

THE REACH OF HIS FAITHFULNESS

“Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds,”

Psalm 36:5.

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The faithfulness of God is one of the strongest truths of Holy Scripture. God’s faithfulness in the Old Covenant stands out in bare contrast with the ancient pagan faiths. We discover the pagan gods were not generally faithful, whether in Babylon or Greece. Most of these gods were down-right immoral, careless of their promises, regardless of their pledged word. In truth, these pagan gods mirrored the whimsical desires of pagan souls. Humanity’s conditional and foolish desires were the conditional and foolish desires of their gods.

The wonderful thing about the Jewish faith is the God of the Jews is always faithful, both to His covenant and to His children. This magnificent and upholding thought did not spring up fully matured in one season, in an instant of time, but developed to maturity from the long history of the Jew’s personal experience with God. It was interwoven with the fact, not conjecture, when the Jews could look back over the tracts of time, and in their history discover the faithfulness of God in a way that one brief life might never show. The Jews had only to recall the story to discover the reach of God’s faithfulness in the past.

God’s faithfulness was there when Abraham traveled to the Promised Land. God’s faithfulness was there when the Jews were enslaved in Egypt and God rescued them from slavery. God’s faithfulness was there during their desert pilgrimage of forty years. One thing is stamped upon the heart of every Jew, never to be erased by any human finger—Jehovah is a faithful God.

This one thought sustains the Psalmist, and with him, all the saints of the Old Covenant. The word for faith is rare in the Old Testament; but the word for faithfulness occurs frequently. And here, the Psalmist, in his poetic way, like Jesus with His parables, draws his images from nature, and says—Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds.

So too, should every Christian remember the story of God’s faithfulness, for Christianity is the fulfillment of God’s promise made long ago to Abraham. The Old Covenant, God’s promise that the Jews shall be His chosen people and He shall be their only God is fulfilled in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ that all who believe in Him are privileged to enter a new relationship with God. God did not dismiss the Old Covenant in favor of the New Covenant, as if by a whimsical choice of a pagan god, when dissatisfied with one choice, you choose another. The God of the Old Covenant is the God of the New Covenant—fulfilling His promise to raise up in the midst of humanity a Messiah who would lead the nations into the kingdom of God and give the world life in all its fullness. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, did not appear to the world devoid of history. He was not born out of context of historical roots—a man without a history. Jesus’ history is the long history of the Old Covenant fulfilled in the New Covenant, the continuing and everlasting story of God’s faithfulness to His promise.

When we receive Jesus Christ out of context, which means, forgetting the promise God made in the Old Covenant, we cut the Lord off from history, and thereby, make Him a quirk of nature, a freak apparition of humanity that appeared briefly and was gone. Receiving Christ out of context, receiving Christ in only the day you need Him, and then when the crisis passes, allow him to dissolve back into history is the whimsical desire of pagans. Jesus Christ stands before the world, not as some “Itinerant preacher of Good News,” but the Messiah of the Old and New Covenants raised up by God to fulfill His faithfulness to His people. When Christ speaks, He speaks for all the saints of the Old and New Covenants. When Christ acts, He acts through the Old Covenant being fulfilled in the New Covenant. Christians do not live just the New Covenant, but the Old Covenant being fulfilled in the New Covenant. We are not supposed to be whimsical pagans seeking the foolish desires of our souls, but standing upon the solid ground of history, pointing back to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and

to King David from whose line the Messiah was to be born by the prophecies of the Old Covenant. And by pointing back to that long history, we stand certain in the present and secure in the future, knowing God is remaining faithful to His promise, even when we do not remain faithful. No, receiving Jesus Christ in just the New Covenant, denies the very ground of God’s Holy faithfulness throughout all the long centuries. God’s promise is unchangeable and unbreakable by any human finger, and yet, His authority and power may be called into question the very moment we make God appear whimsical by our foolish ignorance and desire.

