than theirs. He hears our prayers even when we don't think he does.

He sees our need. He knows your heart even when your heart is broken. And he remembers his promises to you, every single one of them.

[31 : 33] So friends, if you're downcast and struggling, perhaps groaning these many days, he wants you to reach for those promises. He wants you to stand firm on them. Because your hope will never be ever in the changing circumstances of this life, the death of a Pharaoh, whatever that means for you.

Your hope is in the unchanging covenant of eternal life that is yours in Jesus Christ. So are you standing on those ancient but everlasting promises that the hymn was speaking of?

Let me remind you of just a few of them as we close. Maybe tonight you're plagued by worries about your domestic situation. How are you going to provide for your family?

How are you going to keep a roof over your head? Maybe your job isn't all that secure. And there is an economic downturn on the cards, so we're told. Well, reach for his promises.

Listen. Do not seek what you're to eat and what you're to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world look after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added unto you.

[32 : 44] Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. That's a promise to you. Maybe some of us are genuinely frightened for our lives at this time.

I'm thinking especially of some of our mission partners who might be listening into this online. Maybe you are in a dangerous place right now. Well, friends, don't put your trust in politics.

Reach for God's promises. Listen. Do not fear, says Jesus, those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

There are not two sparrows sold for a penny. Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father, but even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. That's a promise to you. Maybe some of us are fearful that God has abandoned us.

[33 : 52] That he can't forgive you because of something you've done, some sin that you've relapsed into, some dreadful mistake that you've made in your life that God couldn't possibly ever forgive again this time.

Or reach for his promises. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. That's a promise to you.

Maybe you're grieving. Maybe your heart is just broken. And your days are full of darkness and painful loss. Or reach again for his promise.

We do not grieve as others who have no hope. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord. The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

[34 : 58] And the dead in Christ will rise first. And then we will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

And it's a promise to us who are left and those who have gone before us. It could be that you're facing the day of death yourself. That dark valley is beginning to cast its shadow over you, either because of your own frailty that's becoming obvious to you, or perhaps it's the bodily weakness and the failing of a dear, dear loved one, a husband, a wife, a mother, a father, a friend.

Well, brothers and sisters, don't put your hope and your trust in the physicians and in the surgeons. Even the help that they can give will come to an end. But you can face death with a steady eye if you reach for the promises and stand on those wonderful promises of God.

Listen, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that you may be where I am also. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

[36 : 28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. That's a promise for you, if you are walking the valley of the shadow of death today.

Maybe you're just feeling cast down. Maybe you're thinking your Christian life, your service, your ministry is just feeble, just vain, it's just a flop.

You want to give up. And I often feel like that. Maybe you think God can't do anything with you, you're just no use at all to him, you're just an unfruitful servant.

Listen, you did not choose me, but I chose you. I chose you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit shall abide.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. That's just a few ancient old promises, but they're still as true today as the day that they were first spoken.

[37 : 47] And friends, when as God's people we reach for his promises in time of trial, in time of darkness, in time of distress, in any other time for that matter, our God will remember his covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and to all the seed of Abraham, to all who are his in Christ, who can never, ever be plucked out of his hand. He remembers his promises to us.

So let's help one another always to be reaching for those real promises, shall we? Not looking to the auspicious politics of man, not looking to the fleeting changes in this world, things which can never be ephemeral in passing, but helping one another to be standing on the ancient promises of God, promises that are unfailingly alive in the eyes and the ears and the heart of the Lord our Savior, even when sometimes it seems that he's not listening and the heavens are as brass. Just remember, God never, ever fails to hear the prayer of those who grasp hold of his covenant of grace, his promise.

Let's let the old version of the gospel hymn have the last word. Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Savior. Stand there and be not afraid, because our feeble church has a faithful God, and he'll be faithful to you too, and to me, no matter how feeble and frail we think we are.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in you we have a rock upon which we can stand, that because our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, died and rose again and pleads our cause at God's right hand forever and ever, then nothing can ever divide us from Jesus and his love.

[40 : 18] Nothing can ever break the sacred chain that binds us to heaven and to him. And though troubles rise and terrors frown and days of darkness may fall all around us, through him all dangers we will defy and we will conquer them all.

For you are the God who loved us from the first of time and you have promised that you will love us till the last. So help us, we pray, to reach for these promises, to stand upon them, to rejoice in them until the day you come and every promise and every covenant will be fulfilled in glory and in wonder.

Amen. Amen.