

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

ISAIAH 54

⁷For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I am gathering you. ⁸In a flood of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but in everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD. ⁹To me this is like the time of the waters of Noah. As I swore that the waters of Noah will never again cover the earth, so I am swearing that I will not be angry at you, and I will not rebuke you. ¹⁰For even if the mountains are removed, and the hills are overthrown, my mercy will not be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not be overthrown, says the LORD, who is showing you mercy. ¹¹Watch me, you afflicted woman, storm-tossed and not comforted, I will set your precious stones in black mortar and lay down sapphires as your foundation. ¹²I will decorate your parapets with rubies, your gates with sparkling stones, and your city boundaries with precious gems. ¹³All your children will be taught by the LORD, and the peace and prosperity of your children will be great. ¹⁴In righteousness you will be established. Oppression will be far from you, so you will not be afraid. Terror will be far from you. It will never come near you. ¹⁵If anyone attacks you, because of me he will accomplish nothing. Whoever launches an attack against you will fall before you.



Change seems inevitable. I went back to homecoming at my high school, where, 20 years ago, my senior class football team took the field. One classmate's mom snapped a pic of three of us who went the whole way, Kindergarten to 12th grade together, and we look different. One of our classmates said we haven't changed, but it turned into a little bit of a joke. Maybe we haven't changed below the hairline, above the football numbers, or it was the shadows that made us young, or that boost we all got post-pregnancy, etc. etc. Change seems so frustratingly inevitable that we try to find excuses for change!

“You cannot step into the same river twice.” So said Heraclitus, pre-Socratic philosopher of Ephesus ca. 500 B.C.; thus, “all existence may be summed up as perpetual change.” All things are in motion and in flux. A riverbed is constantly moving with different channels of H₂O. And erosion changes the riverbed, after some time moving it miles away.

His disciple was a man by the name of Cratylus, who went a step further, because he thought he could improve upon the philosophy of Heraclitus. Cratylus stated that you cannot even step in the same river once. Things are changing so much, the same river isn’t even the same river. Future thinkers say that Cratylus tried to improve on his teacher so earnestly that he ended up denying that there are fixed things to be changed. So Cratylus changed the whole point of the philosophy of change, and he ultimately denied Heraclitus!

Change seems inevitable. I am not the same person I was twenty years ago. Not only has my cellular structure—hair, skin, fingernails, organs—replaced themselves, but I’ve learned different experiences. So much is in flux. So much changes. Seemingly nothing is dependable—but only apart from the Lord.

THE LORD’S CHANGELESS PROMISES

The prophet Isaiah magnifies the unchanging mercy of God, and he gets there by bringing up God’s anger. ⁷*For a brief moment I abandoned you...* ⁸*In a flood of anger I hid my face from you for a moment...* We should not be troubled by the idea of an angry God. The alternative is a feelingless, impersonal force that originates all things, but is in no way touched by them. God is passionately concerned about us, and the thought that we should corrupt and destroy ourselves stirs Him to the depths. (How much better a father who knows what his child is doing to himself and is upset by it, rather than the father who neither knows nor cares what is happening in his children’s lives!) Hence, ⁷*For a brief moment I abandoned you, **but with great compassion I am gathering you.*** ⁸*In a flood of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, **but in everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD.***

The point being made here is highlighted by the contrast between a “*little moment*” and “*great compassion.*” The “*little moment*” refers to the exile, when God’s people were carried off to Babylon for a generation, a human lifetime. For us, a generation is a long time, but in the larger purposes of God it is but a moment. So the prophet magnifies the unchanging mercy of God.

Do we see ourselves as part of those larger purposes? Do we commit ourselves to a faith not held hostage by the ever-changing moment? It is not only the world around us that changes. It is also our wishy-washy, sin-addicted hearts. We are flighty and allow our feelings to be our rudder. We are chatty and allow our stream of consciousness to wander. We want to step outside of the River, the source, the water of life, because the devil still tosses us and batters us off the righteous path ... and our sinful nature prefers it that way. It brings us to sin and doubt and unbelief, because it comes from sin, doubt and unbelief.

