

# Great Is Thy Faithfulness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] There's so many beautiful hymns, it's difficult for me to choose one favorite. Growing up, I played piano, organ for Sunday school, church services, and other special services.

At our Sunday evening service, members of the congregation chose the hymns by calling out the number of their favorite. So I spent hours and hours going through many hymnals so I would be able to play whatever was chosen.

Each hymn was a favorite of someone for their own special reason. They all also became special to me because of the people who chose them and the frequency with which we sang them.

Now I have a bookshelf full of hymn books, including one from Indonesia. Perhaps the favorite of most people was Amazing Grace. I love the power and beauty of that song.

But my personal favorite is Great Is Thy Faithfulness. Written around 1923, it's full of old English phrases, which can be easily updated.

[ 1 : 0 1 ] Each verse a promise from God to each of us. The third verse is my favorite. It goes like this. 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.

Good morning. Good morning. There are two scripture readings today, first of which comes from Lamentations 3, verses 19-24.

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. Because the Lord's great love we are not consumed. For his compassions never fail.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, the Lord is my portion. Therefore, I will wait for him.

The second is from Luke chapter 8, verses 22-25. One day Jesus said to his disciples, let us go over to the other side of the lake.

So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, Master, Master, we're going to drown. He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters. The storm subsided, and all was calm.

Where is your faith? He asked the disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.

[ 3 : 2 1 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. So let's pray together. Loving God, we are so amazed by grace this morning. Amazed by the ways in which you have poured yourself out on us afresh.

And now, Lord God, with our hearts open, please plant a seed in each of us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

So great is God's faithfulness. Now, as you heard us saying during the prayer time, that we have seen utter devastation in Hawaii this week.

That the fires displaced more than 11,000 people. It's estimated that they burned more than 2,000 acres, and the death toll continues to rise.

And we, while not familiar with wildfires in the same way, know what it's like to have times of devastation.

[ 4 : 28 ] We saw it during the Christmas blizzard. We saw it during the October surprise a few years ago. And, of course, we saw it during the mass shooting at Tops.

So we know what it's like to have horror and devastation hit us. Now, I'm putting us there because the challenge that a lot of times emerges in moments like this is that disciples, followers of Jesus, meaning well, will say things.

We'll see the people in those moments and we'll say things like, well, know that God is with you. That God can be trusted. That, and we've all seen the backlash against this phrase, is that, well, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Our challenge today is to keep those things from being simply cliches for us. To not have those just be empty words that we, as those who claim Jesus can stand on those promises and stand in those statements.

And our challenge is how do we make sure that we are there and that they come from us as real gestures of comfort, real testimonies of who we know our God to be.

[ 5 : 48 ] And as I said, not just simply empty cliches. So, I want to read you something because that's where we're going today. I want to read you a story.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's rule, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Babylon's king Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with his entire army.

He camped beside the city and built a siege wall around it. The city was under attack until King Zedekiah's eleventh year.

On the ninth day of the ninth month, the famine in the city got so bad that no food remained for the common people. Then the enemy broke into the city.

All the soldiers fled by night, using the gate between the two walls near the king's garden. The Chaldeans were surrounding the city, so the soldiers ran towards the desert plain.

[ 6 : 53 ] But the Chaldean army chased King Zedekiah and caught up with him in the Jericho plains. His entire army deserted him. So, the Chaldeans captured the king and brought him back to the Babylonian king, who was at Riblah.

There, his punishment was determined. Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered right before his eyes. Then he was blinded, put in bronze chains, and taken off to Babylon.

On the seventh day of the fifth month of the nineteenth year of Babylon's king Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, yet Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem.

He was the commander of the guard and official of the Babylonian king. He burned down the Lord's temple, the royal palace, and all of Jerusalem's houses.

He burned down every important building. That is the account of the fall of Jerusalem that takes place in 2 Kings. And that's an important episode in the life of the history of the nation of Israel.

[ 8 : 06 ] Now, the reason why I'm telling you that story is we talk about complete devastation. Someone who was a witness to that wrote the following. Without pity, the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob.

