

“Covenant Faithfulness”
Psalm 89
(Preached at Trinity, December 11, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. There are many ways you could describe fallen man. One of these would certainly be “Unfaithful.” Even Christians struggle with this. I’ve been pastoring this church for 25 years this April. I’ve known very few truly loyal to the work here at Trinity—but what a refreshment they’ve been.
The motto for the Marine Corps is “Semper Fidelis” – “always faithful”
Faithful to the mission, to each other, to the Corps, and to country no matter what.
2. This is a noble pursuit, a pursuit that we should all strive for – “faithfulness” and “loyalty.” We used to teach these virtues to our children.
 - A. I still remember my Cub Scout pledge. It began:
“I Dale, promise to do my best, to do my duty, to God and my country”
 - B. Most people see the value in loyalty and faithfulness. Most would see themselves as loyal and faithful.
3. The history of humanity speaks quite differently.
 - A. We know the story of Julius Caesar lying in a pool of blood, dying from wounds he received at the hands of a group of senators. Dying, he looked up at his good friend Brutus who stood with the conspirators and spoke his last words, “et to Brute.”
 - B. If you want to see the testimony of unfaithfulness you really need go no further than God’s people. The history of Israel was that of unfaithfulness before God.
 1. At Mount Sinai Israel pledged faithfulness to God
Exodus 19:7-8 KJV - "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. ⁸ And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD."
 2. Before Moses could come down from the mountain Israel had forgotten their promise and fashioned for themselves a golden calf to worship.
 - C. God looked at Israel’s continued unfaithfulness to Him as the sin of adultery. The NASB doesn’t quite convey the force of the word.
Numbers 14:33 NAS - "And your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they shall suffer *for* your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness."
Numbers 14:33 KJV - "And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness."
זְנוּת *zenuth* – harlotry, prostitution, fornication
 - D. And of course, we can’t forget the treachery of Judas Iscariot.
4. The truth is, every man without exception has been unfaithful to God. God demands absolute allegiance and faithfulness to Him—none have fulfilled this demand.

- A. With due respect and honor of the Marines there is only one to whom we can truly apply the words *Semper Fi* – Only God is Always Faithful.
- B. This is our great hope and confidence. That even in the weakness of our unfaithfulness, God is faithful.
2 Timothy 2:13 NAS - "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."
5. Last week we began our journey through **Psalm 89**.
- A. As we can see from the superscription, the authorship is accredited to Ethan. And it is described as a *Maschil* – a psalm of instruction, contemplation, and mediation.
- B. As I pointed out this psalm records the words of a believer in the context of a great national disaster. The sudden transition of Verse 38 makes the hardship almost unbearable. The charge is that God had abandoned His people. In God's apparent delay to come to their rescue he sets his plea before God on the basis of covenant.
Psalm 89:50 KJV - "Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; *how* I do bear in my bosom *the reproach* of all the mighty people;"
6. Last week I asked the question, what is the basis of God's unchanging love for us? What is the basis of our eternal security – how do we know that our salvation will not ultimately be lost due to some failure on our part?
 The answer can be found in one word – **Covenant**.
 Last week I gave an overview of Covenant Theology. I explained that all Scripture points to one unified plan of redemption and this plan rested squarely upon God's eternal Covenant of Redemption. God is faithful to His covenant.
7. Tonight I want to look at this wonderful truth as we unfold **Psalm 89**.
 Like many of the psalms, there are many ways we could divide this psalm. It has eight stanzas and we could divide it among those lines.
 Spurgeon divides it into five sections.
 But I want to simply divide it into only two:
- I. The Record of God's Faithfulness – **Verses 1-37**
- II. The Charge of God's Unfaithfulness – **Verses 38-52**
- I. The Record of God's Faithfulness – **Verses 1-37**
- A. **Verses 1-4** set the tone for the entire psalm. The psalmist uses two words that speak of God commitment to covenant.
1. Faithfulness – the word means "firmness" or "steadfastness"
Psa 89:1 KJV - "I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."
Psalm 89:2 KJV - "thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens."
- a. Verse 5 also:
Psalm 89:5 KJV - "And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints."
- b. And Verse 8
Psalm 89:8 KJV - "O LORD God of hosts, who *is* a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"

Lamentations 3:22-24 KJV - " *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.* ²³ *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.* ²⁴ *The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*"

2. The second word is "Forever" – the word refers to "endurance" or "perpetuity"

Psalm 89:1 KJV - "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever"

Psalm 89:2 KJV - "Mercy shall be built up for ever"

Psalm 89:4 KJV - "Thy seed will I establish for ever"

Also **Verses 29, 36, 37**

3. These words are declarations of the nature of God. He is always and eternally faithful.

This is particularly important as we consider the matter of covenant.

- a. The word "covenant" is found once in **Verses 1-4 – Verse 3**

We also see it in verses **28, 34, 39**

- b. But there is another word we've seen over and over and it also relates to covenant – covenant love - **רַחֲמִים** translated mercy in the KJV. We find it in **Verses 1, 2, 14, 24, 28**

4. The point is God will be faithful to keep His covenant promises and He will keep them forever.

God's Covenant promises are absolute and irrevocable.

Deuteronomy 7:9 KJV - "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;"

5. God's covenant rests upon the infallible eternal transaction of the Covenant of Redemption.

6. It is not founded upon the weakness of man but the almighty power of God

The Covenant of Redemption was promised and sealed in the eternal decrees of God – absolute, unchanging, infallible

And all of God's earthly promises flow from this eternal counsel of God/

- B. Ethan sets forth the Davidic Covenant as the example of God's covenant faithfulness

2 Samuel 7:16 KJV - "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."

1. This promise is repeated in **Verse 4**

2. The psalmist picks up the theme again in **Verses 20-24**

Psalm 89:20-24 KJV - " I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: ²¹ With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. ²² The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. ²³ And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. ²⁴ But my faithfulness and my mercy *shall be* with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted."

- C. Beginning with the second stanza (**Verses 5-8**) Ethan begins the great praise of God's faithfulness
1. God's faithfulness is praised in Heaven
Psalm 89:5 KJV - "And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints."
Who in the heavens can compare with God?
Psalm 89:8 KJV - "O LORD God of hosts, who *is* a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"
 2. God's faithfulness is praised on Earth – **Verses 9-13**
 - a. God's is praised for His faithfulness in governing His creation.
Psalm 89:9 KJV - "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them."
 - b. God faithfulness is compared with His power in ruling over the events of history – "Rahab" is another name for Egypt
Psalm 89:10 KJV - "Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm."
 3. Ethan's point is God is ruler over heaven and earth and He is faithful in His rule over His creation.
Psalm 89:11 KJV - "The heavens *are* thine, the earth also *is* thine: as *for* the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them."
 4. Moving from heaven and earth generally, Ethan then moves to God's faithfulness to His people particularly – **Verses 14-18**
 - a. Ethan adds to God's faithfulness righteousness, justice, and strength
 - b. God's people look to Him in confidence
 - c. This is a great source of comfort for us – God is righteous and just, and He is faithful to stand as our sure defense.
Psalm 89:18 KJV - " For the LORD *is* our defence; and the Holy One of Israel *is* our king."
- D. To these wonderful displays of God's faithfulness **Verses 19-29** describe God's faithfulness to His covenant – These things must lift our hearts and cause us to rejoice.
1. God chose David as king – **Verses 19-20**
Our minds are brought to remember God's election – He chose us to salvation. And we serve a King whose dominion shall never end.
 2. God strengthened him to serve as Israel's king – **Verse 21**
God always equips His people to do what He calls them to do
 3. God protected David from his enemies – **Verses 22-23**
Is this not true of Christ? He is Lord of lords and King of kings. But are we not united to Him. Are we not victors? Is this not our heritage? Are we not more than conquerors? This is not mere rhetoric.
Nothing shall separate us from the hand of God.
Jesus' words to Peter comfort each of us:
Luke 22:31-32 KJV - "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to *have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: ³² But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"

