

The Second World War had just begun when William Dobbie received a call from General Edmund Ironside. Would retired general Dobbie consider helping the war effort by taking the position of governor of Malta? Dobbie had every reason to decline. After all, he had served in the First World War with distinction. And then he was put in charge of the peace keeping in the Holy Land – an almost impossible task. When he reached the age of 60, he decided that it was time to retire. He had earned his stripes as a lieutenant-general. But now he received this call to consider the governorship of Malta. This was really a nominal position, Dobbie thought, for Malta was just a small island out in the Mediterranean Sea. What could possibly happen out there? As a devout Christian since he was 14 years of age, Dobbie prayed about the decision and then accepted his part in this new war effort. Little did he know how quickly his life would change.

At that time, Great Britain stood alone in the war effort against Germany, France having already fallen. Malta was a small island only 60 miles from Sicily - 1,000 miles from the nearest friendly base in Gibraltar. Nobody thought too much about it until Italy joined the war as an ally of Germany. Then, all of a sudden, Malta lying not too far from the coast of Italy was of the most strategic importance. And here was newly arrived William Dobbie - with 5 weak battalions, 16 obsolete aircraft guns, and one battleship sitting in his harbor. When it was learned that Italy had entered the war, General Ironside sent a telegram to Dobbie from England. All it said was *Deut. 3:22: Ye shall not fear them; for the Lord your God, He shall fight for you.*

General Dobbie got busy organizing defense measures for the 270,000 people on his crowded island. Normally, the governor would have tried to evacuate at least the women and children, but in this case, it was impossible. Old tunnels were renovated and 13 miles of new ones were dug. Rationing measures were instituted. Medical relief centers were established. No sooner had Dobbie quickly made his preparations than the inevitable bombing raids began.

During a 2 year period, over 2,000 bombing raids were made on this tiny island. 37,000 buildings were completely destroyed. The N.Y Times said, *It is evident that the Germans are prepared to face almost any losses in their effort to reduce Malta to impotence.* Yet, amazingly, General Dobbie and his people hung in there. In the end, mostly because of Dobbie's excellent precautionary measures, less than 1/2 of 1% of the people on this crowded island were killed by the bombing raids. On the other hand, hundreds of the

enemies planes were shot down - nearly 100 planes were shot down in a single month. And more amazing than this was the fact that every time there was a raid, General Dobbie would climb to the roof of his house to survey the damage being done to his charge. As the people peaked out from their shelters, they would see the General standing in the open - yet he was never injured during the entire conflict. It was the courage and example of William Dobbie that provided the model for the entire nation of England when she suffered those German bombing raids later in the war.

When General William Dobbie returned to England after his ordeal in Malta was over, he was asked how he was able to sustain his morale during such hopeless and bleak times. He spoke of his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and his trust in a Faithful God who could be trusted in any circumstance of life. He said, *Often I have grieved and disappointed God. And yet, through it all, I am amazed at His forbearance and kindness to me. These thoughts create an intense feeling of gratitude to the One who has stood by me in spite of all. I desire to emphasize, especially to the rising generation, that it is a practical and intensely real thing to let Christ come into one's life, and today, as ever before, it is no vain thing to trust in the living God.*

History is filled with examples of people who have risen to levels of almost superhuman courage on the foundation of their belief and trust in the faithfulness of God. When someone really knows God and His divine character, and when someone experiences a personal relationship with Him, there is an inner strength and confidence and courage that can develop in his or her life that defies rational explanation.

Moses had experienced such a phenomenon in his life. It would not have been a natural desire of any person in Moses' day to threaten the Pharaoh of Egypt to his face. Such a person would have undoubtedly expected immediate death. But Moses had done just that. Not only once, but again and again and again as God had executed those horrible plagues upon Egypt. And God had honored His word to Moses time and time again. It's no wonder that as Moses was leading the Israelites in the singing this great song of praise to God in celebration for all that He had done, he speaks of the faithful Lord as his 7th picture of God.

We have been studying 8 pictures of the Lord from this great song of praise found in Exodus 15. We come this morning to the 7th picture found in verse 17. And what an appropriate picture this is for us to look at on this Memorial Day weekend. For on this weekend we not only remember the sacrifices of so many who have paid the ultimate price for the freedoms that we enjoy, but we also acknowledge the faithfulness of God who has blessed us with our freedoms and liberties. Notice this picture of the faithful Lord with me as I read verse 17 for you.

*You (the Lord) will bring them (the Israelites) in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. (Exodus 15:17)*

I would invite you to look at 3 ways in which God proved himself to be the Faithful Lord as seen here in this verse.