In his wrath, he has torn down the strongholds of daughter Judah. He has brought down her kingdom and its princes down to the ground with dishonor.

In fierce anger, he has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it.

Like an enemy, he has strung his bow. His right hand is ready. Like a foe, he has slain all those who were pleasing to the eye. He has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of daughter Zion.

Now, that sounds like somebody who's been pretty traumatized by what he's seen. And that makes a pretty sad assessment of how he feels God is at work in his life.

[ 9 : 17 ] But friends, the reason why I'm reading you these is because the person who just wrote that last thing is the person who wrote what you just heard Tucker read.

Hear it again. I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I will call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself the Lord is my portion. Therefore I will wait for him.

So our challenge is how do we get there? Because you heard me tell the story of what was happening all around him and the types of things this man was able to witness.

[ 10 : 25 ] We didn't even get into how the Babylonian army broke into the temple and broke apart these great pillars that were supposed to be symbols of God. Carried off all the riches and killed how many thousands of people.

What happened to the king was bad enough. And this man is a witness to all of that. Now whether he writes it during the actual siege or after is kind of inconsequential.

But he saw it. And then after knowing how devastating things were is still able to stand on God's promise.

Great is God's faithfulness. His mercies are new every morning. How do we get there? That's the road we're trying to travel.

How do we close that gap? Because as we said when somebody's house has burned down I don't know how many of you have seen some of this stuff on the news but the stories that some of these folks who have survived the fires in Hawaii are telling are just simply devastating.

[ 11 : 35 ] About being at home with a grandfather and then having literal minutes because you see the smoke on the hill and then just minutes later there's a lawn on fire next door and then you have to get out.

This is the sort of stuff people were dealing with. So making that leap bringing that out is our challenge.

I think our lesson is in that this writer knows what I like to nickname the God of the storm. See he understands that story that you heard in Luke today.

Now he may not have seen it the same way but at least he gets it. So most of us are familiar with that story of Jesus calming the storm. Heard it in some way whether you learned it in Sunday school or at least have some background in it right?

So but remember we got to set the stage for this because I think sometimes people kind of gloss over what's happening. So Jesus has had this really long pretty intense day and he and the disciples decided to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

[ 12 : 48 ] Now Jesus gets in the boat and as I said long day so he goes to sleep. But the thing that we often forget is as the storm kicks up you forget who's in the boat with him because the people in the boat with him were experienced fishermen who made their living on this lake for any number of years.

they're familiar with these storms they're familiar with these boats and they're familiar with this lake and the way the story is told is that they are starting to panic that this is too much for them and in the back of the boat is a sleeping Jesus.

So what's the point? the thing we got to remember that we often forget is that Jesus isn't afraid of the storm. We get afraid of the storm but Jesus is never afraid of the storm and when we remember that Jesus isn't afraid of the storm one of the things that we often have to remember is we need to stop going to God last and start going to God first because we start relying on our own experience we start trusting our own eyes we start trusting our own brains we start trusting our own hands and it doesn't work and then we decide well let me go wake up Jesus when in fact maybe going to Jesus first would have probably been a good idea and the challenge that comes from that is you see where the people's heads went right?

Remember that line in the story? Hey Jesus don't you care we about to drown? Jesus isn't afraid of the storm but think about your own situations those times when the storm in your life was raging those times when you were at the end of your road the end of your rope you're like hey Jesus don't you care?

But see but that's not the way God works it's never a question of whether God cares that's never the issue the challenge for us is to trust that God is God even when it's hard now we can say that and I know that we all get it on a certain level it's just when it's your moment you forget when it's happening to you all that stuff kind of goes sideways everybody knows the right things to say right?

