

GREAT IS THY *Faithfulness* ...BUT WHAT ABOUT US?

One of the most comforting aspects of God's character and nature is that He is so very "faithful" to us. There is a timeless and beloved hymn that we every believer is familiar with that expresses this in a very clear and concise manner. Below is the first verse and chorus of "Great is Thy faithfulness." As you read it I know the melody pops up within you. So, go ahead. Sing it out unto the Lord!!!

*"Great is Thy faithfulness
O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not
Thy compassions they fail not
As Thou hast been
Thou forever will be
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me"*
- Thomas Chisholm (1925)

The hymn above was written by a man who considered himself "just an ordinary man." Yet, this "ordinary man" recognized that throughout his "ordinary life" God was so very, very "extraordinarily" faithful to him. This "ordinary man" wrote over 1200 poems and hymns unto His faithful God.

We read in this song, as well as countless scriptures, that God was, is and always will be a faithful God. It is who He is. The definition of God's faithfulness embodies the following attributes as found in the Hebrew words used in the Jewish scriptures. They imply and refer to the fact that He is steadfast, unchangeable and immovable in all His ways including His enduring mercies and love towards His people and to all of creation. There is a "fidelity" within Him which tells us that He will always remain faithful to His children. He does not wish to share us with anyone or anything else. We are totally His and He desires to be the priority of our heart. The Hebrew understanding of God's faithfulness comes from the prime root word "*aman*" which means to support, confirm, uphold, and to nourish. It goes on to tell us that God establishes His ways and He will not move from them nor will He change His ways. He is morally true and pure.

An interesting aspect concerning God's faithfulness is that in the prime root meaning of the word "faithfulness" is the aspect of "believing" in others. This is interesting because we are taught that we are to "believe" in God. Yet, God chooses to "believe" in His people. He chooses to "believe the best" towards us.

As we look into the characteristics of the term "faithfulness" most of us are very quick in declaring that God is so faithful to His people. As mentioned previously, there are numerous hymns, worship songs, writings, etc. that point out this fact and this truth. That is what has prompted me to think more on this issue. Just recently I was listening to the radio and heard a song that was declaring God's faithfulness and that the individual singing also sang that they were in God's heart. I immediately blurted out as I was listening, "Yes,

God is faithful to me and I am in His heart, but am I faithful to Him and is He in my heart." I suddenly realized that that was the real and more important issue for me, as well as everyone else.

The simple facts are that God was, is and always will be faithful. That is who He is. Every person who ever lived was formed and framed within His heart way before they were ever born. They were always in His heart. God knows every individual before they were ever born. Psalm 139:14-16 reveals this as it states, *"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."*

God is faithful. That is who He is. He is faithful to both the just and the unjust. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 5:45, *"...That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."* Jesus was speaking on loving others as He uses this saying to describe the love and faithfulness of the Father towards all of His creation. Unfortunately, the unjust do not recognize or acknowledge that fact. God has shown and continues to show His faithfulness and longsuffering to every person that has ever walked upon the face of the earth - from Adam until now. How do I know this? Simple - because Man is still here. The Father desires that no one perish. (2Peter 3:9)

Understanding and being in absolute agreement with the above, leads me back to my initial reaction to the song I was listening to. I know He is faithful and I am in His heart but are we faithful to Him and is He in our heart? Some may say I'm "splitting hairs" and that it is the same thing. I'm not too sure about that. This "faithfulness" and "heart" thing seems to me to be a two street. Let's see...

As we look into this more we see that the Jewish scriptures delve into the faithfulness of God in a great way whereas in the New Testament the scriptures implore the believer to live a lifestyle of faithfulness to their God. The definition in the New Testament concerning "faithfulness" points the believer to a lifestyle of obedience and yielding to the ways of God. It points the believer to recognize that God is totally worthy of all of our trust and that He is the only One we are to truly rely on. To me it is saying that, in the Jewish scriptures we see God revealing who He is and all His characteristics, however, because of the separation caused by sin, no one was truly able to respond fully to His faithfulness in being totally faithful to Him. Through the Gospel accounts, we read how Jesus role modeled and expressed to the fullest: 1) What the faithfulness of God was and is to His most prized creation and 2) How we now, as His most prized creation are to respond to God's faithfulness by being faithful to Him in every aspect of our lives.

