

Testimony:

“Great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!” (*Psalms 117:2*)

Gracious Father, I remember with gratitude and humility how you have kept your word. I have had difficulties in life, but I testify today that you have been an ever present friend, counsel, guide and comfort.

Accept my thanks, inadequate though it seems, in Jesus' Name.

Amen

Hymn: by B Fielding, B&J Johnson, E Cash, J Ingram

1. I love You, Lord, for Your mercy never fails me

All my days, I've been held in Your hands

From the moment that I wake up, until I lay my head

Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

All my life You have been faithful, and all my life You have been so, so good

With every breath that I am able I will sing of the goodness of God

2. I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire

In darkest night You are close like no other

I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend

I have lived in the goodness of God.

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Scripture Readings:

- Genesis 39:1-6
- 2 Kings 6:1-7

Hymn: by Charles S Horne

1. For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee, our God, our fathers' God;
Thou hast kept Thy pilgrim people by the strength of Thy staff and rod;
Thou hast called us to the journey which faithless feet ne'er trod;
For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee, our God, our fathers' God;

2. For the love of Christ constraining that bound their hearts as one;
For the faith in truth and freedom in which their work was done:
For the peace of God's evangel wherewith their feet were shod:
For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee, our God, our fathers' God;

3. We are watchers of a beacon whose light must never die;
We are guardians of an altar that shows Thee ever nigh;
We are children of Thy freemen who sleep beneath the sod;
For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee, our God, our fathers' God;

4. May the shadow of Thy presence around our camp be spread;
Baptize us with the courage with which Thou blessed our dead;
O keep us in the pathway their saintly feet have trod;
For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee, Our God, our fathers' God.

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Christians can be trusted

It is a worthwhile exercise to look at the culture of the Kingdom of God. The Christian is a citizen of an everlasting monarchy whose King is the risen Christ. Like most countries, there are characteristics, behaviours, events, celebrations, style of government and lifestyles that are distinctive which when combined together form the culture of that country. So it is with the Kingdom of God. Much can be said about that, but today we will focus on just one characteristic which is increasingly difficult to find in the world, but which is common in the Kingdom of God – part of its culture. And it's this: the citizens of this Kingdom can be trusted. You can be trusted.

We know that trust between individuals is something that takes time to establish, is easily broken and hard to restore. The salesperson who asks “don't you trust me?” is trying to suggest that his word is gospel, but the fact that the question needed to be asked suggests that the answer is probably “no”. Trust takes time to establish.

Our Scripture readings do not immediately appear connected, but both are a demonstration of trust.

The first tells of a man who, despite being treated unjustly, demonstrated that he could be trusted. Sold and bought as a slave he proved to his owner that not only was he a skilled house manager, but he was a man of integrity who could be entrusted with his owner's goods. It was a trust that was earned through adversity and trials.

The second describes a situation where a man borrowed a tool, in this case an axe. As the story unfolds it becomes apparent that the borrower could be trusted. He became distressed when the axe is damaged while under his care, and it looked like he couldn't fix it. He was not angry that the tool was dodgy when he borrowed it, nor was he angry at the obvious danger it presented to those around him. He wanted to return it to the owner, but could not and was upset. The cynic might argue that he was scared of what the owner might do when he found out, but that is not the impression one gets on a first read of this incident. This borrower of a tool could be trusted and evidently was trusted. And he took that trust seriously.

Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth responds to several “matters [they] wrote about” (7:1). In verse 25 of that chapter he claims that he is one who “by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy”. This must be a reference to the trustworthiness of his character in general, not just his wisdom in answering questions. Paul knew he could be trusted. He also had established a relationship with the church so that they also knew he could be trusted.

So it is with you, a follower of Christ. You can be trusted. And you know you can be trusted. You have been put through trials of different kinds, but you have determined that you will still honour God in your attitude and behaviour and actions. The

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Kingdom of God is important to you and you will demonstrate that to others. You are a person of integrity. You can be trusted.

When you borrow things, you will return them in better condition than you got it. It's cleaner. It's sharper. The screws have been tightened or the tyres have been pumped up or the bit that broke has been replaced. And you will return it when you said you would, or you will contact the owner if you cannot and explain why this is so and negotiate alternate arrangements, please, unless that causes too much inconvenience. You can be trusted.

Paul was confident that he could be trusted, and said so. This was not a con man trying to persuade vulnerable people. He knew them and they knew him. Paul also knew himself. He was a man who could be trusted. So it is with you, the Christian, who has confidence that "by the Lord's mercy" you can be trusted. This is not so you can respond with a "yes" when asked "Can I trust you?". That is meaningless. But it does mean that when you agree to something, you can trust yourself that you will fulfill what you agreed to. Scripture says the same: "Let your 'yes' be 'yes'" (James 5:12). You keep your word. And you know you do. And you will. Even when it costs you.

Of course you also know how to say "no"! You must do. You consider a request before answering, knowing that whatever it is, if you say "yes" you can be trusted to fulfill it.

The diminution of trust in the world today is the cause for so much increase in legislation, audit requirements and security. It was not unusual in the 1950's to see the man handing out the offering plate during the Sunday service at Kadina Methodist grab a handful of notes that were threatening to fall off the plate, and stuff them into his pocket. No one was concerned. And he was probably the sole counter of the money after the service. Trust was integral. Even during the repairs to the Temple during Joash's time, there was no need for financial accounting "because they acted with complete honesty" (2 Kings 12:15). Sadly even in the church today we are infected by the spirit of distrust.

"Will you come to the working bee next week?" Give the answer you know you will keep.

"Will you pray for me?" You will most likely answer "yes". So you will and you do.

You attend a meeting and agree to follow up on some action. So you do, of course. You can be trusted.

You are given too much change by the shop worker. Of course you will rectify it at the first opportunity.

You have promised to be faithful to your spouse. And so you are, even when provided with the perfect and attractive opportunity not to be. You can be trusted.

You said you would meet someone at such-and-such a place at an agreed time. So you are there. On time. You can be trusted.

You agreed to prepare the words for next week's Sunday service, but your computer has broken down. You will take steps to make alternate arrangements to ensure the words will be there. It was inconvenient and difficult, but you kept your word.

Of course there are times when you cannot keep your word, but you do what you can to mitigate the consequences.

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The characteristic of trustworthiness is rare in our world, but the risen Christ whom we honour and serve is Himself trustworthy. He can be trusted to do what he has said. And so can you.

Ultimately your trustworthiness gives reason for people to give thanks to God. He receives glory. And that's a good thing.

Amen.

Prayer for Suffering Christians: (Barnabas Prayer for 24/9/2023)

Heavenly Father,

We bring before You our brothers and sisters in Saudi Arabia. We ask for their continued protection as they follow You in secret in a country where converts to Christianity are in danger of the death penalty.

We thank You for recent reforms in Saudi Arabia and pray that these will be extended so that the light of the Gospel will be more visible.

We ask in the Name of the Light of the World, our Lord Jesus Christ. (John 8:12)

Hymn: *by Horatius Bonar*

1. Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise,
that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways.
2. Not for the lip of praise alone, nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up of praise in every part:
3. Praise in the common words I speak, life's common looks and tones,
in fellowship enjoyed at home with my beloved ones,
4. enduring wrong, reproach, or loss with sweet and steadfast will,
forgiving freely those who hate, returning good for ill.
5. So shall each fear, each fret, each care be turned into a song,
and every winding of the way the echo shall prolong.
6. So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free,
but all my life, in every step, be fellowship with thee..

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Benediction

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your heart and establish you in every good work and word.

Amen

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA