

"THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD"

TEXT: "...he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself"
II Timothy 2:13

"Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?"
Genesis 18:25

INTRODUCTION These two verses, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, widely separated in time, speak the same word to all time and to all people. "God abideth faithful" said Paul. "He cannot be false to himself". And far back in the human story when the race was younger, Abraham stood up under the canopy of the eastern sky and, baffled as he was by the inconsistency of human character, breathed out his trust in Divine character: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

DEVELOPMENT OF THEME One day not too long ago, according to a report in the newspapers, the city of London experienced a ten minute period of panic. A thick belt of dense, black darkness wrapped itself around the city in mid-afternoon, mystifying millions of people and driving the frightened birds to the shelter of their roosts. Freakish and unpredicted, the cloud of darkness descended, stayed only ten minutes and then disappeared with the swiftness and suddenness with which it had come. But while it lasted, one of the world's biggest cities experienced a near mass panic. Women screamed in the streets, others fell to their knees on the sidewalk and prayed, other hysterical folk shouted, "The end of the world has come". A meteorologist said, "There has never been anything like it in my lifetime". And then he went on to explain calmly and factually the freakish phenomenon as an accumulation of London smoke imprisoned under a thick cloud of mass vapor.

That ten-minute panic in London provides a picture in miniature of the universal pandemonium that would break loose in all the world were it not for the steadying reality about which we are speaking, in which every day we live and move and take so much for granted - that eternal steadiness at the heart of things which the Hebrews called, "the faithfulness of God".

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD Thumb through a concordance and you will discover it is a favorite theme of the Bible. It sings through its pages like the recurring melody in a symphony, over and over - "the faithfulness of God". It is the dominant theme of the psalms, the unwavering conviction of the prophets, the underlying assumption of all that Jesus taught about the Father's care. In so many places across the pages of the Bible, you find someone talking about the faithfulness of God, saying to people: "Hold fast your faith without wavering, for He who has created you and called you is faithful". "He will not fail you. In Him is no darkness, no wavering, no shadow of turning. You can count on Him, trust Him, for he is God - faithful and dependable".

And when you stop to think about it, it is upon this basic premise and belief in Divine fidelity that our other beliefs rest. Our belief in providence, in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, our hope in immortality - all these are undergirded by our confidence in the consistent character of God.

WE SEE IT IN NATURE

We see this consistency and constancy that appears to be at the heart of all things in the dependability of nature, in the trustworthiness of creation's working system. There it is obvious and visible. The constancy of nature is the most visible expression of the abiding faithfulness of God. ~~Running all through the material world in which our lives are nourished is an unflinching fidelity that grows more impressive with the years.~~ As scientific learning advances, as more and more it probes into the inner secrets of the big and the little, it serves to establish more and more firmly the basic assumption in which all scientific inquiry begins, that in all its manifold variety this creation is a unity - intelligible, reliable, and utterly dependable. We ask it a question and it gives back a consistent answer. We put a seed in the soil and it responds without fail after its kind. We look for mathematical order in the heavens and we find it; we regulate our clocks by it. The astronomers predict an eclipse and there to the split second it happens. We seek for chemical order in the atom, and even there in a realm so small we cannot see it, we find an incredible reliability.

Now all this scientific probing and proving is comparatively new; it has come within the past three centuries. But to the religious man it has come with a heartening gladness because it confirms by precise demonstration the insights which existed first only as a faith. Long before science came with its proofs and demonstrations, men of faith were saying that the earth was indeed the Lord's and that back of its manifold ways was the abiding faithfulness of Him who willed it into being.

Have you ever thought of what it would mean to live in a world of chance, an erratic world where nothing could be trusted? If a pine tree overnight could change into a toadstool, or if Mars, instead of whirling away on its prescribed orbit, kept swinging out of its orbit, colliding with other bodies....what if there was no order there. In one of the old English "Readers", there was a story of a man in Topsy-Turvy Land. He walked around in Topsy-Turvy Land and found people digging down into the earth to harvest their apples because in that year the trees happened to grow down instead of up. He poured water from a kettle on the stove and it froze his fingers because heat that day happened not to be hot. He could never tell what might happen. Fire might boil water, today; freeze water tomorrow; gravity might pull upward this moment and sideways the next. So the man in Topsy-Turvy Land finally went mad, not knowing what to count on.

