

God is Faithful

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[0:00] you this morning. Like Paul said, my name is Mark, Mark Schenk. I'm currently principal of the Ragged School of Theology. Before that, I was a pastor at Duncan Street Baptist Church the other side of Edinburgh for just under 14 years, and before that I was one of the pastors at Motherwell Baptist Church for a couple of years. It's been good to get to know Paul, over the, I guess, since our time at various moments over the time we've been in Edinburgh, but it's really good to see Paul, and it's not a funeral. So it's good to meet Paul as part of a living church service. I heard lots about Westerhills Baptist Church when I was at Duncan Street.

I met Daniel on a couple of occasions, was here for, I think, a Banner of Truth conference, maybe seven years ago, but I think the thing that I'm grateful for the most is the influence that Westerhills Baptist Church has actually had on more people than you may realize. One of the guys that was most, has been most influential in my ministry is a guy called Leslie Edge, who we went to his church when we were in Glasgow for four years at the Baptist College, and I see some of you nodding, you probably know him. He was best friends, of course, with Alex Hardy, and nearly every time when I was in a placement with Leslie, just about every time we met, he would tell me some story about Alex Hardy, and something about his ministry, and something about the gift of evangelism that this man had. And it just struck me that what Alex Hardy was about, he was, some of you met him, some of you knew him, some of you had him as your pastor. He just strikes me about a guy who believed in the power of the gospel. He believed that the gospel was the power of God for salvation. I cycled up here this morning, which was probably not the best idea in retrospect, but I got here early, and I was quite hot, so I thought I would cool down a wee bit and had a walk around the community. Now, being members at Nidri Community Church now, my guess is that when visitors come here, and when visitors come to Nidri, they'll drive in, they'll see the place, and they'll be glad to get out of the place quickly.

That's a stereotype, and it's not that far removed from what people see. But let me tell you what I saw this morning. I got excited walking through the scheme here. What a wonderful location for a church to be.

And let me tell you what people see in Nidri is probably the same thing that they see here. They think about poverty. They think about deprivation. They think about the problem of drugs and alcohol and all these kind of things, and they are real problems for sure. But I was excited when I walked through the schemes. There's just people there who will be saved. And it's as simple as that God has people in the schemes of Westerhills, people whose names are already in the Lamb's Book of Life. And as the gospel is shared, they will call upon the name of Jesus. I know myself from being a pastor of a church and just from speaking to folks this morning, ministry's tough, isn't it? It's really tough. But again, coming back to Alex Hardy, that was a man who believed in the power of the gospel, not in his own ability to convert somebody, not in his own cleverness, but simply trusted in the sovereignty of God and the power of the gospel. So I guess what I want to do, I haven't even started speaking yet, but just for your own encouragement, and you don't need me to tell you this, but I'm telling you anyway, the gospel is as powerful today as it was when Alex Hardy was here. The gospel is as powerful today as it was in the days that we read about in the early church and Acts. So all of us can be encouraged just to continue to be faithful to that call of God that is upon each one of our lives. Let me invite you to turn up to Genesis 21. And in just a few moments, we're going to read the first four verses. For sure, it'd be worth reading the whole chapter. It'd be worth reading the whole book, but we're just going to stick with four verses because there's a lot in these four verses.

But just as you're looking that up, let me remind you of a great day. 17 days ago on the 11th of May. Does anyone here know why the 11th of May this year was just a great occasion? I've got my posh

voice on today, but you might just have a little bit of a hint in my accent that I'm not from Edinburgh. And that's a clue. Just over 17 days, or just 17 days ago on the 11th of May, Aberdeen fans all over the world, because that's how big a club we are, celebrated the 40th anniversary of beating Real Madrid to win the Cup Winners' Cup. I remember watching that game, which gives you an indication. I'm a little older than I look. And it was just an incredible game.