Jesus role modeled for us the highest aspects of what it truly means to live a life of total faithfulness unto the Father. Notice that I wrote, "...unto Him." I believe living a lifestyle of faithfulness "unto" the Lord is an act of true worship. The Father is seeking "true worshippers." (John 4:24) I believe we can all agree upon the fact that Jesus was a worshipper and for that matter the epitome of a "true worshipper." Yet, through the Gospel accounts we never read of Jesus "leading others in worship songs" and we never read of Him ever playing an instrument. The only time we ever read of Jesus possibly "singing" was at the conclusion of the Seder meal at the Last Supper with His disciples. Hmmm.... Could this possibly mean that being a "true worshipper" does not have much to do with music, song or dance?

So what did Jesus role model for us as being the epitome of a "true worshipper?" Remember, true worship is always unto God. Yes, Jesus loved the world and died for us. Yes, He expressed love, forgiveness and countless other characteristics and attributes of God as He represented God as His beloved Son here on the earth. Jesus expressed, revealed and lived out all of God's characteristics to us because He was God and revealed God to us in a "tangible" way as the Son of God.

As a man (the Son of Man), Jesus role modeled what the lifestyle of a true worshipper of God should look like. He revealed what a lifestyle of “true worship” unto the Lord our God should entail and be continually expressing. He revealed a lifestyle which included obedience to the ways and precepts of God. He revealed a lifestyle of total surrender to the will and purposes of God. He revealed a total absence of any thing that had to do with self, self centeredness and self righteousness. Most of all, He expressed a lifestyle of total faithfulness and loyalty to Father, God and with no one else or nothing else.

The enemy tried very hard to put Jesus’ faithfulness and loyalty to the test. We see this in the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness as well as countless times throughout His life. The temptation to not follow God’s plan was so great in the Garden that He sweat “as if it were great drops of blood.” Even while on the cross He was tempted to betray the will of the Father by the mocking of the crowd to “come down from that cross and we will believe.” Of course we know they wouldn’t but it was still a temptation to disobey and betray the Father’s plan.

It is interesting to note that Jesus uses the term “faithful” in His teaching over 11 times. In one of His last parables to His disciples just prior to His arrest, the “Parable of the Talents,” we see Jesus teaching about being faithful unto the Father. The words spoken to the ones who had the correct attitude of heart towards God and the desire for His Kingdom to grow will hear, “...*Well done, **good and faithful servant**; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of **your lord**.*” (Matthew 25:21)

Let’s face it, being faithful and remaining loyal and obedient to the Father and His commandments can at times be difficult. My brothers and sisters, unfortunately in these end times it will seem to get even more difficult to remain totally faithful unto the Lord. Jesus, in His letter to the Church in Smyrna which was about to experience terrible trials and persecutions, exhorts them to “remain faithful” even when faced with death concerning their belief in Him and the Father.

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus tells us what the “reward” will be for remaining faithful and obedient to Him and the Father as He states, “***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***” The Church at Smyrna had been faithful and Jesus promised if they would ***remain faithful*** He would reward them with “the crown of life.” This “crown of life” obviously refers to “eternal life” with the Father and Jesus. The way it is written and the way Jesus phrases it tells us that they would have to make a choice. The question is, “What would they do when presented with the choice of remaining faithful when the time came?” Hmmm....

James expresses a similar promise from the Father as he states, “*Blessed is the man who endures temptation (trial), for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*” (James 1:12). Jesus and James are both referring to what the ultimate action of being committed to living a lifestyle of faithfulness unto the Lord may bring forth - martyrdom. Do you and I have that kind of commitment to being faithful unto Him? This is the ultimate heart of the true worshipper of the Lord. This is the heart of the worshipper to whom God is seeking after.

