

Lent Reflection 4 The faithfulness of God

Part 1

This is the 4th of our Lent reflections on faith. This week we'll be taking a look at the faithfulness of God to us, His people. I'd like to start with this statement – we can only put our faith in God and trust in His promises because He first is faithful. Lamentations 3: 22-23 says

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”.

Listen to the song “Great is Your Faithfulness” and spend some time reflecting on what the words tell us about God’s faithfulness - [Great Is Thy Faithfulness - Chris Rice - YouTube](#)

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father
There is no shadow of turning with thee
Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be

Great is thy faithfulness
Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness
Lord unto me

Summer and winter, springtime and harvest
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love

Pardon for sin and peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside

How do we know that God is faithful?

First, we can turn to the Bible and read specific accounts of his people’s experiences of His faithfulness. Secondly, we can examine our own lives and relationship with Him and recall our own examples of where God has remained faithful to us. Here are some verses to reflect on which speak of God’s faithfulness

Deuteronomy 31:6 – “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” We can see this promise again in Hebrews 13: 5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”.

Psalm 91:4 “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart”.

Psalm 100: 4-5 “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations”.

Jeremiah 29: 11-13 “For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”.

These verses tell us that:

- God is constant,
- that He is unchanging,
- He will protect us
- that He will be present throughout eternity,
- that He will never leave us,
- and that we will find Him when we seek Him out

Spend some time reflecting on what this means to you.

One of the best-known accounts of God’s faithfulness is to be found in the story of Abraham and Sarah’s relationship with God which we can read in Genesis, chapters 12 – 25. At the beginning of their story, we learn that Abram (as he was then) responded to God’s call and left his homeland to travel to Canaan. God made this promise to him (Genesis 12: 2-3) “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Abram remained faithful to God, but there was one issue that troubled Abram greatly. He and Sarai longed for children, but it seemed that Sarai was unable to conceive. There was huge stigma attached to the inability to bear children and it was often seen as some kind of judgement from God. Abram’s fear was that everything he had, according to the law would be left to his servant Eliezer (Genesis 15: 1-3). It is at this point that God makes a covenant with Abram. Genesis 15: 4-6 “Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness”.

After 10 years in Canaan, Sarai had still not conceived so she took matters into her own hands and persuaded Abram to sleep with her servant Hagar, so that she could start a family through Hagar (Genesis 16). Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old. When he was 99 years old, God reaffirmed his promise to Abram. As a sign of that promise, he changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah. The ongoing sign of the covenant was the circumcision of all male children. Crucially, God also promised that Sarah would bear Abraham's children. Abraham found this unbelievable.

Genesis 17: 16-22 "I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!'

Then God said, 'Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.' When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him".

God's promise to Abraham and Sarah was fulfilled when Sarah gave birth to Isaac (Chapter 21). God also kept his promise to Hagar in respect of her son, Ishmael.

Abraham and Sarah's story, and Hagar's for that matter show us that God is faithful, that he does keep his promises even if at the time they seem ridiculous and unbelievable. God remains faithful to those who are faithful to him. At times, he tests our faith as he did Abraham's. In Chapter 22 we see how God tested Abraham's faith in him by telling Abraham to sacrifice his own son. Having seen that Abraham was prepared to obey Him, he substituted a ram for Isaac. Here, right at the beginning of the Bible we see a foretelling of the sacrifice God would make of his own Son to save us all from our sin.

Abraham remained faithful to God even though at the time in human terms, God's promises seemed impossible to keep. Abraham stayed faithful to God even when he was faced with sacrificing his own son. In return, God remained faithful to Abraham, keeping his promises even though Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands and were quite openly sceptical about what God might achieve. In Hebrews 11 Abraham is counted among those credited with being faithful (verses 8 – 12) "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this

one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore”.

Going back to Genesis Chapter 15:6 “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness”. Abraham believed God’s promises because God proved himself to be faithful. Abraham’s faith has marked him out as ‘righteous’ in the story of God’s faithfulness to his people. We all know from our own life experience that it is impossible to stay true to someone whose promises are never kept. As we have seen, God keeps his promises to those who obey and who put their trust in him. Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments”. I’ll finish this section of our reflection with verse 19 from Numbers Chapter 23 “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?”

Before we move on, spend some time reflecting on the occasions when God has kept his promises to you. You might find it helpful to jot them down, then bring them to the Lord in thanks and praise

Faithful God, we give you thanks that we can trust in your promises and faithfulness. I thank you now for all the times in my life when you have shown your faithfulness to me, and ask that you forgive me for all the times when I have doubted your word. Amen

Part 2

As modern Christians, one of the things about God the Father that we struggle with most is his judgement on wrong doers. We see throughout the Old Testament God responding to his people with blessing when they obey Him and with judgement when they do not. Although God is sovereign in all his ways, he still gives the people of Israel (and us) the right to make our own choices. We must expect Him to respond according to the choices we make. This is the situation the people of Israel faced, and as we read the Old Testament, we see divine blessing and judgement in action. Although God rules over all, he allows us to make our own moral choices which can have far reaching consequences both for ourselves and others. God requires the obedience of all people and that they worship Him alone (1 Samuel 7: 3-4). The people suffer for their sins in accordance with divine retribution. But added into the mix outside the tragedy of human excess and folly, a sovereign God continues to work his gracious purpose toward his chosen people and his chosen king. In the Old Testament we see a God, who having given his people freedom to choose, balances the tension between keeping the promises he has made in the face of the choices the people made, and his justice when dealing with the consequences of their choices.

