

God's Faithfulness to His Promises

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

- [0 : 0 0] As we continue our series thinking about God's faithfulness, we think today particularly about God's faithfulness to his promises. And we're given this image of an anchor, an anchor that holds a sense of steadiness, a sense of security, that when we listen to the promises of God, that is the security, the strength in the midst of what can otherwise be a chaotic and disordered world that holds us steady.
- With that image and the images of steadiness and being held and being stable and secure, we've got to be really careful with that image. Because there can be a side to it that can be so profoundly misunderstood and indeed distorted.
- And we think of God in terms of one where there's no change and where we might not change and where things just stay the same and are held.
- That, if we're not careful, can be a distorted image. Let me give you an example. It was back in the 1990s when I was a youth worker. Working in Billericay in South Essex.
- And the church ran an open youth club on Friday night where young people could just drop in. And I'd gone into a conversation with a girl, I guess she was about 13, 14 years old.
- [1 : 2 7] And she said, you work for the church then? I said, yes, I do. She said, so are you a Christian? I said, yes, I am. I said, are you a Christian?
- She said, no, I'm not. I said, can I ask why you're not a Christian? And her answer, I'll never forget.
- She didn't say any of the things that I quite thought she was going to say, which people would normally say why they don't believe in God. But she said, I'm not a Christian because if you become a Christian, you can't do stuff.
- In that young person's mind, being a follower of Jesus meant a whole list of prohibitions. Life stops. Comes to a halt. You're kind of tied down. You can't go anywhere. You can't do anything. You can't have any fun. You can't live life fully.
- [2 : 3 4] All the things that, in fact, are the very opposite of what being a follower of Jesus is. See, that's a distorted image of what it means to be anchored in hope.
- See, to be a follower of Jesus doesn't really mean stop. There's a sense in which it does. And we might think a bit about that next week.
- But it's more about go. It's about being empowered. When you encounter Jesus, it's transformative. It's about being set free.
- It's about release. But in a world that is full of so much ongoing change and uncertainty and chaos and disorder and fear and anxiety, we're all anchored to something.
- The question is, what is it? And to be anchored in this hope, this image that we're given, makes all the differences. It says in Hebrews 6.19, we have this hope as an anchor for the soul.
- [3 : 4 1] Firm and secure. You see, change happens. It's a pile of life and there's nothing new in that. Times change.

Culture changes. Fashion changes. Prices change. Technology change. Our bodies change. Our health changes. People change.

Change happens. And in that midst of ongoing change, there's that permanent swelling around of flux. And, you know, we long for some sense of security.

Some sense of continuity. I think of the guy who, I'm told years ago, bought a radio. One of the old ones with the, you know, the knobs that you turn. And he got it home.

He tuned it into the radio station that he only ever listened to. And pulled all the knobs off it. We long for something that's going to give us that continuity.

[4 : 43] To anchor on to something, which is the image that we're given in these words of Scripture, is not about being tied down in a way that stops our freedom. It's about being anchored onto someone who actually gives us that very freedom as part of the security that we long for in the midst of change.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Firm and secure. So what I want us to think about over these next few minutes is what does that look like?

Let's just dig a bit deeper into what that might look and feel like. Firstly, in terms of that sense of being anchored in the midst of waiting.

And secondly, what it means to be anchored in the midst of uncertainty. Firstly, what about that waiting? See, I mention this because I think it can be so much a part of our lives.

We're praying for God. We're praying to God in the midst of change. And we're waiting for an answer to prayer. We're waiting for God to do stuff.

[5 : 51] We're waiting for God to give us guidance in some way. Perhaps we're waiting for God to heal. We're waiting for God to step in and to change something.

And in the midst of all of that, to be anchored onto the promises of God in which he is faithful can make all the difference. But we need to understand that properly.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Firm and secure. What does it mean when we're anchored then to wait on God? I think we need to be really careful how we understand what it means to wait on God.

That we anchor ourselves in hope on him. But when we wait, it's not a passive waiting. And there's the danger. That when we say, oh, I'm going to commit this to God and now I'm going to step back and I'm just going to wait for him to do something.

