God's Faithfulness

A church tells what God has done, and a sermon steps aside

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, November 27, 2022
PASSAGES	Psalm 100:5; Exodus 15:1-21; Psalm 124; Isaiah 11:1-9; Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 12:11
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:19:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God is faithful — not because we noticed, chose him first or held on well, but because he is good and his faithfulness is to all generations. On this Thanksgiving weekend the church heard it from its own people: in long waiting, in a hard "no," in grief and depression, in provision, and in family lines turned around. The sermon stepped aside so that the testimony could be heard.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Telling what God has done encourages others, praises God, and is part of how his people overcome — "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."
- God's faithfulness runs through generations: grandparents' songs, parents' prayers, and children now walking in the truth.
- Trusting God in waiting is one of the few gifts we can give him, and he is with us in the waiting and in stepping out in faith.
- Sometimes his faithfulness comes as a "no," or as something entirely different from what we pictured — and he holds on to us even when we run.
- His faithfulness began before we knew him, even before we were born. "His faithfulness is not about us; it's about him."

- God breaks generational patterns of darkness; several people testified to reaping what they did not sow.
- What looks like disorder to us can be God birthing something new — "from heaven's perspective this was decent and orderly."

▶ 0:19:38

It was the first Sunday of Advent and the Sunday after Thanksgiving. The call to worship had been the parable of the ten virgins, with a prayer that the Father would give his people oil for their lamps. Then Melody, leading worship, opened something she had long wanted: a Sunday simply to give thanks for God's faithfulness, with an open microphone between the songs for "a micro tiny testimony time."

> "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent… Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."
>
> MATTHEW 25:1–13 ↗ (NASB)

Why tell it

▶ 0:21:15

It might be a specific story from the past week or year, Melody said, or simply "I have been walking with the Lord this many years and he has always been faithful." Saying it encourages others, it praises God among his people, and it is part of the overcoming Revelation describes: "they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11).

▶ 0:14:39

Earlier, Biniam Gebrehana had lit the first Advent candle for the world's longing for a Saviour, reading Isaiah's promise of a shoot from the stump of Jesse: "just as Israel waited for the root of Jesse whom they could not see, we wait for the return of Christ whom we have never seen."

> "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him... The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat... and a little child shall lead them... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."
>
> ISAIAH 11:1–9 ↗

Through the generations

▶ 0:29:00

The first to speak remembered a grandmother singing "Jesus Loves Me" and a father who, just before he died, talked with his sister about running the race. Now, with most of her children grown, she hears the same testimonies from them:
"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" — that he is faithful even when things are hard and they have to wait.

▶ 0:30:30

Lorraine Mahan, after more than fifty-two years with the Lord, described a lifelong holiday depression that had just plunged her, that week, into a darkness deeper than she could remember. A visiting daughter sensed spiritual oppression in the house and prayed; the next day the darkness lifted. "God can still resurrect you once again."

▶ 0:32:51

A believer of nearly three years, who had always envied Christian friends their peace, said she finally understood it is for everyone. Not a naturally joyful or believing person but a logical one, she tells herself when joy and peace come through darkness: "It's not a coincidence. It's Messiah."

In the waiting

▶ 0:35:27

Cynthia Lerma, who had dedicated her daughter two weeks earlier, said that trusting God through the waiting "is one of the only things that we can actually give God," and it touches his heart. In college she would sit by a little pond and cry out in loneliness for a husband and a child. After she married and was pregnant, she went back to that pond: "Wow, God has given me everything I was asking for."

▶ 0:40:07

Trusting God sometimes looks like waiting and sometimes like stepping out — for her, trusting her heart to a man, which was hard. "God doesn't leave us alone. He doesn't just say, you know, figure it out. He is literally with us."

▶ 0:44:09

A husband, married forty-six years, recalled provision like the avocado tree that fed five family members for a month in 1983. Back from ten years in Turkey, he then needed three heart procedures he might not have survived abroad. "The best is yet to come. One day we'll all be in front of Jesus face to face."