1. First, note with me that God is faithful in His **person**. Moses begins with the personal pronoun *you*. No less than 5 times in this single verse, Moses uses a personal pronoun in reference to God in addition to his calling Him Lord twice. The God that Moses knew was a personal God. He was not just a mere force of nature. He was a being with whom Moses had communicated and fellowshiped. And that God was a faithful God - He was faithful in his person.

There are 2 attributes of God that go hand in hand with His faithfulness. One is God's immutability. To be immutable means to never change. When we speak of God's immutability, we mean that God never changes in his being or person.

\*God spoke through his prophet Malachi those words recorded in Mal. 3:6: *I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*

\*The Apostle James spoke of the immutability of God when he writes as recorded in James 1:17, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

\*The author of Hebrews wrote of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8)*

The immutability of God is foundational for our realizing his faithfulness. For God's person and character do not vacillate. He never changes. He remains the same. Therefore, He can be trusted to be faithful.

The other attribute of God that is connected with his faithfulness is His perfection. God is perfect in his person and all that He does. And perfection, by definition, demands immutability. Now we often use the term *perfect* lightly in a relative sense. But if something is absolutely perfect, it cannot change. If it were to change, it would either have to get better or worse. If it got better, it couldn't have been perfect before. If it got worse, it wouldn't still be perfect. So it should not surprise us that the Bible also speaks of God's perfection in his person and ways.

\*2 Sam. 22:31: *As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him.*

\*Deut. 32:3,4: *I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God. He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.*

\*So God is perfect in his character and in his actions. His ways and his words are perfect.

\*Now because God is immutable and perfect, He can be fully trusted to be faithful in all that He does. In other words, you can count on God. He is consistent. He will always act in accordance with his righteous and loving character.

There is nothing quite as frustrating as having a human relationship with someone who is not faithful is there? And to some extent, this is what makes our human relationships so difficult, for none of us are perfect and immutable as God is. But that friend who is so changing and vacillating. You never know what to expect. He can come in with a big smile on his face on top of the world, or with a frown and a growl because he's in the dumps. And it makes life difficult for you don't know what to expect and how to respond.

God's is faithful in his person. He is faithful because He is both immutable and perfect. Therefore, we can always trust Him. When we have our quiet time with the Lord and bow our heads in prayer, we don't have to fear that he is having a bad day and will ignore our requests. Rather we can be confident that He is just as ready and willing to have a personal relationship with us today as He was yesterday and will be tomorrow.

2. In the second place, God is faithful in His **providence**.

\*Moses speaks of God planting His people on the mountain of his inheritance. This reminds us of the fact that God is faithful in his providential watchcare over his creation.

There are many people today who are wringing their hands in anxiety and worry because they fear what is going to happen on this planet earth. We are in the midst of an ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. In just over a month now since the offshore drilling rig exploded on April 20 killing 11 workers, there has been some 7 million gallons of oil by the most conservative tallies spewed out in the Gulf waters from the broken oil line a mile beneath the surface. BP has been frantically trying to find a way to stop the flow. Hopefully this most recent "top kill" attempt where mud has been injected into the leak to temporarily stop the oil flow until it can be sealed up with cement will work until the relief well can be finished sometime in August to permanently solve this problem. But already millions of people's lives have been altered. Fishing off the Gulf coast has been halted putting thousands of fishermen out of work. Tourism has been crippled affecting restaurants and motels. Grimy oil is beginning to coat beaches and marshes of Louisiana. Many residents feel that the end of their world has come. But even in the midst of man-made disasters, God remains faithful. It was just a decade ago that the Exxon Valdez oil tanker dumped over 10 million gallons of oil off the coast of Alaska. Yet God's creating of nature with a natural cleanup mechanism has been so effective that there isn't a trace of that ecological disaster left up there in our 50<sup>th</sup> state. God is a faithful

God. Now this doesn't mean that we should take his faithfulness for granted. He has given us the job of taking care of this earth as his human creation. We should do everything in our power to protect the earth's environment and use its resources that he has provided for us to their fullest advantage. But even when we fail, God remains faithful. God delights in taking apparent disasters and turning them into blessings so that he might receive greater glory. Now we can understand why those who don't believe in a personal God are consumed with anxiety about the future of the earth. It really shouldn't surprise us that they are wringing their hands in despair. After all, they have been preaching for several generations now that the universe came about by pure chance through the process of evolution without any divine guidance. Belief in chaotic chance doesn't give much confidence and assurance for the future, does it? For chance happenings cannot be trusted. Chance happenings are not faithful.

The Bible clearly tells us why we have the weather patterns that we have. God promised to Noah in Genesis 8:22: *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.*

\*Now many events have occurred since God uttered those words to Noah thousands of years ago.