We've got to be careful how we handle that. Let me tell you a story. In fact, I'm going to tell you a joke. When I'm trying to get ready for sermons, I like to kind of trawl the internet for jokes.

[7 : 00] And I like to put in words, you're like, you know, joke, God, then whatever the theme is. And whenever there's a warning that comes up and says, you know, some people might find some of this content offensive.

That's where I tend to go. Serious point. Okay. Because very often, the very reasons why people think that this is going to be offensive to Christians. Is the very reason why as Christians we need to be offended.

Because sometimes it's only when people from outside of Christian faith actually flag up those contradictions that we don't see that we can finally see them.

So, I'm not going to apologise if anybody finds this offensive. It's not rude. But it's a story that, and it's a new one. I've not, maybe you've heard it before, but it's a new one on me.

It's a story about two brothers. One was a farmer, and the other was a vicar. And the farmer was quite sad about the fact that his brother, who was a vicar, never came to visit him.

- [8 : 09] Well, after many years of having not seen his brother, one day he rocks up on the farm. He's very excited about this, so the farmer takes his brother out on a tour of the farm.
- And they're walking past a field. And they see this, the farmer shows us this field, it's got loads of grain growing in it. And he explains to his vicar brother how he's grown all of this grain himself, and he's developed all these methods over the years, he's researched it.
- And he says, I grow all of this grain by myself. And his brother, with a very pious tone in his voice, says, Oh yes, but with the Lord's help.
- The farmer takes this as a little bit of a put down. But they carry on their walk. They come to a next field, and there's some really stunning looking cows grazing in the field.
- So the farmer says, I've been breeding these for years, and I'm really proud of this herd. I've bred them all myself. Once again, his brother, in a really holier-than-thou tone, says, Yes, but with God's help, of course.
- [9 : 20] Well, by now, the farmer's feeling quite insulted. So they carry on the walk in silence. Until, that is, they come to a field where there's just loads of weeds, and thorns, and bushes growing, and it just looks a mess.
- And the vicar says to his brother, what's going on in here? The farmer says, this is where I let God get on with the farming all by himself.
- In Scripture, what we see is the God who calls us into a relationship with him. Right from the very beginning, when we are created in God's image, God sets human beings in his image, in this world, and creates us, designs us to work in partnership with him.
- And if you like, in a simplified way, the Bible is a whole story, a whole narrative of how that relationship goes wrong, when we, as human beings, choose to do things outside of that relationship.
- The danger for us as Christians is we can forget that. And in the way that we quite rightly emphasize this idea of God's sovereignty, I mean, we can't do stuff without God.
- [10 : 48] And God can do stuff without us. But we can completely distort that, such that we think that when it comes to praying to God, and waiting on God, it means actually we do nothing.
- To be anchored in a meaningful way in hope, means yes, of course we accept God's ultimately, ultimately in power. That's why we pray, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth in heaven, as it is in heaven.
- But, it's not a passive waiting. To be anchored in God means that we are called to live in meaningful partnership with him.
- To live on his strength. But to be poised to be ready, to step up, to step out, and to live like we believe it. As Martin Luther said hundreds of years ago, I live as though Jesus Christ had been crucified yesterday, had risen this morning, and was coming again tomorrow.
- We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. So that's about, you know, waiting on God, being anchored on him, being in partnership with him, knowing ultimately he's in control.
- [12 : 16] But what about the theme of uncertainty? What does it mean to be anchored in him, on him, in the midst of the uncertainty of life, where there are situations that we are praying about, that we're living into, that we're facing each day, and we just long for some sense of clarity.
- You know, trusting in God's faithfulness, trusting in his promises, when we cannot see the future, is such a challenge. What does that look like then, to be anchored into his promises?
- Florence Chadwick was an American swimmer. She was particularly prominent during the 1950s.

She became the first woman, to swim the English Channel, in both directions. She set many world records.

Interestingly, one of them, she swam from Western Supermare, to Panarth Head, near Cardiff, in a record time, just over six hours.

[13 : 30] But the story I want to share with you, is a record that she set, in 1952. When she swam, or attempted to swim, from Catalina Island, to the Californian coast.