▶ 0:46:42

Laurel, depressed and alone through her teenage years, said God was near in every moment. When college counsellors urged her to tell God how angry she was that she had felt alone, she could not: "he was the one consistent thing."

▶ 0:48:11

A man of seventy-one, now sharing his testimony four or five times a day with alcoholics and addicts, said he used to hide in shame that he had struggled to come to faith. But God revealed himself: "Jesus is real… he doesn't need a salesman, he doesn't need an apologist," only people honest about their own experience — and his struggle gives others hope.

When the answer is no

▶ 0:50:41

A woman who with her husband Felipe had faced years of infertility spoke for those whose promise never came the way they pictured. She had told God that if he did not let her give birth, they were done. They lost seven babies, "and they're in heaven, and we'll be with them one day." She was angry, sinned, ran — praying only, *if you're the real thing, don't let me go.* Then "God did a whole new thing": three children they did not birth, shared with birth families. "He was so faithful, even when I was not… I wouldn't trade them for anything."

▶ 0:55:28

One person had passed twice through the fiery furnace — an assault and throat cancer — and been kept unscathed.

▶ 1:13:55

Later Cynthia returned to add that faithfulness sometimes comes as a no. As her labour began, God told her, *I am with you*. Thirty hours of labour followed, eight and a half hours pushing, no pain relief,

crying out for it to stop. For a long time she felt traumatised, as if God had not come through. "But he was faithful. He was with me… I am alive and so is my baby. He was faithful through the no."

Before we knew him

▶ 0:56:30

A woman who had assumed God's faithfulness began once she decided to follow him told how her mother almost died giving birth to her, and she nearly died in her first six weeks for lack of nourishment. God later showed her that he had held her to his breast and fed her. "His faithfulness is not about us. It's about him." That morning two women had prayed over her as she sat staring at her own failure: "It's about Jesus Christ at the cross… blood covers all of that."

▶ 0:59:52

Ceci, who did not grow up in a Christian home, looked back on dark places, her own sin and sins against her, and saw his goodness chasing her into the kingdom. "It's not like all easy now, but I can't ever say he's not faithful."

▶ 1:05:11

Andrea once refused to read the Bible for fear that God would "mess with my life," escaping into science fiction — where God made the stories speak Scripture to her. Then she bribed her kids with video games to memorise verses and tried not to listen, "and God was like, ha ha, I am sneaking me into your life. My avoidance does not mean that God ever avoided me."

▶ 1:06:27

Bethany McCants, hit by a drunk driver with her daughter in the car, was barely sore — but asked herself whether God would still be faithful if the worst had happened. Yes: the martyrs' stories did not turn out well outwardly, "but internally, yes, it turned out well for them."

In grief

▶ 1:08:31

Jolene lost her older sister in a car accident without a chance for goodbyes. In the hospital room, her father and brother-in-law were dressed identically, and she sensed the Lord saying the Father and Jesus were present with them. Later God gave her a dream in which her sister said goodbye to each of them one by one — "a gift… to receive and have a closure."

▶ 1:09:55

A young woman who had felt alone and dismissed the signs God gave her found peace listening to the testimonies: "Lord, I'm seeing you in all these people… I'm seeing you in their stories."

▶ 1:30:57

Melinda, as the church sang "had it not been the Lord who was on our side," said that seventeen years ago, after her husband died by suicide, she could tangibly feel the Lord with her, and his faithfulness brought her to Hope.

▶ 1:32:30

Elodia told of her oldest brother, diagnosed this year with metastasised cancer. They prayed for healing, and he died three months later. But a hard life had left him antagonistic to the gospel, and as he weakened his heart softened, and he professed Jesus as Lord. "The snare is broken and we have escaped" — the line of the song (Psalm 124:7). "He's with Jesus."