\*Empires have risen and fallen - Babylon, Medes and Persians, Greece, Rome

\*Wars have been waged and fought - even great worldwide wars

\*Civilizations have come and gone - the world endured the intellectual darkness and ignorance of the Middle Ages and the enlightenment of the renaissance and reformation

\*The basic way of life has even changed many times for people living on the earth. We have moved from an agriculturally based economy to an industrial based economy to a technologically based economy. We have moved from donkey power to steam power to combustible engine power to laser and nuclear power.

\*But there has never been a day on earth since Noah lived when the sun didn't rise in the sky in the morning and set in the evening.

\*There has never been a year when the seasons refused to come in their time.

\*The reason for this is the simple fact that God is faithful in His providence. And that brings us to our third point.

3. God is faithful in His **promises**. Moses sang, *You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance- the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.*

\*Where would Moses have gotten such an outlandish idea as this - that he should give to these 3-4

million slaves the idea that they should move into this land called Canaan and make it their home? Moses got that idea from God, didn't he? God had called Abram from his homeland of Ur in the Mesopotamian region. And God had lead Abram to this narrow land between and Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. And then God had promised to give that land to Abraham and to his descendants. Because God is faithful in his promises, Moses some 700 years after that original promise had been given was still remembering it. And not only did he remember it, but Moses quotes it as if it were already a done deal. *You will bring them in and plant them.* There is no hesitation here. There is no hint of doubt. Moses believed the promises of God as if they were already history, because He knew a God who was faithful in his person and providence, and therefore, faithful in his promises.

Now as we grow in our relationship with the person of God, and as we continually experience the providence of God, we also grow in our confidence trusting the promises of God. God's word is true. We can rest in the assurance that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved - born again into the family of God. We can know that the One who has begun this good work of salvation in us will not rest until it is fully completed. We can have the assurance that God will never leave us nor forsake us; that He will always provide for our needs. We can come to the Lord in times of trouble knowing that He will hear and answer our prayers and that He will provide His supernatural strength for us. These are all promises that God has given to us. And these promises are good and true because God is a faithful God.

But we must remember that God has not only told us the best, He also has not withheld from us the worst. God has warned us of the danger of straying from His paths of righteousness. God has even told us of a place of eternal separation from Him for those who refuse His free gift of salvation through His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And just as all of God's good promises are true because He is a faithful God, so all of His warnings are likewise true - because of His faithfulness, He cannot lie.

God desires for His people to become more and more like Him as they grow in their knowledge and relationship with Him. So if we are members of God's family, and if we are growing in our relationship with Him, we too should be becoming more and more faithful in our person and character, in the providence and administration of our little worlds of influence that God has given to us, and in our word - the promises that we make to one another.

One of the best loved and most widely published books in all of human history is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this book, Bunyan wrote of a Christian's journey through life using allegory as his poetic medium. At one stage of Christian's life, he is tempted to leave the main highway and follow another path. The alternate route seems much easier at first, but it soon leads him into the territory of a giant named

Despair who owns Doubting Castle. Eventually, Christian is captured by Giant Despair and thrown into a dungeon in the basement of Doubting Castle. The Giant then advises Christian to just kill himself, saying that it is no use for him to even think about continuing on his journey. As Christian sits there in the cold, damp, filthy dungeon, he becomes so depressed that he thinks Giant Despair's advice is best. But then Christian's companion named Hope begins to speak. Hope reminds Christian of former victories. Hope reminds Christian of other times when he had been in difficult straights, when God had gotten him out. So it was about midnight on Saturday night that Hope and Christian begin to pray, and they continued in prayer all the way through the night until the dawn of morning. As the sun began to shine into the small window of that dungeon cell, Christian broke out into an impassioned speech. *What a fool I am thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well be at liberty. I have a key in my bosom called Promise that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in doubting castle.* Hope joins in the encouragement. *That's good news. Good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom and try.* As soon as Christian tries the key called Promise in the lock, the jail doors spring open and he and his companion, Hope, are able to escape.

Jesus never promised a care-free life to his followers. He never promised that life would always be easy. On the contrary, Jesus told his disciples that in this world they would have troubles and persecutions and trials. And it is natural that some of these trials would bring despair and depression into the hearts of even the strongest Christians. If Moses had his down times - as he did - why shouldn't we? If Job and Abraham and David and Peter and Paul had their down times, why shouldn't we? If even our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ had his moments of trials and discouragement, why shouldn't we?

It is at times like these that we must remember the key that God has given to each of us to unlock the dungeon of doubting castle. That key is called Promise. The promise of a faithful God. A God who is faithful in his person, faithful in his providence and faithful in his promises. As we remind ourselves of his faithful promises to us, our spirits become liberated and our hearts are filled with the joy of the Lord once again.

Are you discouraged this morning? Perhaps you need to reach into your pocket and pull out that key called Promise right now.