

Podcast 254 God is Faithful

We've begun a new series on God's attributes and today I will be discussing God's faithfulness for it is very real to me right now. One of my favorite hymns is "Great is thy Faithfulness", which fits with this theme and is based on Lamentations 3.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your word and the insights in it. Thank you for these different aspects of God that you are revealing to us and I pray that you help me to teach well, help us all to listen well and above all, let this meditation on Your faithfulness be a portal into your presence and a way to connect with the living God. In Jesus' name, amen.

There's always some overlap when speaking of God's different character qualities, yet each word used to describe God gives us a different insight into His nature. For example, God is steadfast. God never changes. God is faithful. Each of these attributes is connected to the eternal nature of God and His immutability but they also highlight a unique perspective of God.

His character also spills over to what He has designed, like the Word of God. Since God is faithful, then so are His words. As God never changes, neither does anything He has ever said or the promises He has made.

In Jeremiah 1:12, we read, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My Word to perform it." I like to think of God faithfully watching over His Word. Somewhere along my journey, I remember somebody saying, "Each word God has spoken shall never be broken." This idea that God is watching over His word to ensure that everything that has been spoken will be fulfilled to the letter, is amazing. But it's simply an extension of His character.

God made several covenants with Abraham which are still resonating in our world today. There's one promise in Genesis 15:13-14 which speaks of the future of the nation of Israel. God told Abraham way back before there was his grandson Jacob was born, who would later become Israel, "The Lord said to Abraham 'know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions.'" And that is exactly what came to pass.

1,400 years later, in the book of Jeremiah, After the nation of Israel had come out of Egypt, they went into the promised land and lived under the reign of David, Solomon, and many kings. They rebelled, because they were stiff necked, hard hearted and unfaithful. Because of their sin, the northern 10 tribes were dispersed among the nations. Eventually the southern two tribes were also punished and taken into captivity in Babylon.

When Jerusalem was overthrown, Jeremiah was right there watching it happen. As this transition was happening, which was awful to witness, he prophesies in Jeremiah 29:10, "Thus saith the Lord, 'When 70 years are completed in Babylon, I will visit you and I will fill it to you my promise and bring you back to this place.'"

While in Babylon, Daniel, who knew God and knew His word and knew that He was faithful, said, "I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." (Daniel 9:2) Because Daniel knew that the 70 years was almost up, he set himself to pray that that word would be fulfilled.

Now that's interesting to me. I wonder if I would have had the same response. Daniel could've packed his suitcases and sat out by the curb, because he knew the 70 years was up, instead, he began asking God to confirm His Word. He prayed. And sure enough, Jeremiah 29:10 was fulfilled to the letter and 70 years after the children of Israel were led into captivity, they returned to the land of Israel under the leadership of men like Joshua, Zachariah, Nehemiah and Ezra.

The first three verses of Ezra, which are almost word for word the last two verses of 2 Chronicles says, "Now in the first years of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation through all his kingdom, and also put it in writing: 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him . Let him go to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God who is in Jerusalem.'"

So Jeremiah in the spirit, conveys to the people that they are going to be in Babylon for 70 years and then they're going to come back. Based on this prophecy, Daniel prays that event into being, and Ezra and Nehemiah go down in fulfillment of those words. I find it fascinating that right in the beginning of the life and book of Jeremiah God tells him: "I am watching over my word to perform it." (Jeremiah 1:12) Before his life is done, God is speaking his word through that man. Jeremiah ends up being the longest book in the Bible.

God made promises to David which He also faithfully fulfilled. In 2 Samuel 7:16 "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure before me. Your throne shall be established forever." What a promise to a king! Your house will be made sure. As you read the history of all the different kings of Israel and Judah, and through all the changes of kings over hundreds of years, there's always someone in the southern kingdom from the family of King David.

In Luke chapter 1, we read, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" this is talking to Mary "and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, he will be called the son of the most high, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. "

God made promises to David that were fulfilled when Jesus came and to this very day we're still awaiting when Jesus returns to the Earth and sets up this Kingdom, which will never end, Amen.

Now, back to Jeremiah. Several years ago, I was in Thailand speaking to missionaries about home education and how to build families of faith. There was one family who saw that I was coming but couldn't make it to the conference. They had been using my math program Math-U-See and they found out that I was coming, so they sent me an email which said, "Would you like to spend the weekend after the conference up at our home in the Jungle?" I looked at my calendar and it turned out that the conference was over on a Friday and I wasn't flying back until Sunday, and I said "Yes!" I'd never met them, but it sounded like a fun adventure.

They came down into town on Friday and drove me back up to the mountains where I spent Friday night and Saturday night. On Sunday mornin, we got up for church and they said "well, we have two churches that we can go to. We can either go to an international church which is English speaking – it will be a little bit of a drive – or we can go to our local tribal church." I don't know what you would say, but I think you'd probably say the same thing as me: I want to go to a tribal church! So we went to this tribal church and took off our shoes and sat on a big deck outdoors, because it was being held in somebody's home. There were several families there. The man who was in charge of the service said, "Today we're going to do testimonials" and he looked at me, "and as our guest, you will begin..."

I took a deep breath and gave my testimony, with the missionary translating. This was 2009 and the elections had just occurred and I was pretty discouraged by the results of the elections. However God encouraged me when I read the book of Lamentations, the third chapter. I thought of Jeremiah, who in his day had watched Jerusalem go right down the tubes. Even when he kept prophesying to them and giving them God's word they rejected him and they rejected his message. He was persecuted, he was put down into a pit of mud for a while. He endured a very difficult time. He watched as the precious city that God made wonderful promises to throughout the Old Testament, Jerusalem, the glory of all lands, would be overthrown. Then all the inhabitants would be taken to Babylon.

In the middle of Jeremiah's laments, as he suffered, he said in the Spirit (Lamentations 3:15-24):

"He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood.
He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes;

my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;
so I say, 'My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.'
Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!
My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me."

Here is a man who has been reading the newspaper too much. He's watching world events fall apart all around him, he has access to the king, he tells the king what to do and the king rejects him. Then he sees the awful suffering of the people when the Babylonians came to Jerusalem. Right in the middle of this grievous time, which makes looking at our government less discouraging, he declares:

"But this I called to mind, therefore I have hope,
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, His mercies never come to an end,
They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.
'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul. 'Therefore I will hope in Him.'"

Isn't that powerful? This is when I want to sing: "Greatest is thy Faithfulness!" Because it's true and that inspired hymn is based on this portion of Lamentations. As wonderful as the words are, the context is what makes it so powerful. When everything around Jeremiah was discouraging, he was helped to keep his mind focused on God and recall to mind eternal truths. God never changes. His love never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. God is faithful and He will never forsake His own.

I'm getting inspired just telling you. It's inspiring to me because I know that God's faithfulness, God's love, God's care, and God's word, are the eternal verities that we count on when everything else around us goes astray.

I like the phrase from the hymn, The Solid Rock – "When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay."

Here are some inspired reminders that God is faithful. In Deuteronomy 7:9 "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, The faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."

Here's another one in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man, God is faithful." He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, because He's faithful.

Hebrews 2:17, "Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God."

So there we are! God is faithful, His word is faithful, His covenants are faithful, His promises are faithful, because He is faithful and they are simply an extension of His nature and His character. Amen?

(Scott) Amen. I was afraid when you started talking about this that I was going to have to be like Job. I just finished listening to Job today and lately I've been feeling a little bit like I want to say, "God, where are you? When are you going to show up and fix everything?" Then I was thinking I probably just need to put my hand over my mouth and let God be God and for He's faithful and I really don't understand how all that works. But you've inspired me to feel even better about it, so thank you.

Well, you're welcome. I think this is how we encourage each other. Jeremiah's situation is so much worse than our situation. and yet he was able to hold on to hope, because he knew God and he knew God was faithful. He reminded himself, "This I recall to mind." Perhaps He needed to reread the Scriptures, or recite passages to himself and encourage himself in the Lord. May God always give us hope and keep us fighting and believing. Amen!

(Scott) We all need to recall Hebrews 6:19, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul." I need to keep ruminating on that and meditating on that and asking God for that anchor, because most days it doesn't feel like an anchor for my soul, so.. I have a long way to go still.

(Steve) I forgot to tell you the rest of the story. I was seated at this little Thailand tribal church in a hut on the second floor and had just quoted these verses from Lamentations which I referred to as Jeremiah's prayer. They pulled out their Bible, because like good students they wanted to follow along with me. I gave them the reference, Lamentations 3:15-24. I did not know it at the time, but I was about to witness something that was such a blessing.

The family that was with me turned out to be the second generation of missionaries to that region. The first missionaries had learned the language, recorded it, and then done Bible translation. And the missionaries that were with me were the second generation and they were maintaining the Bible school where they taught and were a witness to the local peoples. Before the first missionaries had left, they had completed a translation of the old testament. Very recently these new Bibles had been printed these young Christians in Thailand were reading the Old Testament in their own language for the first time. The Bibles were brand spanking new and the pages were white. However they couldn't find the reference in Lamentations because they were looking in Jeremiah. I had referred to Lamentations as Jeremiah's writings.

They didn't understand that the book of Lamentations was a compilation of Jeremiah's lamentations, they were his prayers. The missionary's daughter noticed they were looking in the book of Jeremiah and said, "Papa, they don't know where to look!" and so he taught them how to find Lamentations, and directed them to the exact passage

I had just quoted. Then I had the incredible privilege of watching these people read a new portion of God's word for the very first time in their own language. You talk about a thrill... and pretty soon the tribal people were going back and forth with the missionary because they were encountering new words in the Old Testament. Perhaps they didn't know what lamentations meant or some interesting words such as the wormwood and the gaul. It was a powerful experience for which I am very thankful. I was there to witness people reading God's word in their own language for the very first time.

Let's Pray

Thank you for your input and thank you, Father, for being steadfast and faithful, so unchanging, so steadfast, so good and kind and all these attributes that we count on and I thank you for that expression that says May the God of all hope fill us with all joy and peace and believing. Thank You that You word gives us hope, that Your attributes give us hope and help us to remember Your faithfulness to Your word and to Your people as we go through difficult times, in the spirit of Jeremiah same thing in his day in Jesus' name, amen.

If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com.