Reaping what we did not sow

▶ 1:34:55

Nicole McCarron's mother's family line was riddled with death, abuse and alcoholism, and her grandfather was the source of much of it — until, widowed, he had an encounter with Jesus and became a man on fire, reading his Bible, "such a man of blessing." The Lord told her this year, *you get to reap what you did not sow*: blessings from a generation that had sown darkness, given even amid her own doubt.

▶ 1:37:27

Rebecca's father and grandfather both died at thirty-eight; she was ten. Bitterness, codependency and judgment followed. She testified that she has been healed and set free, has learned to forgive, and receives the blessings God has for her, "because when I am weak, he is strong." Aaron Lerma added that his uncle came to Jesus and prayed for all his siblings for years, until a kind man in the Austin Fire Department brought Aaron's father to faith. "I get to reap the benefits of that."

▶ 1:20:15

A man and his wife Nance, called at twenty to a ministry wholly on faith, lived thirty-five years with no salary and no insurance, never earning more than about six thousand dollars a year — and never missed rent. Sandy, at Hope for some thirty-five years, gave thanks for parents who have battled on their knees for their children, and for the young leaders those children have become: "the oil so much resides in your generation."

His faithfulness to all generations

▶ 1:11:07

Partway through, one man pointed to the only psalm titled "a psalm for thanksgiving":

> "For the LORD is good; his lovingkindness is everlasting and his faithfulness to all generations."
>
> PSALM 100:5 ↗ (NASB)

He does not just do good things; he is good. His love does not come and go with moods. And to those who are wounded and wondering whether he will be faithful to their son or daughter: "the story is not over… so we lean back hard on his faithfulness."

▶ 1:23:31

Rowan, whose anxiety had at times made him physically sick, recalled God saying, *wherever you may wander, I will be there; you cannot escape me* (Psalm 139:7–10), and prayed over the congregation that God's presence would be with them even when they run.

Decent and orderly

▶ 1:51:09

Matt did not preach his prepared sermon ("come back next week"). He thanked Melody for "having the courage to let God move among us." You might think church needs songs and a sermon, decently and in order. But think of Sandy at a birth: to the untrained it looks frightening, but a midwife would call it decent and orderly. "From heaven's perspective this was decent and orderly. God is a God of order; he can step on my plans. God is birthing new stuff in us."

▶ 1:53:54

Kathy, praying over the church, marvelled that God keeps working on what we forget to pray about — "in all these moments that I was not thinking of this, you were" — with Jesus interceding at the Father's right hand. Matt also thanked everyone behind the no-strings Thanksgiving feast for Brentwood Elementary's staff: "we see you and we love you."

▶ 1:56:21

Jenny McDonald closed by pointing to the story behind the song the church had been singing: the crossing of the sea was itself a birth story. In labour there is a moment of transition when you think you cannot make it — "that's the squeezing moment, and that's what gets the baby in position." The

exodus was the birth of a nation, as the cross was the birth of the church, and many in the room, she sensed, are in that painful transition now.

▶ 1:59:05

> "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him… You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode."
>
> EXODUS 15:1–21 ↗

▶ 2:04:23

She sang Miriam's song and prayed in thanks that God delivered Israel, has delivered us by the blood of his Son, and has given us new birth into a living hope — "thank you for the birth pangs… we are being transformed into the likeness of your Son, whatever it costs."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 25:1–13 (NASB)
- Revelation 12:11
- Isaiah 11:1–9
- 3 John 1:4
- Psalm 124
- Psalm 100:5 (NASB)
- Psalm 139:7–10
- Exodus 15:1–21

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which testimony from this morning stayed with you most, and why?
2. Where have you seen God's faithfulness running through the generations of your own family, or breaking a pattern in it?
3. Cynthia said trusting God in waiting is one of the few gifts we can give him. What are you waiting on, and what would trusting him in it look like?
4. Several people spoke of God being faithful through a "no" or through loss. How has that been true, or hard to believe, for you?
5. What is one story of God's faithfulness you could tell someone this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezrNS3mTGEM&t=1178s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.