Yet the Lord is changeless and His promises remain undisturbed. So here the prophet appeals to His promise after the flood. The Lord God says, *"⁹To me this is like the time of the waters of Noah. As I swore that the waters of Noah will never again cover the earth, so I am swearing that I will not be angry at you, and I will not rebuke you."* You know the purpose of the rainbow. Gen. 9:9-11, *⁸God said to Noah & to his sons, who were with him, ⁹"Listen, I will now establish my covenant with you & with your descendants after you ¹⁰& with everything with you that has the breath of life: with the birds, with the livestock, & with every wild animal that is on the earth with you, with everything that went out of the ark, even with every wild animal on the earth. ¹¹I will establish my covenant with you: Never again will all living creatures be cut off by the waters of a flood. Neither will there ever again be a flood to destroy the earth."* If it weren't for this, the poor people might have trembled, and at any sign of rainfall might have dreaded a similar calamity if the Lord had not sworn that this should never again happen.

In the same way, we too might dread disaster if the Lord did not promise that the Church would be safe. Yet that is just what He promises. Believers in the Name, members of the Church, are eternally SAFE. The foundation of the Church is more durable than hills and mountains. It is more likely that the world will turn upside-down than God's promises fail. There is no discontinuity between the God of the flood and God of the exile; there is no alteration in the God of the beginning of the Old Testament and the God at the end of the Old Testament. God commits Himself to a future yet unknown, for the sake of purposes yet to be achieved. *¹⁰For even if the mountains are removed, and the hills are overthrown, my mercy will not be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not be overthrown, says the LORD, who is showing you mercy.*

Does the expert say the world is in flux? The Lord tells you He is unchanging.

- Does society offer empty guarantees? His Word, the Bible, stands forever.

- Does the devil tell you your sins condemn you and you must despair of this battle? The Lord God tells you your sin is fastened to the cross of Christ, where He died to permanently remove it.
- Are you stuck in a hospital bed with changing health? You'd never have any good health or healing without the Lord.
- Does your conscience condemn you and accuse you? The baptism that washed you calls you washed, justified, sanctified, elected into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Although David Albrecht, Kevin's father, has completed that battle and now joins the host of heaven, arrayed in white, presented in fullness of glory in heaven; little Cole has only begun the battle. And the Lord Jesus has given Cole and all believers here the full suit of armor to fight.
- Does the unbelieving world seek to tear down and destroy the Church, the faith and all believers in it everywhere? I guarantee you that is the endgame of all dark forces in the world. But the promise of your Lord Jesus is that this Church is safe, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it or withstand it. After all, it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as its cornerstone.
- Does the philosopher teach you cannot step in the same river twice? The Lord says you can step in and stand on His promises once, twice, thirty, sixty, 100 times, forever and ever. These promises never change.

The Lord Jesus promises in Isaiah to decorate His bride, the Church, as a city rebuilt. (*Read vv 11-15 again.*) This is a change, but the change is among sinners. As the world turns and the rivers move, as the mountains slip into the sea and the islands rise in the ocean; the Church is set high above in the lofty fortress who is our God. He is a trusty shield and weapon; He's by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit. Though all may be gone, the victory is won. Due to His mercy & grace, we can face the change that takes place out there.

We can depend on getting old, on fighting temptations, and that the Enemy will attack us in a variety of ways. Yet we can also depend on the unchangeable, immovable promises of God. We can trust that our favorite ball teams that will be defeated, but we can trust that our Lord Jesus remains undefeated. So tighten your grip on His promises. Tighten your grip on Him in faith. Pull it together and be determined to battle sin. Be like this city rebuilt in the Bible, because that is your real life. Know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and always, from His baptismal promises all the way to the Last Day. **Amen.**