[ 15 : 45 ] So literally take yourself up out of your moment and imagine it's somebody that you know who's going through the same thing you know what you would say to them it's just when you try to get it to work in your own head it doesn't work because you're just feeling the feelings and the situation is all too raw and real for you and you know the things they just aren't tracking the same way so our challenge is so what's the difference how do we get to this place where it's not just that sort of stuff for us here's a thought now I'm going to ask you something and I don't want it to be insulting okay but I think if we're really going to get to the heart of this question and so this point is where we're not living in land of cliches anymore and we're not just simply dropping these phrases without really owning what we're saying got to wrestle with this so the thing

I want you to consider is this is your relationship with God an everyday thing or sometime thing hear that question again is your relationship with God an everyday thing or sometime thing now when I say a sometime thing here's what I mean now look I have been blessed to have lots of friends in my life lots of people who I know and love but I'm willing to bet that I'm not the only person who's probably had some people in their lives who they call you and they don't call all the time and usually when they call they need something right so it's not that they don't love you and it's not that they're not a lot of fun and it's not that they're bad people but usually when they're reaching out it's because there's something in it right they either need some help with something they need some money or something like that don't y'all look at me like I'm the only person with people like that in their heart because everybody got their church manners on like I have no idea what you're talking about y'all know we got some people like that now the reason why I'm bringing that up is because think about how you feel when that phone rings and you recognize that number okay here's the hard part guys is that if you only check in with

God when you need something you that sometimey friend in other words take that sometimey friend off the table and think about the friends that I call nothing friends and what I mean by this it's these friends that don't want anything and don't need an agenda to simply love you those folks you can literally do nothing with and it's a blessing to your life you don't need to have a plan there doesn't need to be anything happening and when the phone rings or you get a text from them your feelings are good it puts a smile on your face it's like cool right as opposed to that you feel when that other person reaches out so you think about that when that's the nature of your relationship when you're that plugged in when you're that connected you already know that that person is faithful you know what love feels like and it's not connected to oh

I'm gonna have to do something but see here's the challenge is when those crises show up when those storms show up they're also the people who are with you in the storm and they don't need an invitation they don't need a manual they're just there friends what do you think being faithful means and so when you think about Jesus like that when you think about God's faithfulness in your life if you are in that kind of relationship with God if you are able to just celebrate God without needing anything from God if you are plugged into God not in crisis mode but in worship and love and discipleship mode then when the storm hits you already know that

God is faithful but then there are those who only turn to God when there's an emergency and then want to shake their fist and go God why did you let this happen to me what was your relationship like yesterday is the question you gotta ask and I'm not saying that God brought the calamity on you to teach you a lesson that's a much deeper conversation but the challenge is is that if you already love God if you already know God see here's the thing and I don't want to sound too judgy about the disciples here but when we read the Bible the Bible does what you would expect it tells sort of the highlights of the Jesus life right the big things if you will we miss like what I would call every other Tuesday and so there are days if they're just kind of moving from place to place like walking from this city to the next city and they have lunch and they camp and they sleep and they maybe sing a song or they read some scripture that's not making it into the

[ 21 : 56 ] Bible but they had plenty of those days and because of that kind of love because of that kind of intimacy because of that kind of closeness that's why this thing in the boat that's where that gets that's why Jesus says where is your faith don't you trust me don't you trust the father do you really think that I'm just going to let y'all drown out here in the middle of the lake don't y'all know me better than that that's where that comes from you see friends this hymn great is thy faithfulness for all the power in that message I wanted you to hear the context that gave birth to it because we know that sort of phrase right like

God's mercies are new every morning and great is thy faithfulness if you've done some Bible work if you've been in church for a while you've probably heard somebody talk about that sort of thing I'm going to bet most of you didn't get that context that was born out of the ransacking of Jerusalem that's the verse that gives birth to this song but let me tell you something even deeper Jan said this in her devotion the song was written in 1923 it was written by a man named Thomas Chisholm and Thomas Chisholm was born in 1866 in Kentucky and I'm going to read you a little bit of background about this guy and so you can appreciate this song Thomas Chisholm the author of Great is Thy Faithfulness and 1200 other poems was born in a log cabin in Kentucky in 1866 he lived a pretty unremarkable life he worked as a school teacher a newspaper editor an insurance agent then he retired and spent his remaining days at the