The other aspect of my initial question was the part that, yes, as we previously discussed, we are in His heart but is He in my heart? It may surprise us to learn that there is only one scripture that specifically refers to Jesus “living in a person's heart.” In Ephesians 3:17, Paul prays that believers would be “...*strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***” There is a more accurate understanding of what happens when we accept and believe in all that Jesus had done for us and we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord. It is the Holy Spirit that truly comes into our “inner being” and regenerates what was a spirit that is “dead to God” and makes us our spirit “born anew” into a new creation who is now “alive in Christ.”

This simply means that now we are a child of God and we have the ability to have a true relationship with our loving Father, God. So yes, symbolically speaking and colloquially speaking Jesus is “in my heart.” But in spiritual reality, it is the Holy Spirit who actually now dwells and lives within the believer because of the Blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all unrighteousness and paves the way for the Holy Spirit to come and dwell within. The Holy Spirit is God. The Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are One God – the trinity, the three in one God. Therefore, as a believer God (the total essence of who He is) is now found to be within the born again child of God. This, of course, occurs only if the individual truly believes and accepts Jesus as their Lord (their absolute, supreme and final authority within their life) and their Savior (their redeemer and deliverer from what the wages of their sin would be – eternal death and separation from God).

Previously, in this essay, I wrote that a part of the definition of God’s faithfulness to His creation was that He chooses to “believe” in us. He chooses to believe the best concerning us. In this aspect of God’s character of faithfulness we see that God actually “places His trust” in His people. He is choosing to believe and trust His people, individually and as a whole, to do as His Word commands us to do. He trusts His people to follow after and live the lifestyle that Jesus role modeled as the epitome of being a true worshipper. This means that the true believer, the true worshipper, will remain faithful, even unto death. We live this lifestyle with the attitude of heart as the true worshipper that the Father delights in.

We see the work of the enemy as He has doggedly gone after this character trait of “faithfulness” in the lives of God’s people. The Jewish scriptures are full of examples for us to learn from. It speaks of their failures and mistakes in not being faithful to the God who was always consistently faithful them. In today’s Body of Christ we see this attack on fidelity and faithfulness, as well. We see it in marriage as countless spouses are unfaithful to their spouse and commit adultery. We see this in business and the political realm. We see it in every aspect of life. We are seeing an increase of self, selfishness and self centeredness in the lives of God’s people. We are coming to the place as it was in the time of Judges when God’s people were doing things that seemed right in their own eyes instead of what is right in the eyes of God. (Judges 21:25)

The more unfortunate thing is that leadership within the Body of Christ for the most part is condoning and affirming these failures in “fidelity and faithfulness” under the guise of “grace.” It is like the “blind leading the blind.” Unfortunately, as Jesus points out, they will both wind up in the ditch. (Luke 6:39) If we, as the Body of Christ, can turn a blind eye and do these things and condone these things to each other who we do see, how much easier to be unfaithful in the things of God to our God whom we do not see. Hmmm.....

Obedience, surrender, faithfulness have all become “taboo” words these days within the Body of Christ. These are difficult words. They are words of sacrificial living which characterizes a life that is totally not its own. It means living a lifestyle of fidelity to only “One God” – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. There is nothing of self but rather it is all about being selfless in our lives towards God and towards those that are around us – not just our fellow brothers and sisters but also to the lost and unsaved. This is what Jesus did. He remained faithful even to the cross for a world that hated and despised Him. Yet, He remained faithful to the Father in every way.

We are in the “season of correction.” The Father is giving us an opportunity to repent from our lack of fidelity and faithfulness unto Him and turn back towards the lifestyle that Jesus role modeled. It is the lifestyle of a true worshipper who worships the Father in Spirit and Truth, not simply in song and dance. Will we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us in this hour as we approach the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? Yes Lord, great is your faithfulness to us. I pray that we as your people return and remain faithful unto you – even unto death.