To me, this constancy of nature is one of the most visible expressions of this eternal steadiness that rests at the heart of life, that never fails, never breaks down. And these processes of nature through which His faithfulness finds expression are so constant and so reliable that we tend to take it all for granted forgetting the deeper faith and fact which they represent. The message of science and the message of the Bible are essentially the same at this point. They both declare that the world in which we live is not haphazard or chaotic, but trustworthy, law-abiding and backed by an abiding faithfulness that we can stand on.

MORAL CERTAINTY AND ETHICAL STABILITY

Now move up a bit to test the fidelity of God in the higher level of moral certainty and ethical stability. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God".

There's something in the moral order that holds steady in the midst of perpetual change. There's something here that is permanent - timeless, that doesn't budge, that can't be shaken. We need to be reminded of this from time to time for it does for man what the compass needle does for the little ships at sea - it provides man with a touch of celestial certainty which he can trust in and count on and be sure about.

A kind of queer uneasiness has come into modern life through these years of unprecedented, abnormal change. ~~The most marked~~ ^{ONE of} characteristic of our generation is uneasiness, uncertainty, ethical insecurity. To millions of people caught up in this whirlpool of change, nothing seems certain any more. "What is there to tie to?" they ask. Old solid patterns of life have been altered beyond recognition. Old ideas, once valid, are gone. Old social patterns once rigidly held by custom are gone. The unchanging East we once talked about is today the most changing part of the world. Old standards of morality, too, once held to be the truth, ~~the old rules of civilization,~~ are now everywhere questioned and in some lands abandoned.

In the play, "Green Pastures", the angel Gabriel is sent down to earth to investigate the havoc of Noah's flood. Returning to heaven, he reports: "Lord, there ain't nothin' fastened down there any more. Everythin' nailed down is comin' loose".

It does seem to us on occasion that everything is coming loose. The total effect of our swiftly changing time is to create the illusion that moral stability is an outworn idea, that nothing is fixed, nothing is permanent, nothing is certain but the certainty of change. People are saying there are no absolutes. That everything is relative.

Don't believe it. The moral order has not come loose. The Ten Commandments are still the Ten Commandments. The Sermon on the Mount hasn't budged an inch. The magnetic north is still there and the compass needle still points to it. Down underneath all of the outward confusion and change there is still the stability of the permanent. There are still some fixed, abiding realities which, like the everlastingness of God, go on from age to age, eternally the same.

Lloyd Douglas, author of the Robe, told how he loved, on occasions, to visit a little old man, who gave violin lessons. He had a studio, if it could be called that, a small room set in a long row of rooms where other music teachers taught. "I liked to drop in on him" Douglas said, "for he had a kind of down to earth wisdom that always refreshed me". "One morning I walked in and by

way of greeting, said, 'Well, what's the goodnews today?'"

Putting down his violin, stepping over to a tuning fork suspended from a silk cord, he struck it a smart blow with a padded mallet, and said, 'There is the good news for today. That my friend, is A. It was A all day yesterday. It will be A all day tomorrow, next week and for a thousand years. The soprano upstairs warbles off key. The tenor next door always flats his high ones, and the piano across the hall is out of tune. Noise all around me, noise, but that my friend is A".'

It will steady your soul to remember that. Some things remain constant in the midst of noise and change, not transient, not at the mercy of the popular vote. There are things that are timeless and permanent. You can tune your soul, your entire life by them. You can come back to them and confidently count on them. Through the Scriptures there runs this one note - like the melody of a symphony - the note that God is faithful.

It was this truth that the writer of the book of Hebrews was trying to express when standing in the midst of wars and bloodshed and revolution, when it seemed to him that everything solid was being swept away. He lifted his eyes and said: Jesus Christ - the same - yesterday, today and forever.

LET US PRAY We live in a world, O God, that is forever changing. Help us to see those things that do not change, and give us the courage to stand up for them, to speak out for them, and to tune our lives by them. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus - the same, yesterday, today and forever. Amen