Methodist home for the aged in New Jersey unlike many hymns that have heart wrenching stories behind them for instance it is well with my soul great is thy faithfulness is inspired by the simple realization that God is at work in our lives on a daily basis he meaning chisholm wrote my income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in my earlier years which has followed me until now although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant keeping God and that he has given me so many wonderful displays of his providing care for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness the hymn reminds us that God doesn't only work in dramatic or miraculous ways but also in simple everyday ways it also reminds us that Jesus has never failed us in the past so we have no doubt no reason to doubt his faithfulness in the future friends all of us have those stories most of us sitting here can bear witness to a

God that took care of us in ways we didn't even see things we had no idea were at work I just had one of those happen to me that many of you know that we've been on this journey with my daughter's and a lot of you have been asking it about it and most of you have sat in my feelings with me and I appreciate you for that but let me tell you about great is thy faithfulness those of you who are at Bible study on Thursday have heard this story so but I'm going to tell the rest of you long story short my daughter's car was stolen as part of this whole Kia Hyundai thing that got swept up now there was some earlier drama but part of it was we were struggling with this because we keep getting messages from the dealership that says they have the parts but the car is still not getting fixed and we can't figure that out so we have been after them to say we got to get this car back so after shaking the tree shall we say in less than Jesus like fashion that we finally get to the point where they text my daughter and say your car is done we're like great but then 30 minutes later she gets a text that says

I was given bad information can't have the car back yet now what I didn't know at the time was they had actually told her we're not comfortable releasing the car that's what they actually told her now given the backstory with how much pressure we had put on them to get this car back that was really brave of them okay but here's what had happened when the tech took the car out to drive it before he said it was really done he heard a sound and he recognized that sound and he wasn't sure but he said I got to at car model he said that sound sounds like that problem and so he said I'm only going to know if I get back under it so what he did was he got back under it and he realized that that part had malfunctioned and so rather than just simply give the car back which you know they might have done what had happened is the part had malfunctioned to the degree that she an entire engine replacement but here's the thing for those of you listening for the god part catch this now remember the car was stolen it's been going on five weeks now the thing is this malfunctioning part was in there before that okay and because the working theory is that her car had never been brought in for the recall she brought it used so it just had not been taken care of that way but now we're dealing with the situation but because they had the courage to say nope we're not comfortable giving this car back yet and because it was covered under the recall she's getting all this work done for free

[ 28 : 30 ] God is faithful God is faithful even when we don't understand how God is being faithful God is faithful and see and that's what allows us to come to these folks whose hearts may be broken whose lives may feel like they're falling apart and I can say let me tell you what God did for me I can tell you why I know God is faithful I can tell you why prayer works I can tell you that Jesus makes a difference and that's where we all have to be so if we're not those sometimey folk who walk with God only when it's crisis time but if you know love of God all the time you get what this hymn says when it talks about this idea of bright hope for tomorrow strength for today peace that endureth all those things you heard in that verse that

Jan read for us today those are real for each and every one of us friends that's how we can look anyone in the face and say great is thy faithfulness may it be so amen almighty and gracious God we thank you that you are indeed faithful that you love us like that that you show up in situations behind scenes in ways we would never see or understand and you are taking care of us no matter whether the storm rages in these high points or whether it's just simply knowing you day after day that you forgive where we stumble and fall or that you provide and make sure there's something on our table or that we don't feel alone in times of struggle you have proven yourself over and over again to be faithful and we are your grateful people let us live lives that bear witness to a broken and hurting world that you are who you have always promised to be in

Jesus name we pray amen indeed our lives bear witness to who our God is we have such a powerful morning today and I want to just acknowledge how great God is right now because we saw that in our baptisms we saw that in our communion and we felt it in our testimony and so as we prepare to walk our faith this week remember we have Bible studies coming available to everyone we also have opportunities for giving and donating goods that we need for other ministries so the most important thing I want everybody to remember is that we're not doing this next week that next week is our picnic and so we're having one service at 11 o'clock and we're going to be worshipping outside so more details are in your bulletin also if you haven't signed up to bring something make sure you see the clipboard on the name of

God our creator and king and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and our savior and in the name of the holy spirit our counselor and our sustainer may God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children Amen