4. God raised David to a place of prominence – **Verses 24-27**
 David was granted a special relationship with God
Psalm 89:26 KJV - "He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation."
 We have been raised up as sons and daughters. How guilty we are of putting little value upon these things. How guilty we are of placing too great value upon the prestige and prominence of this world.
 5. The final aspect of God's covenant with David was that He promised to extend the blessings of the covenant to David's descendents **forever** – **Verses 28-29**
 This was fulfilled in Christ, our King
Psalm 89:29 KJV - "His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven."
- E. Finally, in **Verses 30-37** the psalmist continues his commentary on 2 Samuel 7 and declares what would happen if David's human descendants should drift into sin.
- 2 Samuel 7:14-15 KJV** - "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: ¹⁵ But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee."
1. God's people can expect to be disciplined as a father disciplines his children
Psalm 89:32 KJV - "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."
 2. We find this clearly taught in **Hebrews 12**
Hebrews 12:6 KJV - "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."
 3. Yet God always deals graciously with His people and always in love
Psalm 89:33 KJV - "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."
 4. God always knows exactly what we need and will continue to conform us to Himself – He is always faithful to His covenant blessings.

II. The Charge of God's Unfaithfulness – **Verses 38-52**

- A. After making all of these affirmations of God's eternal faithfulness and love the psalmist now seems to be accusing God of breaking His covenant
Psalm 89:38-39 KJV - "**But** thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. ³⁹ Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown *by casting it* to the ground."
1. There is some form of calamity behind the words of the psalmist.
 Perhaps it was the breakup of the kingdom during the reign of Rehoboam.
 Perhaps it is the attack and absolute destruction by the Babylonians.
 2. Whatever it was it involved the apparent collapse of the Davidic dynasty
 "thou hast profaned his crown *by casting it* to the ground."

3. The striking thing about these verses is that God is being charged with the responsibility.
God is the subject of almost every verse. It would seem that God had forsaken His covenant with them – **V. 39** – "Thou hast made void the covenant"
 4. The truth is, God *was* behind their calamity. Nothing happens without design. Disasters are never random occurrences.
The question is, what was the design of this disaster?
The truth is their own sin brought their calamity. And God had not broken His covenant.
- B. This psalm has infinite instruction for us.
1. Affliction is not without purpose
 2. God will not allow us to persist in sin
 3. Sometimes it may seem like God has forsaken us
 4. God will never forsake His own – He will not forsake His covenant
- C. We should note something important about the psalmist – His complaints did not come from a heart of unbelief
1. The first 37 verses in praise of God's faithfulness cannot be removed from these verses
 2. **Verse 46** makes clear the psalmist's trust in God
Psalm 89:46 KJV - "How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?"
 3. We saw it in **Psalm 79**
Psalm 79:5 KJV - " How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever?"
 4. This is the cry of the martyrs
Revelation 6:10 KJV - " And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"
 5. **Psalm 89** is the cry of a saint looking for answers. There are times of great conflict upon this earth when the people of God feel frustrated and abandoned.
 6. The psalmist is expressing his feelings. He feels as if God had forsaken his covenant. He feels abandoned.
- D. So he concludes by setting before God two arguments
1. First, he pleads for God to act soon. God can act any way He chooses. His time isn't our time – **Verses 47-48**
 - a. This is plainly expressed by Peter
2 Peter 3:8-9 KJV - "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness"
 - b. The psalmist knows God can take a thousand years to fulfill his promise if He chooses. But although God might work in this time frame the psalmist's time is limited. He won't live that long.
Psalm 89:47-48 KJV - "Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? ⁴⁸ What man *is he that* liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? "

2. Second, he pleads on the basis of God's vindication. Shall He not judge his enemies? **Verses 49-51**

Conclusion:

1. The psalmist ends in a beautiful expression of faith towards God.
Psalm 89:52 KJV - "Blessed *be* the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen. "
2. It may seem that God has abandoned us, but we know that His covenants are irrevocable. His promises never fail. Even when we are in the midst of calamity we know that God is with us. And we can only praise Him.
3. His faithfulness is from everlasting to everlasting.
"Blessed *be* the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen. "