[5 : 50] A few days after that, my dad came through to the living room and he told me that he'd got tickets for the Scottish Cup final that year, which was against Rangers. I think I probably laughed when I heard it. I was almost in a state of disbelief. I was only six at the time and the news was just almost too incredible to believe. For the next week, I was absolutely bouncing. I was counting down the days to the game. And then the day came and we went to the game and we won 1-0 and we were absolutely buzzing. Later that year, my dad told me that he'd got his tickets to the second leg of the Super Cup final against Hamburg. Again, I was absolutely bouncing at the thought of going to this game. And again, I was buzzing when we lifted our third trophy that year. But forget the football for a moment. Just forget the football completely. Because what I want you to focus on is the announcement of those tickets. Tickets for those games were like gold dust. They really were. But not once did I doubt my dad's promise. Now looking back, I think there were probably two things at play. Firstly, my dad had promised me something. And as I waited, I trusted him. Secondly, my dad fulfilled his promise. And I responded by being very thankful and very well behaved. At least for the next week or so. And at the heart of what my dad was saying, at the heart of what was happening in this situation, I believe that my dad was faithful to what he said. And that made every difference. Now if you're going to go home this morning with one thing, just one thing, take this truth home. God is faithful. We've sung it this morning, haven't we? And we believe it. And if our belief overflows into the practice of our lives, it'll make every difference for us. God is faithful. Let's read this passage where we see that so clearly.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said. And the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Amen. Let's just pray briefly.

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you that your word is powerful. We thank you that your word is flawless. We thank you that your word is truth. And we pray this morning, Lord, that your word would have its way in our lives, that it would not return to you void, that it would achieve the purposes for which you are sending it forth this morning. Firstly, Lord, for your glory. And secondly, Lord, for our good and the building up of your local church. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Two points for you this morning. Number one, God is faithful. And our response? Trust in his promises.

God is faithful. God is faithful. Our response? Trust in his promises. Now let's be honest. Trusting people can be very difficult. All of us know people, I'm sure, and they've got the lingo. They've got the pattern. They're likable people. They talk a good game. They promise that they're going to do this and that and the other. But it's all talk. It's all talk. And their words, really, they don't count for very much. All of us have people who we've loved, maybe who we still love.

[10 : 20] But people who fed us lie after lie after lie. For some of us, it might be a parent. For some of us, it might be children. For some of us, friends or people that we work with. And it's difficult. It's really difficult. We believed in their promises. We believed that it might be different this time.

But again, like they've done before, they've let us down. And it's difficult. And it's difficult, isn't it? I mean, it really is. It makes it difficult to trust people. If we're being really honest, for some of us, it might make it difficult to trust God.

And maybe you're asking this this morning. Can God be trusted? Are his promises any better than those of the people who've let me down? Well, just look again at verses 1 and 2, where we find a very clear answer. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said. The Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. So these verses tell us that God was going to do something, and they tell us that now God has done something. What he's done very simply is this.

He has fulfilled his promise. So let me tell you very straight. God can be trusted. He can. God's promises are sure and certain. Now listen, I've been blessed, and it is a blessing to have a dad who's great. It's a blessing for me. But that hasn't been the case for all of us.

But even if we've had a great earthly dad or a not so great one, our heavenly father is nothing like our earthly father. Our heavenly father is perfect in every way. He is unlike anyone else. He is without equal. He is beyond compare. What he says, what he promises, that he will do. But maybe you think this morning, well, it was all right for Abraham. He had all these amazing experiences of God. He had all these amazing encounters with God. It was easy for him to trust in God's promises. But actually, if you know anything about Abraham, you'll know that's not the case at all.

[13:17] Abraham had to wait a long time before God's promise was fulfilled in his life. Let's just have a very quick overview. In chapter 12, Abraham, as you know, Abraham then was told to leave his homeland, to go to the land that God would show him. At that point, God promised Abraham that he'd make him into a great nation, that he would bless him, and that he would make his name great.

Actually, as an aside, chapter 12 is probably one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible. That promise that God makes to Abraham. But you'll know, because you know that chapter, that at this point, Abraham had no children. But he trusted God, didn't he? And off he went. Now, I don't care what you say. That's not an easy thing to do, is it? It's not. I remember when Sarah, my wife, and I moved from the northeast down to Glasgow. Now, no offense to Glasgow, but when you're from Aberdeen, Glasgow's not the place that you want to move to. I can stand here today and honestly say that we loved our time in Glasgow. Our daughter was born in Glasgow, but when we moved to Glasgow, we weren't too chuffed about it.

We weren't happy at all. At times, we wanted to move back. We're like, why on earth have we moved to a place like this? It's not easy to move away from what you know to something you don't know.

But what we didn't know is that Glasgow would be great, because God had called us to go to Glasgow. In that same chapter, chapter 12, God promised that he'd give Abraham's offspring the land of Canaan, the promised land. Abraham responded, he built an altar and he worshipped God. In the chapter 13, the promises are repeated again. But there's a problem. Still no children. In the chapter 16, still no children. The years have gone on, still no children. And you'll remember that what Abraham and Sarah do is they take things into their own hands, don't they? A child was born through Sarah's servant girl, Hagar. It was a faithless act. And God's promise wouldn't be fulfilled through that faithless act. But amazingly, this faithless act wouldn't stop God's promise. God remained faithful to his promise, even in the midst of Abraham and Sarah's unfaithfulness. Into chapter 17.

Abraham and Sarah, they still haven't got children together. But as we look at chapter 17 and 18, you'll see that God gives a very specific promise now that a child will be born within a year.

[16:27] Now for sure, Abraham and Sarah made mistakes along the way. They weren't perfect. But at the same time, the New Testament makes it clear, especially Hebrews 11, that they both lived by faith. They trusted God.

And for the most part, they waited well. Even against the challenges of fear and struggle and doubt. How did they do that? That's a question, isn't it? How did they remain faithful? Simply this. They knew that God was faithful. They knew that when God spoke, they could hang on his every word. And the same, by the way, is true for us today.

That knowledge helped Abraham and Sarah to wait 25 years for their son to be born. Now I'm sure you've heard the saying, not all sayings are true, but this one is. The best things come to those who wait.

That's true, isn't it? Theologically, that's true. You see, the story of Abraham and Sarah, it's an incredible story, isn't it? And by the way, when I say story, I'm speaking about history.

[17:52] We're speaking about historical people who actually lived. But we need to understand that their story, the account of their lives, that's not really the story. You know that, I'm sure, don't you? It's not really the story. Their story is part of the bigger story. You see, in Genesis 3, well, actually, Genesis 1 and 2, we're told in the Bible that it was all good, that it was very good.

But as we know, Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3. Sin entered the world with it. Death entered the world, and it spread. It massively changed the world that we live in. If we only had the first three chapters of the Bible, and if we only had kind of half of Genesis 3, it seems that God's great plan had somehow been overcome, that it was done, that it was finished. But of course, it hadn't. Because in Genesis 3, we see the first announcement of the gospel, that God would send a saviour, and this saviour would defeat sin and death and the devil. This saviour would come from

the seed, which really is a fancy word in the Bible, for the family tree of Eve. And as we follow the Bible on from Genesis 3, we can follow the family tree, can't we? That's what Genesis does. It gives us all these accounts of people's names. It gives the genealogies. And we see that this family tree works down from Adam and Eve, and it works its way down through people like Noah, and through Abraham.

It works its way down through Isaac, and his son Jacob, and through Judah. And it keeps on going through the Old Testament, and it's gathering pace. It's gathering pace. And eventually, the promised saviour would come. And as we know, his name is Jesus. Later in Genesis, we'll see that Isaac is spared from being killed. But Jesus wouldn't be spared. And on the cross, Jesus died for the sin of his people. Now get this, this is where all of this really comes to just a head that blows my mind.

Abraham trusted he'd have a son. Abraham trusted that his people would receive a land. And by the way, remember this, that never happened in Abraham's lifetime. Abraham was able to trust.

[20 : 53] We've already said because he knew that God was faithful. But actually, it's even more than that. It's even deeper than that. Abraham trusted in the one who'd be sent. Now that's mind-boggling when you start to get your head around that. Abraham trusted in Jesus. Now when you get that truth, the Old Testament suddenly becomes, you suddenly realize that actually all these Old Testament saints, they were waiting for Jesus. They believed in Jesus. They wouldn't be able to speak out Jesus as we can now. But make no mistake, that's who they were waiting for. They trusted in Jesus.

Abraham trusted in Jesus. Their story, Abraham and Sarah's story, the message from that story, it actually screams one thing to us this morning. Trust in Jesus.

Trust Jesus in the big things. Trust Jesus in the small things. Trust Jesus in everything. And we can. Because he is faithful. Jesus, as you know, is the one in whom all the promises of God find their yes.