To swim through shark-infested waters, of some 26 miles. Because of the sharks, she was surrounded by boats.

She was flanked by boats, ready to pull her out, if she got into trouble. And shortly after she started, this 26-mile swim, the fog descended, such that you could not really see, beyond where these boats were, surrounding her.

She swam, she swam, she swam, and eventually, she was so exhausted, she could not see anything, because of the fog. She said, I think I'm going to need to stop.

But she decided to carry on, and she swam for about another hour, until eventually, she was so exhausted, she could do no more. She could see, barely beyond, beyond, the immediacy of these boats.

[14 : 42] So she, called, one of the boats, to come right up close, and she was pulled out, of the water. Only when she was in the boat, did she realise, that she was only, one mile away, from the coast.

Two months later, she got in the water again. Strangely enough, the fog, descended again. But this time, she just kept going, and kept going, and kept going.

And for all the fog, and the sharks, she finished. Afterwards, she said, she was asked, what was the difference, between your first, and second attempt?

She said, well, not a lot, in the sense of, you know, the circumstances, were the same. I couldn't see the land. But the difference, is second time round, I kept that image, in my head.

The coast, was drawing near. I love the way, that the Living Bible, paraphrases, Job chapter 8, when it says, those who forget God, those who forget God, have no hope.

[16 : 12] That image, in our minds, knowing that God is there, even though we cannot see through the fog, in our lives, is transformative.

One last thing, one last thing, before we pray. I've worked, in ministry, for the church, for my entire working life.

Do you know, what the thing is, is that I've heard people say to me, when I tell them, what I do, what the thing is, is that, probably looking back, over the last, 25 plus years, the thing that, I hear people say to me, more than anything else, is their first response, when we get into conversation, what do you do, I'm a minister.

Oh, you'd be surprised. I'll tell you what it's not, although it is very often, you know, I'd have a pound every time, in the run up to Christmas, people say to me, this is your busy time of year, isn't it?

I'd be even wealthier, if the same had happened, every single time, somebody said to me, oh, you lot only work, one day a week, don't you?

[17 : 28] It's funnier every time. No, the thing that, that I hear people say to me, from all different walks of life, and from different ages, and backgrounds, is this, and this might surprise you, tell them I'm a minister, I don't know whether to laugh, or cry, when they say this, but it happens surprisingly often, they say, I envy you Christians, I wish I had your hope, the answer to that one, is very simple indeed.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you that, we're not just left to get on, with life in this world, your desire is for us, to be in partnership, with you, not to go it alone, but to, to face change, that is part of life, with you.

And we thank you, that because of Jesus, we can, we can, we've got something, or someone, to be anchored onto, that gives us hope. Lord, thank you, that in the midst of change, and uncertainty, you are there.

And as we pray to you now, Lord, we just take a few moments, as we bring before you, and hold before you, whatever that uncertainty, might look like, or feel like, right now.

Lord, thank you that, that being anchored to you, does not restrict our freedom, it actually sets us free.

[19 : 47] Lord, in the sense of the unknown, in the uncertainties, in the fears that confront us, renew us in, a fresh sense of confidence. Fill us afresh, with your Holy Spirit, right now.

Lord, like one swimming, towards the shore, surrounded by fog, not knowing, how close that shore is. But Lord, help us to keep, that mental picture, in our minds, and help us to hold it, in our hearts, that you are there, even when we cannot see you.

Lord, forgive us, for when we anchor ourselves, to other things, that are not faithful, that are not reliable. Things that we can see, and touch, things that are not you.

Lord, thank you, that the hope, that you hold out to us, is not something, just for a select few, but anybody can have.

Thank you, for the way, that you transform lives. We pray, that you would continue, to transform us. Father God, whatever lies ahead, in our own lives, whatever battles, we may be facing, whatever insecurities, we may sense, or whatever fears, we may have, help us to know, that you are with us, that you go before us, and that you are faithful, to your promises.

[21 : 37] Lord, as we continue, to worship now, and as we go, into this coming week, go on filling us, with your strength, your power, of your Holy Spirit.

In Jesus name. Amen.