Into this long history comes David. In 2 Samuel 11 and 12 we read of David’s dealings with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, and of God’s response to it. On this occasion, when his armies were away fighting, David remained behind in Jerusalem. One night, from the roof of his palace, David spotted a beautiful woman. He found out who she was, and even though she was married, he sent for her and slept with her (2 Samuel 11: 2-5). We don’t know how Bathsheba felt about this encounter, but I would hazard a guess that she was powerless to

refuse. As a result of this encounter, she became pregnant. When David learnt of the pregnancy, he contrived to bring Bathsheba's husband Uriah home, no doubt in the expectation that a man returning from war would want to spend time with his wife. But Uriah's loyalty to David and his comrades was such that he did not go home to relax in comfort but stayed close to David. The plan to trick Uriah into believing the child was his having failed, David then arranged for Uriah to return to the battle front and be placed in a position where he was bound to be killed (2 Samuel 11:13 - 24). His plan having succeeded, after a suitable time of mourning David married Bathsheba and she bore him a son. Chapter 11 finishes with this short verse – "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord".

In Chapter 12 we read of how the Lord sent Nathan to David to show him how grievous his sin had been. Nathan tells of how a man with an abundance of riches uses a poor man's only lamb to feed a stranger. David is incensed by the story and by the man's greed and lack of pity for his neighbour. 'That man deserves to die' cries David. Nathan's response is to tell David that he is that man.

Read [2 Samuel 12: 7-25 NIV - Then Nathan said to David, "You are - Bible Gateway](#)

The key verse in this section is verse 13 – "Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die". Although David's sin was terrible, with far reaching consequences for both his family and God's reputation, the Lord tempered justice with mercy. His punishment was still terrible – David and Bathsheba's son died. Bathsheba particularly suffered as a result of the choices David made.

We always see David as better than Saul, but were Saul's sins so much worse than David's? How can David, following his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah be described as 'a man after God's own heart'? 1 Samuel 13:14 tells us "the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people". Israel had chosen Saul because of outward appearances, but God knew what was in his heart and still let the people have their choice. That's a human failing that has never gone away – judging on outward appearances. The people would not have chosen the physically unimpressive David for themselves, but God knew what was in his heart. When it came to God's judgement of Saul's and David's sins, what was in their hearts played a part. David suffered for the sins he had committed but God did not cast him aside. He remained faithful to him despite, or because of his human frailty.

We cannot leave this story about David without considering Psalm 51, that great Psalm of repentance. David had sinned dreadfully and God punished him for that sin – not just one of murder but adultery, abuse of power and lack of repentance. It was Nathan whom God sent to David who demonstrated to him just how terrible his sin was, and as a result David threw himself on God's mercy. In this season of Lent, verses from Psalm 51 feature regularly in our liturgy. You may want to take some time here to read and reflect on the Psalm

[Psalms 51 NIV - Psalm 51 - For the director of music. A - Bible Gateway](#)

Or listen to [Lord, Have Mercy On Me \(Christian Praise and Worship Songs with Lyrics\) - Esther Mui - YouTube](#)

In this Psalm, David pours out his heart to God and calls on his “unfailing love” and “great compassion”. In other words, he calls on God’s faithfulness. He pleads with God not to do his worst – verse 11 “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me”. God showed His faithfulness to David when he turned to Him with heartfelt repentance. David pleads with God not to abandon him. And although David’s punishment is terrible, God does not cast him aside as he did Saul. He remains faithful to David.

God showed His faithfulness to David when he turned to Him with heartfelt repentance. He does the same for us, even more so as Jesus bore our sins to the Cross.

The Cross

The greatest example of God’s faithfulness is the Cross, the death and resurrection of God’s own Son. God knows that however hard even the best of humanity tries, we will always fail to live up to what God wants for His people. The Jews had failed miserably under the guidance of the Law He had given them and continued to sin. Human sin was separating God from His people. God’s answer was to put the sin of the whole world on his Son’s shoulders, and he took them to the Cross. Because of God’s own sacrifice we are unburdened by sin. By this great act of faithfulness all our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God restored. All we have to do is to remain faithful to Him.

We will reflect more on The Cross in the last of our reflections and on Good Friday

You may want to finish today’s reflection by listening to [The Power of the Cross - Stuart Townend \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#)

Oh, to see the dawn
Of the darkest day
Christ on the road to Calvary
Tried by sinful men
Torn and beaten, then
Nailed to a cross of wood

This, the pow'r of the cross
Christ became sin for us
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross

Oh, to see the pain
Written on Your face
Bearing the awesome weight of sin
Ev'ry bitter thought
Ev'ry evil deed
Crowning Your bloodstained brow

Now the daylight flees
Now the ground beneath
Quakes as its Maker bows His head
Curtain torn in two
Dead are raised to life
"Finished!" the vict'ry cry

Oh, to see my name
Written in the wounds
For through Your suffering I am free
Death is crushed to death
Life is mine to live
Won through Your selfless love

This, the pow'r of the cross
Son of God, slain for us
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross