

Show Me Your Glory: Faithful
Exodus 33/Genesis 22

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I came across two stories in the news recently that each stuck me in very different ways. The first came from Texas A&M baseball coach Jim Schlossnagle. He led his team to the college world series and after a loss was asked if he would return to the program: Here was his quote: “I took the job at Texas A&M to never take another job again.” The next day, he left the university and signed with their rival school. Compare that lack of faithfulness with these two men: Tom Cook and Joseph Feeney. In 1992 they made a handshake deal. They said that on the off chance either of them ever won the powerball lottery, they would split the winnings 50/50. Life went on, careers went on, and then randomly, 30 years later, Tom hit a winning ticket worth over 20 million dollars. It would have been so easy and understandable for him to ignore the original deal...after all, it wasn't in writing, it had been 3 decades, no one thought it was actually going to happen...but rather than side-step the deal, as soon as Tom told his wife about the ticket, the first phone call he made was to Joseph and he said, “We won.” He gave his buddy over 11 million dollars. We hear of the coach's faithlessness and our estimation for him goes down. We hear the story of a friend's faithfulness and our estimation of him goes through the roof. We are inspired by faithfulness. We want to be in relationships with people who are faithful.

We are in week two of a series called show me your glory. This is all based around a passage in the Old Testament where Moses comes to God with a bold and outlandish request: Exodus 33:18 Now show me your glory—God, I want to see you, I want to know you, I want to be close to you. God says, no one can see my face and live, but I'll show you as much of my glory and splendor as you can possibly bear. God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and passes by him and declares his name.

We skip forward to Exodus 34:5-5: “Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” In this series we are looking at each of the descriptions God used to describe himself, and today we are going to look at God's faithfulness.

There are four different words used throughout the Old Testament to refer to God's faithfulness.

***Emet*—God never breaks a promise.** This word is used 127 times and most frequently highlights the fact that every time God commits to doing something, he follows through. He keeps his word.

***Emuna*—God never changes.** This word occurs 49 times and refers to God's unchanging nature. (Just like the Geyser Old Faithful gets its name because it erupts roughly every 70 minutes, no matter what. Doesn't miss. Doesn't take a day off, that is what God is like. He is faithful, he is dependable, consistent, and constant. He will always do what he says he will do. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

***Hesed*—God never forsakes his people.** This word occurs 255 times and refers to a woman who is faithful to her husband or a husband who is faithful to his wife. It highlights the reality that God is filled with love and kindness toward us, and because of that, he will never leave us nor forsake us.

***Zacar*—God never forgets.** This word is used 235 times and highlights the fact that God always remembers. Because I am a forgetful dad, my kids are always coming and reminding me of the commitments I made: you said we could have a snack, you said we could watch a show, you said we could do a camp out, you said we could go to Chick-Fil-A. Because I'm an imperfect father, sometimes I forget and need to be reminded. God never does. He is faithful in every way!

Listen to how the faithfulness of God is celebrated throughout the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations.”

Deuteronomy 32:4 “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”

Psalms 33:4 For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.”

Psalms 36:5 “Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.”

Psalms 89:8 “Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.”

Psalms 100:5 “For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

One of the best examples of God’s faithfulness is displayed in the life of Abraham. Abraham’s story begins in Genesis 12:1-3:

“The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

In other words, God asks Abraham to leave everything he has ever known, head off to an unknown destination. And God says, if you trust me, I will reward and honor you in three ways:

A great nation that endures throughout history.

A great name that is known throughout the world.

A great blessing that enriches all humanity.

Not simply the rest of the book of Genesis, but really the rest of the entire Bible is an account of God’s faithfulness to the promises he made to Abraham. But all throughout Abraham’s life there were questions about how God is going to come through! Abram knew that God promised to make him into a great nation, but he didn’t have any children, so he assumed it was going to come through his servant Eliezer. God says, “No, no, no...look up at the stars, one day, counting your actual off-spring will be like counting all those lights up there. So what did Abraham and his wife do? They decided to have Abraham sleep with Hagar, their servant, in order to produce a child. God said, “No, no, no.” Why don’t you trust me?! I am a faithful God, I am going to bless the world through a child from you and your wife. His wife Sarah literally couldn’t believe it. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?” Gen 18:12 It’s not crazy for her to laugh and ask questions. Abraham was 100 years old at that time, she was 90, safe to say she was passed the child bearing years. At their age, they were worried about putting diapers on themselves, not kids! God said, it doesn’t have to make sense to you. You don’t have to understand it. I’m going to give you a child of your own. And sure enough, in Genesis 21, as a centenarian, Abraham had a son, and named him Isaac. As you can imagine, Isaac, his only child with his wife, the child he had waited for his entire life, was his entire world, the apple of his eye and the center of his world. He cherished his son. He would do anything for him.

So you can imagine what happened in Abraham’s heart when God spoke to him in Genesis 22:2 “Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” This was more than the ultimate

curveball, this is like the floor dropping out from beneath you. What was Abraham going to do, and how was God going to keep his promise to Abraham if his son was sacrificed. There was so much unknown. But the one thing Abraham had come to know and rely upon at this point in his life is that God was good, God was faithful, God was reliable, God was trustworthy, so he decided to set out for mount moriah, with his son, and with wood for a sacrifice. When they finally made it to the mountain, they started climbing it, and we read:

(Genesis 22:6-7) “As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

And not even being sure of the answer himself Abraham gave the only reply he could think of...22:8 Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” I don’t know how he is going to do it, but I know my God and I know that he will. Every other time in his life, Abraham failed to trust God, but then God always came through. At this point, Abraham had absolutely no idea how God was going to keep his promise, but he had learned enough about God to know that somehow, someday, he would.

