

God Is Faithful in His Promises

✦ to punish and provide

In the name of Christ our Rock, dear souls bound for the Promised Land, and all who want to come:

It might be just a story, another example of the lame humor of pastors. So a pastor walked into the home of a shut-in, a widow who could not come to church any more. She was known to have a sweet tooth, so he was a little surprised when she offered him a bowl of peanuts – just peanuts. “I love the chocolate,” she said, “but the peanuts hurt my teeth.” Translation? She loved Peanut M&M’s, just not the peanuts. He politely declined to eat from her bowl of leftovers. Rather gross, isn’t it?

It’s also a good illustration of how we tend to treat God even on our best days. It’s easy to imagine someone from our late modern culture really turned off by this sermon outline. The theme is fine: **God Is Faithful in His Promises**. If they think there is a God, they want **Faithful** – not saying one thing then doing another. The second part is like your favorite chocolate. **God Is Faithful – to provide**. But this might tune you out in a hurry: **God Is Faithful – to punish**. Who wants a God who punishes? Except if someone really hurt you. Or committed terrible crimes against humanity. Or abuses women and children. Or is intolerant. They should all be punished, right? The government should do something, right? So I guess we really do not want everyone just doing whatever they want? Do we really know what we want?

Let’s let the Lord’s Apostle Paul clarify for us. **“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea.”** (EHV¹) All Christians need to remember their Sunday School lessons. God’s chosen nation of Israel had been in Egypt 430 years **“to the day”** (Exodus 12:41), most of that time as slaves. Through ten dreadful plagues the LORD God forced Pharaoh to let His people go. The Savior-God miraculously opened the Red Sea so that 2-3 million people could escape overnight. That path had to be over three miles wide. **“The cloud”** was the way God made His presence seen. Otherwise, God is invisible as the wind to human eyes. **“They were all baptized into Moses,”** i.e., they became Moses’ responsibility under the LORD God of Israel.

How could so many men, women and children survive in the desert? The logistics are beyond imagination. Tons of food on two freight trains a day, each a mile long. More train loads of wood for cooking. Caravans of tanker trucks for eleven million gallons of water a day. But the physical miracles were nothing compared to the spiritual. They weren’t all sitting at home, isolated from a virus. They had no homes; they were living in tents. Encouragement was needed to keep their spirits up. So the LORD miraculously provided: **They all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—and that rock was Christ!** Every morning there was manna on the ground to eat, twice as much for the Sabbath Day. Every evening quail for millions – like chicken on the barbie. Fresh water from the **Rock**, not just to drink, but to enjoy God’s Presence. Steady like a **Rock** to bring them to the Promised Land, Jesus was always there.

Moses’ instructions were a test of their faith and obedience. But some just wanted to do things their way. After exploring the Promised Land, everyone but Joshua and Caleb were afraid to go in and conquer it. They saw miracles in Egypt, ate and drank miracles every day, had Jesus right there with them. And when Sunday School children shake their heads and say, “Not again!” their teachers have to remind them that we’re all like this. But they gave in to their fear that their children would die in the desert. So God promised to take their children safely all the way, but the bones of the rebel dads would be buried in the sand. **“God was not pleased with most of them. He had them die in the wilderness.”**

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

“What’s this have to do with us?” you ask? ***“All these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come.”*** You see, they were living like most Americans today. And we can’t keep ourselves from this either. Is anyone happy when a police officer pulls you over for speeding? At least inside, aren’t we all rebelling? We want life’s chocolate candy, but the peanuts hurt our teeth. Give those to someone else. So our loving God must warn us too. Can we be honest and see ourselves in the intervening verses of our text? ***Now these things took place as examples to warn us not to desire evil things the way they did. Do not become idolaters like some of them—as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to celebrate wildly.” And let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell. Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and so were being destroyed by the serpents. And do not grumble, as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”*** (v.6–10) ***The end of the ages has come.*** This is where we are. If God is so **Faithful in His Promises – to punish** His own people, how will our nation escape if we rebel against God?

Ah, but this is not about bad citizenship. This is meant for each of us personally. It’s too easy for pastors and church leaders, men and women, to think their work somehow makes them more pleasing to God. Sadly, some continue down that self-righteous road secretly; others fall openly into crimes and prison. It’s too easy for congregations to think, “We’re friendly,” but never notice it’s only to each other. They forget to welcome guests they don’t know. They ignore the needs of their community. They want “our kind of people,” and end up discriminating against God ***“who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:4) It’s too easy for Catechism kids who stood before God and promised faithfulness even in the face of persecution and death – then to forget or rebel because they want to do their own thing. They compromise the truth God gave them and even give up the sacraments because they like someone else’s music. They love their relationships more than God.

“So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall.” Like it or not, we all have a heart problem. Trust the shed blood of Christ that washed us clean. Remember the best teachers that pushed you to learn and led you skillfully into new knowledge for life? Don’t you honor the coaches that disciplined you to play at a level higher than you thought you could? They tested you again and again until you were not only in shape, but able to work with your teammates to win. It’s all okay as long as you’re all working together. Don’t feel as if God has singled you out or treats you worse than others. Your challenges are real. They may seem unique to you. But we all have them. And God wants to reassure you today: ***“No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.”*** God’s **testing** is not to break you, but to strengthen you.

That’s because Jesus is always there for you too. Your best Friend for life, the **Rock**, says, ***“I am the Bread of Life....The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty....Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.”*** (John 6:35–37) Through today’s Psalm 34, more reassurance: ***“Taste and see that the LORD is good....The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them....The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit....No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.”*** (NIV) Truly it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) ***“Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.”*** (Proverbs 24:16 NIV84) In kindness God gives warnings and more promises to **provide** all that we need for this body, this life, and our final victory in God’s Promised Land of heaven. ***“Therefore humble yourselves under God’s powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”*** (1 Peter 5:6f EHV) Christ our **Rock** took all God’s punishment on Himself. He willingly suffered God’s burning anger at our sin, to set us free from guilt and shame. Your debt with God is free and clear. Nothing pleases God more than providing everything you need for body and soul in Word and sacrament. **God Is Faithful in His Promises.** All God’s grace is yours, not just leftovers. Live, love, enjoy Jesus for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

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