

# Sermon Notes



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TIn the Orchard of God's Grace – Faithfulness

Psalm 37:1-11

- When I contacted ministers and asked them to co-preach with me during this series, I was surprised at the subjects they chose first. They were not easy subjects, but they held meaning for the ministers who chose them. I was more surprised by the subject no one took: faithfulness.
- Upon further reflection, it became easier to me to see why faithfulness might be a tricky subject. Here at OSHC we are known for being honest and open about every subject, even those that most churches consider closed and sacrosanct. When we speak of faithfulness, we are generally speaking about three different things: the faithfulness of God, our faithfulness to God, and our faithfulness to each other.
- To use a relationship phrase: it's complicated.
- To make it even more complicated, the Bible itself shows us that it was common to question God about His faithfulness. Go with me to Psalm 89 (brief comments about 88). I want everyone who struggles with prayer or who struggles with promises of God to pay close attention. You are not alone, and you are not sinning by having these questions.
- Psalm 89:1-29. That sounds great, doesn't it? Amazing! And then...we keep reading. Psalm 89:30-37. Not quite as good but still great. Psalm 89:38-51. Wow. That took a turn. Is David alone or have you experienced similar turns in your life?
- I often see Jeremiah 29:11 on placards, wall hangings, and woven into songs. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." That was said to Jeremiah and through Jeremiah. He included it in a letter he sent to those exiled in Babylon. He was not in Babylon but was trapped in Jerusalem with a king and administration that considered him a problem and with false prophets attacking him.
- Jeremiah never had a good day at work in his life. He prophesied in Jerusalem that Babylon was going to take them because of their unfaithfulness. For that, he was thrown into a muddy cistern and left to die. The Babylonians came and took the city along with about 25% of its population.
- Later, Jeremiah was taken to Egypt and is lost to history. He was never restored. He never prospered nor was he given hope and a future. The people who received his letter did not receive the promises, either. They died, and it was after 70 years of captivity that they were allowed to return. Scholars differ on how many actually returned, but it is known that the majority stayed in Babylon.
- I say this to warn us that God's plans are millennia long and we should not assume that promises given to others in certain circumstances belong to us. The promise given through Jeremiah to those in captivity does not belong to us and cannot be claimed by us when we are looking for a new job, a new spouse, or for a way out of illness.
- I once saw and purchased a book entitled "All the Promises of God." It enjoyed having it, but worried that those reading it might think the promises were to them. Taken out of context, we can place expectations on God and hold Him to promises He never made to us. If we don't understand this, we might crash and live in Psalm 88, as I have done more than once in my life.
- Look at Psalm 36:5-10. God absolutely is faithful and righteous. He absolutely preserves man and beast...until He does not. Do you see and understand? We have not been promised unending joy and immortality in this life, but every single day and every single pleasure in the day, every morsel of food, every drink of cool water, and every comfort, every pleasure comes from God.

- And yet, look again at Psalm 36:10. The Psalmist asks God to keep it up. Why? The first portion of the psalm is a complaint against a wicked man or group who is coming up against David. How do we square this circle? Look at John 16:33. "I have told you these things so that, in me, you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world."
- Our hope in the faithfulness of God is very similar to our faith – not by sight. God is working with us, but when the situations change, His path changes. He never fails to be faithful or righteous, but we need to watch carefully to whom the promises are made and what the words actually mean. In 2nd Samuel 7:16, God promises through Samuel that David's house and kingdom and throne would be established forever...but it failed within a few generations.
- As in our study on punishment after life, we need to remember that "eternal" didn't mean to them what it means to us. It meant "until it is done." Just as in Psalm 36, God preserves us and our lives until He does not. Our response? As difficult as it is, we need to see what the Psalmist said in 89:52. He praises the Lord anyway. (Bobby Hampton uses the phrase daily)
- What does that look like? Read Hebrews 10:22-25 and then take time today to read Hebrews 11:1-12:3 to see what it looks like to have faith in God despite what is happening to you and around you. He never said it would be easy. (and if it is for you, do not judge those for whom it is not)
- It is in those chapters and in scores of stories that we learn what faithfulness looks like in us. It is obedience until death. We don't get the crown in this life; we get it in the next.
- The last aspect of faithfulness is being faithful to each other. God intends for us to live up to our promises as much as we can. James tells us that we should confess our faults to each other...but how safe is that? One of the great problems among church leaders is that there is no safe place to speak. Promises are too easy to break. What is the solution?
- Be very, very careful about what you promise. Keep as many promises as you can. When you cannot keep them, own up to it and see what can be done to restore trust. If you made a promise and it has turned out to be damaging to you, admit it. More than a few have told me that their church is killing them spiritually and emotionally, but they made promises to be there and to help in this or that ministry. It may be that you need to reconsider that promise and let it go. Only you and God can figure that out and if you make the wrong decision, you are still covered by the grace of God.
- Give yourself time. Give yourself grace. This is an orchard, and growth takes a lot of time. No one approaches perfection in this life. That is why we have a savior who has made very specific promises to us about Who He is and about what love will do for all of us. Those promises are directed at all humankind and will never end, for He is faithful who promised.