9 “When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.” This was the moment of truth. Not only going to the mountain, but climbing the mountain. Not only building the altar, but laying his son on the altar. You can just imagine Abraham. God has always come through, God, are you coming to come through now? 10 “Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” It made no sense to him, but he was prepared to give God the thing he treasured most in all of the world.

How could he bring himself to such a place, by raising the knife? Listen to what we read in the book of Hebrews 11:17, 19 “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son...19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead.”

He was willing to take his own son’s life because he realized God had been so faithful in the past, that God would be faithful, even in bringing his son back to life. But that is not how the story ends. Right when Abraham was going to bring the knife down on his beloved son, we read: Gen 22:11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied. 12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

And it’s hard to express just how powerful of a phrase this is: “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” Because yes, God did provide in that moment, a substitute for Abraham’s son, but it was really a foreshadowing of so much more...of all the ways that on that very mountain, God would one day provide for humanity. A thousand years later it was on that very mountain that the temple would be built, and God would come down to meet with his people and wash away their sins. At two thousand years later, it would be on that very mountain that God’s one and only son would carry the wood of his own sacrifice, that Jesus would carry the cross to the place of the skull, and there would be no ram, there would be no substitute, rather, Jesus would become the substitute for all of us. He would die on the cross for our sins. And then it would be said, once and for all, on the Mountain of the Lord, it has been provided.

What a faithful God?! Through sending his Son to the earth, to live a perfect life, to die on the cross for our sins, he has kept all of his promises. (2 Corinthians 1:20-20) For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And God’s faithfulness reveals his glory! Sometimes when we ask to see God’s glory, instead of taking us to a place of transcendent intellectualism, or instead of taking us to a place of passionate worship, he takes us down the halls of history, world history, salvation history, and personal history, and he shows us how he has been faithful again and again and again and again! What a wonderful God. What trust-worthy God, what a loving, and sacrificial, and worthy-of-worship God.

As we go through life, we have to make it a point to remember God’s faithfulness and use his faithfulness as an anchor in the storms of life. We may not know what he’s doing at the moment, but we know what he has done! We may not know how this story is going to play out, but we can look in the past and see how he has kept every one of his promises, and we can know with confidence he will come through again.

Several times throughout the Bible, when people witnessed the faithfulness of God, they set up markers to commemorate his faithfulness. In the book of Joshua, when God parted the Jordan river for the entire community to walk through, listen to what we read:

(Joshua 4:4-7) 4 “So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

God told them to pick up twelve large stones from the bed of the river and take them with them and keep them as a sign, so that, anytime they begin to doubt the faithfulness of God in the future they can look back and say, “Remember that time he cut off the flow of the largest river in the entire region. Oh yeah. God is faithful. He’s always kept his promises in the past, he’ll keep them again today. Another time, in the book of 1 Samuel, God’s people were in the midst of a very long war with the Philistines. God provided a decisive victory, and after he did we read this:

(1 Samuel 7:12) “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

He set up a stone as a reminder...whenever we look back on our lives, we can see that God was there, that God has been faithful. He has kept every promise he’s ever made. And as we are reminded of the faithfulness of God in the past, we should find strength and confidence that God will be faithful again today, and tomorrow and the day after that, and the day after that.

I have set those up in my life! Many of you know this part of our story, but before Keren and I had children we went through two miscarriages. So when we found out we were pregnant a third time, instead of having the normal feelings of excitement and hope, we felt fear and anxiety. Are we just going to have to say goodbye and experience heartbreak and mourning again? Within days of finding out Keren was pregnant, the elders of our church and their wives happened to be at our house for a meeting. We shared the news with them, they knew that part of our story, so they gathered around us and prayed for us. I could be wrong, and I don’t know how to explain it, but I felt God speak to me during that prayer and say 40 weeks. 40 weeks. You are going to make it to 40 weeks. I held that word with open hands, but Keren not only went full-term, her due date was Dec 17. And on Dec 17, at exactly noon, while she happened to be shopping in a store called Buy-Buy Baby, which basically shares a parking lot with the hospital we

were set to deliver at, Keren's water broke and she went into labor. Whenever I look at my son, I remember the faithfulness of God.

I remember a time 8 and a half years ago when good friends and mentors to Keren and I approached us and told us they felt God was calling us to step into a new ministry. We didn't think they were right, but all four of us prayed for 90 days and felt God really was calling us to something new. On day 91, The Creek called and said they were looking for a new pastor and asked if we were open to a discussion. When I came to this church, I knew God was unwaveringly faithful in leading us to this place, so he will be unwaveringly faithful in guiding us each step of the way.

After being at this church for a year, I felt God putting some very specific needs on my heart for this congregation. And to be honest, some of them were going to cost a lot! I was daunted and intimidated by the sheer amount of the money that was needed. In the middle of the day, I was in my office and I felt God call me to get up from my desk, to leave my office and start to pray for a miraculous provision. I have never prayed that sort of prayer before. But I'm doing what I felt God was calling me to do: praying for a miraculous provision. The next day, *the very next day*, I met someone for breakfast. We just had a normal conversation, I didn't mention any needs at the church, I didn't mention any prayers from the day before, just a regular meeting. At the end of the meeting, he handed me a check made out to the church for \$100,000. I had to count those zeros a few times to make sure I wasn't seeing things. Whenever I look at the unbelievable ways God has blessed and provided for this church, I see his faithfulness. I am reminded of his constant goodness.

We have to set up these pillars to remember that he is good, and that he always comes through.