Yes indeed, the Christian may look, for instance, upon the clouds of Scripture in such a passage as the Lord’s Ascension story, and there, see the image of God the Son ascending to God the Father, and a cloud received Him from the apostles’ sight (Acts 1:9). We can well imagine that lonely and desolate hour, when the cloud wrapped around the Christ, and in an instant—He was gone. The apostles had loved Him so, albeit with a soulish love of human conditions which revealed more the whimsical imaginings of pagans in their pagan gods. When Christ ascended into heaven, they were utterly broken-hearted, crushed to the core of their being. From that moment on, they would have to lean on Christ, not from only the side of their human, visible existence, but from the side of the Divine, invisible existence. It would mean they, too, would have to travel through the desert as did their forefathers before them travel, crossing the line between the seen and unseen, venturing into the realm beyond human understanding. God’s faithfulness to His promise requires each of us, by His command, to venture from where we are with all our “Human and Pat answers” into a realm in which we do not have any answers at all—God will answer the questions. From the moment of Christ’s ascension, it means for each of us who follow the Christ, as did the apostles that we must lean upon Christ as beggars for God’s Divine Answers. The apostles discovered, as the days passed without Christ’s visible presence, the engulfing cloud that took

Jesus from their sight was not the end of everything, but the very beginning of the new fulfilling the old. Just as the Lord promised, if they were patient to wait upon His words, wait upon His answer, they would be touched by the faithfulness of heaven.

Jesus, the Christ, promised to be with us always. He is faithful to that promise still. He said, “I will manifest Myself to you.” His pledged word is the pledged word of God made visible through the manifestation of His Divine Presence through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Just as the cloud had come, wrapped our Lord around in the mystery of God, our thoughts of sweet companionship with the Lord’s physical presence hidden from us—God’s faithfulness reached unto the clouds.

From our human perspective, Christ seems hidden from our sight, just beyond our human reach. But when we approach the Lord as beggars, crying aloud, “Alms for the poor,” begging for His Divine pity, miraculous and astounding things happen. It is the Church’s greatest prayer, the desperate prayer for God to relieve our human poverty. The poverty of our unwillingness to embrace God’s Divine Presence in our human present. In all the human realities of this world, nothing comes close to the awesome power of God transforming human life by His Divine Life through Jesus Christ. Nothing this world offers matches the astounding revelation of one human being, unfit for the kingdom of God, and yet, by God’s faithfulness to him, guides that one human being to “Takes up his cross,” to “Take up the Way of Christ,” and by the mystery of God makes him fit to enter the kingdom. It is a story of the Old Covenant, an unfit people of Israel being made fit by God alone. It is a story of the New Covenant, one human being desperately begging for God’s help, discovers God’s faithfulness through Christ, and is led by Christ from human poverty to the dazzling Light of God’s Presence. What an astonishing revelation of history—human beggars being named God’s heirs of the whole of God’s Heavenly, Holy Estate! “Nobodies” in this world becoming “Somebodies” to God.

It is beyond my wildest dreams to imagine myself fit for the Kingdom of God. I fail more often than I succeed. I sin, beyond what I think is God's Divine, patient, tolerance, and yet, God's Divine promise prevails, "Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds." If only a meager portion of God's faithfulness abided in me, I could, as the Lord promised, move and remove mountains. I suspect God does not settle for anything less, but patiently abides with me, in whom, settling for less is a daily occurrence.

And yet, God's faithfulness leads people and nations to the foot of Christ's Cross, and in God's courage alone, they step through Christ's Cross to God's unending Glory. What a promise made by God that I may dwell in the midst of heaven while still in my pilgrimage upon this earth! There is no thrill of mortal nature that can ever attain such heights as standing before the altar while the Glory of the Lord overshadows me in the cloud, and there, I receive His everlasting faithfulness. I am consumed and burned to ashes by the Fire of His Love. Nothing I will ever say or do will ever compare to what God says and does by His Divine faithfulness—His promise fulfilled through Christ!

