

God Is Faithful

December 18, 2016

Matthew 1: 18-25:

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.



Congregation, please repeat after me, "In the name of God... I take you... to have and to hold... from this day forward... for better, for worse... for richer, for poorer... in sickness and in health... to love and to cherish.... until we are parted by death... This is my solemn vow." Do you recognize these words? Do these words have deep meaning and importance?

"I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." God spoke these words to



Abraham in Genesis 17, establishing an everlasting covenant between God and the Israelites. Through our own personal relationships with Jesus Christ, we are also a part of this everlasting covenant. Let us pray.



Over the past three weeks we have talked about how God is expectant, dangerous, and jealous. During Advent, God is expectant for change. Through the gift of Jesus, God expects

to change the world and to change us. God is doing this daily throughout the world and seeks to do this each day in our lives as well. God can be dangerous in the change. God calls us to places and to people that challenge us, that call us to step outside of our comfort zones, that call us to trust in God alone. God calls us to take dangerous steps to share the light and love of Christ. And God is jealous. God is jealous for our love. God wants to be #1 in our lives. Any time that we place something or someone ahead of God, it makes God jealous.



Today we turn to how God is faithful.

We began our time together this morning with two covenants. The first was the marriage covenant made between a husband, a wife, and God. The second was the covenant God made with mankind through Abraham. When

we make a covenant, we are vowing to keep our part - no matter what the other party does. You really hear this in the wedding covenant: for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love no matter what. This concept of "no matter what" is also illustrated in the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament we read of God's being faithful to his people even when they were not faithful in return. From the story of Adam and Eve to the story of the golden calf in the exodus story, from the worship of foreign gods to trusting in foreign powers to save them - the people of God have broken their part of the covenant over and over and over. But God, who is always faithful, fulfills the covenant whether the people do or not. God continues to be their God, no matter what. Time after time, when the people repent and turn back to God, God welcomes them with open arms. This story continues with you and I. No matter who we are, no matter what we have done, no matter how often we sin, God remains faithful to you and to me. When we repent of our sins and when we turn back to God, we are made new again and welcomed back into God's love.

Doesn't this concept seem so foreign in today's world? The idea that I will love you no matter what you do is hard to wrap our heads around. In our family relationships we have a semblance of this. For the most part, we love our children and spouse no matter what they do. Yes, we get disappointed and even angry at times, but we still love them. The same is generally true for our close friends. But this is just the tip of the iceberg of God's love for us.



In today's world we are much more used to contracts instead of covenants. When we make a major purchase, when we begin a new job, when we take out a loan - we enter into a contract. The contract states exactly what each party will do and allows for the contract to become null and void if the agreement is broken by one party or the other. This is a much different concept than a covenant. Put another way, a contract represents a business relationship while a covenant represents a personal relationship. Imagine your deepest relationship – with your spouse or with a best friend. A contract relationship would ask, "Am I getting what I was promised?" A covenant relationship instead asks, "Am I giving what I promised?" There is a significant difference in these two questions.



When we look at our faith, we see a covenant relationship, a personal relationship with Jesus. I cannot imagine where I would be if I was in a contract with Jesus. Can you? Long, long ago I would have broken my part of the contract for the last time. Long, long ago I would have been on my own, left to navigate through life as best I could on my own. This is a scary thought.

God understands this. God came to understand that you or I would never be able to keep our end of a contract relationship. God came to understand that mankind would never be able to keep the Law. God came to understand that there must be a different way, a better way. So God sent Jesus.

We will celebrate Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, in one week. Part of Advent is about how God is expectant and dangerous and jealous. Part of it is about the gift that came in our Emmanuel, God in the flesh, God with us. This gift is Jesus living among us, setting for us the example of what it means to love God and to love neighbor. As we live out this example, we experience God and come to understand God's call upon our lives. But it is also about something bigger than Jesus as our example. Christmas is also about keeping a promise. Christmas is about honoring a covenant. Christmas is about how God is faithful. Jesus was also born to be our Savior. Christmas was God's plan to bring Jesus into the world. Jesus had to be born so that He could die on the cross. Jesus had to die on the cross to be the Savior of the world, the Savior of you and me.

We know these promises to be true in our hearts. We understand that God loves us no matter what. Yet, there are times when we do feel forgotten. There are times when we do feel alone. There are times when we feel distant from God. Just about everyone knows what it feels like to be forgotten. [*Play video.*]



When we experience that feeling of being alone or being abandoned or forgotten, sometimes it makes us hesitant to believe that anyone could ever be faithful again. And when we are honest, there are other times when we're the ones who in some way have been unfaithful, when we have been the ones to let another down, or when we have forgotten to follow through or to be there. So it's not surprising that some of us go into relationships holding back, not fully committing, or not really letting

our guard all the way down. This way of dealing with others may even affect our relationship with God. We want to embrace the relationship, but we aren't sure that we can trust that God will be faithful.

Throughout the Bible, we are promised over and over again that God will be faithful. In Deuteronomy 13:8 we read, *"It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."* Later, in Joshua 1, in verses five and six we read, *"No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous."* And in the New Testament, we hear Jesus again repeat this promise in Hebrews 13, verse five, *"I will never leave you or forsake you."* There are no conditions on these promises. Our God is a covenant God. Our God is faithful.

To conclude and to summarize, reading from *Under Wraps*, on page 76:

"So on Christmas Day we celebrate that God the Son became incarnate, coming into our world while knowing the price that he would have to pay to redeem us from our sin. And God the Father allowed him to do it for you.

You can trust God. You can trust every promise that God has made to you because God has already proved He is faithful. He said, "The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out". If you have wandered away from God and wonder if you can come back home, know that God is faithful. He will not cast you away. If you've done things that you're

ashamed of and don't want to admit to yourself, much less to God, he has promised, "I will forgive your sins and remember them no more". You can come and put them at the foot of the cross. He will forgive you. He has promised, and he is faithful."

God will be faithful to us no matter what. If we wander, God will wait for us to return. If we are embarrassed about what we've done, God is ready to forgive. God is faithful, even at great cost, even when it meant the death of His Son on the cross. The Scriptures are clear: We can trust God. Nothing can separate us from God. God is faithful. For this we say, thanks be to God. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

1. The Old Testament is the story of God's unfailing love and the peoples' unfaithfulness. How does your life sometimes reflect this story?
2. How have you experienced Jesus Christ as "Emmanuel" (God with us) in your life lately? How could you share this experience?
3. When or how do you live your life like you have a contract with God?
When or how like you have a covenant with God?
4. As we draw near to Christmas, in what ways can you renew your covenant with God to live as a more faithful disciple of Christ?