Now let's apply this to waiting. I don't know about you, but I don't think waiting is very easy. Maybe you're waiting for a season of suffering to end.

And you're wondering, is it ever going to end? Is it ever going to finish? Maybe you're waiting for test results from hospital. Maybe you're waiting for God to answer a prayer that you have been praying for months, years, maybe even decades.

[23 : 09] Maybe you say, actually, 25 years? I've been waiting 50 years for God to answer this prayer. And maybe you're getting fed up.

I mean, if we are, you know, God already knows we are. But be honest before God this morning in your heart. If you're struggling, acknowledge that before the Lord.

Are you getting fed up? Are you getting angry? Maybe you're wondering, I'm not sure this waiting is worth a while anymore. Maybe you, like Abraham and Sarah, are thinking about taking matters into your own hands.

Trying to force the timing of a situation. Maybe you've started to believe the lie of the enemy. That God's not interested. That God's holding out good things from you.

But the Bible's making it clear to us today, isn't it? The Bible's making it clear that we can trust God in everything. That we can trust God with everything. Because he is good and he is faithful.

[24 : 14] And listen to this, friends. God knows what's best for us. So often, one of our arrogant assumptions is that we know what's best for us. But no, God knows what's best for us.

Because God knows what we really need. Because he is all wise and he is all knowing. And listen, you might look at the circumstances of your life this morning and all you can see are situations that suggest that everything is unraveling before your very eyes.

But let me tell you this. God is in control. He is in complete control. And if you are in Christ this morning, he holds you and I secure.

Look again at verse 2. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Do you see it?

God's timing is perfect. What God has planned will happen.

[25 : 27] There is no doubt about that. Not only will what God has planned happen. It will happen not in our time. But always, always in God's perfect time.

So then firstly this morning. God is faithful. What do we need to do? Simply trust him.

Trust him. Secondly, God keeps his promises. Our response? Be faithful. Be faithful. Look again at verses 1 and 2.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said. The Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.

We might say, what great days these were that Abraham and Sarah lived in. But for those of us who have read the Bible, and probably for some of us have read it many times, there's no doubting the days that we live in are far greater days than the days of Abraham and Sarah.

[26 : 49] Because we live in the days after the fulfillment of the greatest promise. We live in the days after Jesus has come. After Jesus has died.

After Jesus has risen. After Jesus has ascended. After the Holy Spirit has been sent at Pentecost. We live in those days, and they're the greatest days to live in.

The days between the first and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's got to make a difference, hasn't it? The question has to be, what difference?

What difference should that make? Well, let's see if we can learn something from verses 3 and 4.

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old. As God had commanded him.

Now let's not forget, Abraham was a hundred.

[27 : 56] I'm looking out this morning, I can't see anyone that's a hundred. I'm not even going to make any jokes on that. I'm just going to say that and leave it there. Sarah was ninety.

I'll say this, there's definitely no ladies that look like they're anywhere near ninety. And what's happened with the birth of Isaac?

I mean, let's just call it for what it is. It's impossible. Humanly speaking, there's no way this happens naturally. There's no way. But the impossible had been made possible with God.

For, as we've read, or as you would read a few chapters previous, nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Now all of that had a massive impact on Abraham.

Massive. In 1719, chapter 17, verse 19. God told Abraham that the son to be born was to be called Isaac.

[29 : 02] Isaac, by the way, means laughter. In verse 3 of today's chapter, what do you see? Well, simply this. Abraham does as God told him.

In chapter 17, 10 to 14, God gave Abraham very specific instructions regarding circumcision. And what do we see in verse 4?

We see Abraham being obedient to God's clear command. So again, let's just see what we're saying today. We're saying God is faithful.

And we're to trust in his promises. And knowing that God has fulfilled and will fulfill his promises should lead us to living faithfully.

Now imagine I'd received that ticket from a dad. And I'd ripped it up in his face. That's what I think of your faithfulness, dad. You can take your ticket and you can shove your ticket.

[30 : 04] Or maybe I took the ticket off him. I went to the game. And I forgot all about the gift. I didn't say thanks. I wasn't grateful.

I took his gift for granted. Or maybe it's what actually happened. I was very thankful. Very appreciative. And I behaved myself for the best part of a week.