No, none of us are fit for such Divine ardor, especially in our present age of "Bottom-line" Theology. An age, in which, our souls tailor the Promise of God's Faithfulness to meet our "Bottom-line" human desires. The world is in desperate "Spiritual Need" of God's Faithfulness without the witness of our human "Bottom-line". What unsurpassed miracles God works, if only we would allow God to break the boundary wall of our soul that separates us from God. A wall our soul aims to keep in good repair, and in fact, we busy ourselves daily with the task of making it thicker and stronger than yesterday. God's promise is never to "Tidy-up" our souls, clean up the mess we make of our lives, but in truth, He breaks our souls, shatters our pride in maintaining the wall of hostility, the wall of human independence between God and us. Such a promise is born upon a long history of the Old and New Covenants in which God grinds souls to powder and lifts from the ashes

the rising phoenix of the spirit. Such is the Will and Good Pleasure of the Lord, that when we approach as beggars, God gives willingly and freely in the relief of the poor in spirit.

When one thinks of the clouds of history, one knows of its dark and cloudy days. It was a dark and cloudy day of human desolation when the Jews were carried off to Babylon. Exiled in a distant land, they thought God had forgotten to be gracious to them. They said, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." The intolerable hardship of exile was made unbearable the moment they believed God had broken His covenant with them. A day of utter desolation when they imagined God to be unfaithful to His promise. So, by the waters of Babylon—they sat and wept. They hung their harps upon the willow trees, vowing to never sing again. How could they sing the faithfulness of God when He allowed them go into captivity? It would take God four hundred years to instruct their hearts in rising to another view of their captivity. The day did come, finally, when they could proclaim with majestic voice, "Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds."

Memory illuminates the moment we remember our captivity to the soul in our willing choice to be lost to God. Being lost grows doubly precious when our distance from God helps us to a clearer vision of what sin is and Who God is. And then, across our dark and cloudy days comes the ringing of prophetic voices with the message of ransom and return (Isaiah 35). We were not forgotten by God. We were not rejected by God. We were not passed over by our God. Our days in the midst of travail will never exhaust God's faithfulness. His faithfulness reached unto the clouds.

How many dark days of human history have there been since the Jew's exile into Babylon? The days are always the darkest when our thoughts revert to War against another human being. Have we seen enough of the countless parades to human glory, humanity's soul springing to life in desiring the handmaids of human pride: pain and suffering, violence and destruction; reaping vengeance

instead of peace in the soul's desires to trade willingly for cloudy days of human tribulation instead of sunny days of Divine salvation. It is always so, when humanity sets the seal of their soul's pride upon God's domain.

We think of how this great truth applies to the clouds that hang over our human lives. Who can say with adoring gratitude, "Your faithfulness has reached unto the clouds?" Just as in every life are days of sunshine, when the sky is blue and all the birds are singing; when every wind blows from where the Lord is, and when we feel it is good to be alive. So, too, into every life come shadowed days when the sun withdraws its shining for a season and clouds continue after the rain. It may be the time of trouble for a family, or of great anxiety over the pressing weight of money; the time when health is showing signs of failing or when the chair is empty and the grave is full. It may be the time when all a man has lived for seems washed away by the tides of human adversity. It may be the day of unexpected poverty, the poverty of being lost and the luxury of being without a clue of how to be found.

How overlooked in humanity's conscience are these clouds of life. They gather swiftly, like some tropic thunderstorm, and in fear of the tumult, we hide. Oh, how confidently we expect a cloudless day, and yet, before eventide, the sky begins to darken with the tempestuous clouds of human travail. Our first thought is—God has quite forgotten to be gracious to us. We secretly doubt His care for us. And yet, as we look backward unto the path of our human experience of life, we see the imprint of God's hand upon our life. Quite often, in life's immediate moment, we cannot sense God's hand upon ours. It requires us to look back upon the whole of our life, and there, we are given another vision, another certainty, just as the psalmist experienced. If there be any person who reads these lines, for whom the day is dark and cloudy, who are very anxious and distressed, who say in the morning, "I pray it were evening"—embrace the faith that is not just for one day of history, but the whole of history. Do not be despondent.

The hour of God's presence is nearer than we think. He is there in the clouds of our human misery. God is in our midst, right there before us, while life's storm shakes the ground beneath our feet, and rattles our teeth in the quake of soul-wrenching adversity. It is our hour to stand upon our feet, lift our head high, and say with the Psalmist, "Your faithfulness reaches unto the clouds."

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