

God's Faithfulness

Joshua 23:14

“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.”

A common practice of some newspapers at the end of the year is to give a running commentary on the highlights of the passing year. They like to give an overview of important happenings as well as significant accomplishments made in the lives of people, for the community, and for the nation.

If you were asked to write such an article, what events would you describe as the most outstanding of the past year? Would they be some of the great accomplishments of men and women? Or would they be reflections of God's power, love, and care in people's lives? Yes, it is important to reflect upon what man has done, but Christians certainly cannot discount the things that God has done, for God's faithfulness is proven by what He continually does. So as fellow Christians, we reflect upon God's faithfulness. What a wonderful time to do this as one year closes and another opens.

Our text takes us back into the history of Israel at the close of Joshua's life. Joshua became leader of Israel after the death of Moses. Moses had led God's people from Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land. The Lord then turned over the leadership of these people to Joshua. Joshua was a man with great wisdom who had served under Moses, and through the years had gained the confidence and respect of the people, proving to be a great leader. He guided the people from one victory to another over powerful enemies that controlled the land. God's people finally triumphed over their enemies and distributed the land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

We could talk tonight about the faithfulness of God toward the children of Israel under Joshua. In fact, Joshua himself says, in the words of our text, that the evidence of God's faithfulness was so great that “not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you” (NKJV). God had promised them victory, rest, plenty of the necessities of life, and so on. God had not failed in one of his promises.

How similar to the experiences of Israel

have been our experiences throughout the past year. With another year going away, dying, and never to return, we, too, have to admit with Joshua, “Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you.”

What was it God promised all of us at the beginning of the year? Listen to just some of the promises that he gave: seedtime and harvest, health and protection, the necessary provisions of life, continued care, strength in weakness, removal of obstacles, answer to prayer, spiritual fullness, power for service, victory over the devil, all things working together for our good, comfort in death, togetherness with Christ.

Has God kept these promises? If you and I are honest with ourselves as we look back at the past year, we must say, “Surely God has kept his promises!” God *has* been faithful. As Joshua said, “Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God promised concerning you.” All we need to do is look at our congregation, our church facilities and resources, our families, our relatives, and our homes. God has certainly been faithful!

And we can't forget the greatest of all his promises: his forgiveness in Christ for our sins. Just think of all the sins that we have committed this past year! What if God kept a list of these that couldn't be erased and made us accountable for every one of those sins? But we have forgiveness, which is so beautifully conveyed to us again in the message of Christmas and secured for us in the glorious Gospel message that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation”

A Great Lakes steamer was carrying 323 passengers on a chilly evening in early September, 1860. She was brilliantly lighted and loaded with travelers. Suddenly, before the boat reached the port of Chicago, she began to sink. Obviously, before help could arrive, she'd be gone. The crowd on the shore watched the tragedy; most felt powerless to help.

Two brothers, students in a theological seminary, plunged through the crowd with a rope in their hands. Nat, the older of the two, a powerful man and a trained swimmer, leaped into the waves. Inch by inch, he fought his way through the waves until he reached the sinking ship and climbed

aboard. A moment later, he carried a woman back to safety. With eager arms the crowd helped to haul him in; he was choking and cold, but still strong. Again he plunged in—and again—and again!

Twenty-three lives Nat Spencer saved. For weeks he lay delirious. Meanwhile the twenty-three, whom he saved, scattered to their homes. In time, the nation began to forget the tragedy of the death of three hundred in Lake Michigan. But the twenty-three whom he had saved, surely they didn't forget, did they? Surely, they were grateful! Well, not one of them ever came back to thank Nat Spencer for what he had done. Not one of them even wrote him a letter. Nat Spencer lived out his life as an invalid. Not one of the twenty-three people ever said, "Thank you."

Surely, we who are saved by Christ should express our gratitude by word and deed to the One who gave his life for us, who died and rose again so that we might have our sins forgiven and enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This has been our most precious treasure in life. Without it, we have no hope, no real happiness; we are actually helpless. But with it, how wonderful life is! What an impact this should make upon us! Where can you find a friend so dependable, so generous, and so faithful as our gracious God?

Have your friends been as faithful as God has been? How about your loved ones? How about your employer or employees? Your government? If our blessings depend completely upon men, how miserable we would be!).

During the Christmas season, we really have grateful hearts toward those many friends and relatives who express themselves in so many ways. Shouldn't all of us also express our gratitude to the Giver of all good things—that is, our faithful God? He is the One who made us, preserved us through all the days of the past year, loved us in Christ, and gave us every spiritual blessing through his Word and Sacraments. So let this concluding service of the year be one of sincere thanksgiving in the remembrance of God's faithfulness.

Our hearts should also be filled with comfort and be confident in another new year. There are 365 unopened pages ahead of us, which are mysteries to us now. But we move forward confidently, because God is faithful. This glorious truth was to Joshua the security of his people, even though he was leaving them. This was God's pledge of continued

blessings to them. This is also our security as we go into the new year. God is faithful.

During the next year the Lord is going to touch all of our lives many, many times. Let's not be so busy with worldly things that we forget to see him and how he blesses us day after day. You and I can confidently enter the new year. We can truly say with St. Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:31–32 KJV).

Yes, he can give us all things, for God is all powerful.

He shall give us all things that we need, because he is faithful.

This is our comfort. This is our confidence. This is our joy as we enter the new year. Amen.

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