But then back to normal. I wonder. Is that what we can be sometimes? When it comes to the Lord.

I think it's true to say that all of us. I know myself for sure. You can answer this for yourself. But we can all be a bit inconsistent I think.

Can't we? Just think of Sarah. One minute she's laughing in unbelief. That she'll give birth to a child. And let's be honest.

[31 : 02] None of us would have been any different. She's 89 years old. She's laughing in unbelief. She then has a son.

Which as I said a moment ago. Isaac means laughter. And then in verse 6 of today's chapter.

Sarah's previous ungodly and unbelieving laughter.

Has been turned into godly. Believing laughter. But then if you look at verses 9 and 10. Sarah's gone berserk.

When she sees Ishmael laughing. And basically what happens is Sarah runs. Ishmael and Hagar. Out of town.

Now it's easy to stand here and speak about Sarah's mistakes. I know for sure that Sarah's faithfulness. And example are far better than mine. And that's not only true for the Sarah of the Bible.

[32 : 00] It would be true for my own wife, Sarah. But I think it's true to say this. The reality of our lives often goes like this. Though we know.

That we should love. And obey. And serve. And worship God. Though we know we should be faithful. So often we can find ourselves being unfaithful.

Sometimes we can find ourselves. Acting like spoiled little children. Though God has treated us like royalty. We have treated the one true king.

With total contempt. And if you understand what sin is. And what our sin is like before a holy God. We can't do anything else but agree with her.

We've laughed. We've waved our fist at God. We've acted like we're in control. We've treated his forgiveness and grace and mercy as if they're cheap things.

[33 : 01] How can I say that? Again I say that because I know that we sin. And each time we sin. This is exactly what we do. Chasing after the things of this world.

Instead of pursuing the path of personal holiness. God is faithful. But so often we're unfaithful. You're thinking where are we going with this?

To say this. Don't you find those words in 2 Timothy 1 to be some of the most encouraging words of scripture? If we are faithless.

He remains faithful. It's wonderful isn't it? That's just absolutely astounding and incredible. So. Maybe we haven't been waiting well. Maybe we recognize this morning that in some aspects that we've actually been living unfaithfully. Unfaithfully. Now the question we need to ask is a simple one.

[34 : 09] What now? What next? Are we done? Are we finished? Maybe this morning you feel far from God. Maybe this morning you feel like you are stuck in a rut.

And you just don't know how to get out of it. You want change. You want it. But maybe in your heart you feel like you've sinned one time too many.

And let me tell you I've pastored many people. Many people who on the outside were doing very well. Some of them leaders. Some of them pastors.

And they were worried that they'd sinned too much. I've heard people speak about the fact that they think they are past the point of no return.

That God could forgive their neighbor. That God could forgive their friend. But they worried that there was no forgiveness for them.

[35 : 16] Can I say something this morning that I think is so so important to hear? For all who repent. Focus on the word all.

For all who repent. Now that includes you. And it includes me. For all who repent. There is forgiveness in Jesus. That's good news.

Let me tell you to folks in the community out there. That's the message that they need to hear. That there is hope. There is forgiveness in Christ. Now I'm not going to assume this morning that everyone here is a Christian.

I don't base that on anything other than the fact that I don't know you. So I'll say this. If you are not a Christian this morning. Repent of your sin.

And come to Christ today. If you are a Christian. And you know you've been faithless. Repent. And by his strength.

[36 : 17] And please hear that. By his strength. Respond. By living. Faithfully. If we've messed up.

And I've never met somebody who hasn't. There's still a second chance. Now you might say. I've had my second chance. I've had my thousandth chance. Well guess what.

For the person who's blown their thousandth chance. There's a one thousand and oneth chance. For somebody who's blown it a million times. There is a. A million and one. A million and oneth.

Chance. I think that's right. Now listen. We're not talking about taking God's grace for granted. We're not saying. Well let's just sin a bit more. So God can forgive. We're not talking about that.

We're talking about the person who genuinely recognizes. That they've messed up and wants change. You can be forgiving. You and I. If we've messed up.

[37 : 13] Can be restored. I like reading. And one of the. One of the guys. Who's writing over the years.

Amen. Amen. Amen.