

The Faithfulness of God

By Lehman Strauss

[Recording already in play]

A lawyer says, "As soon as I get back you have just been disinherited my friend."

[Audience boisterous laughter]

That introduction costs you 1,000 smackaroos.

[Audience mild laughter]

00:13 Open your Bible please, to the, Book of Lamentations. You'll find that where the pages are still stuck together.

[Audience laughter]

Ah, chapel is rather brief and I, can't give you more than three minutes to find it so, if you'll rustle through those pages I'll be, very grateful to you. Now because of the brevity of time we'll get right down to the, business, that is at hand. That's the business of, the Word of God. Maybe we oughta, have a further word of prayer. Let us pray. Loving Father we thank thee for bringing us to a new day, for all the joys and the blessings of our Christian experience. And we thank thee for the opportunities afforded us to represent thee, and to touch somebody's life, for good, this day. May thy Word contribute, to our spiritual growth, our, the sharpening of our intellects, and the inspiring of our hearts and our zeal, to live this day for thy glory. We ask this in the name, of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

01:26 The Book of Lamentations is, possibly one of the most neglected, books, in the Bible. The word, "lamentation," has the connotation of a, dirge, sort of a, funeral, dirge. I have a Jewish background. My father was a German Jew. And Jewish funerals are very sad. There's never any joy, at a Jewish funeral. Never. Just sad, it's, it's just a-ah lamentation. It's a dirge all the way through. A friend of mine went to Jerusalem, and ah, went to the Wailing Wall, where the Jews just stand there and weep and weep. There was a man weeping and my friend went up to him and said ah, "What's your problem, friend? May I help you?" He said um,

[Strauss speaks in Yiddish accent]

"I want to be with my people. I want to be with my people."

[Strauss resumes his own speech]

But my friend said, "Well you're here in Jerusalem with your people."

[Strauss speaks again in Yiddish accent]

"No, no, I want to be with my people in Miami Beach, Florida."

[Audience laughter]

[Strauss resumes his own speech]

Ah, ah, I mean, they didn't, really weep over there, very little. But if you ever attended a Jewish funeral, y-you'll know what I'm talking about. It's just a, a sad, sorry affair. Now a Christian funeral is different. There's joy knowing that the departed has gone to be with the Lord. And the Book of Lamentations was written by a, very tender hearted prophet. Not all preachers are hard. Some are very tender, and Jeremiah was the weeping prophet. Very soft hearted man with a tremendous compassion for people. And this always makes, ah, preaching effective when the minister, a prophet of God, is seeking to communicate to people and meet their spiritual needs. Jeremiah was a tender hearted prophet who wrote, these five chapters. Now the interesting thing about these five chapters. The first two, on the one side of the middle chapter, each have 22 verses. And the last two on the other side of the middle chapter have, 22 verses. And right smack in the middle, of this dirge, of this lamentation, of this heart rending, manuscript, there's an encouraging word.

03:35 All you have to do is read chapter 5, to get something of the condition, in this man's heart. The word, "affliction" verse 1, "darkness" in verse 2, "God's hand against him" in verse 3, "his bones are broken" in verse 4, "gall," meaning bitterness and travail in verse 5, "dark places" in verse 6, "heavy chains" in verse 7. You can see, every occasion for sorrow, and for lamentation. And right in the middle, of this, lamentation, of this, sad manuscript, there's an encouraging word. Verse 22 of chapter 3, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new, every morning, great, is, thy faithfulness." We're living in a, world of, sorrow. Perhaps in the spirit of a meeting like this, we are not aware of it but, well look at the news, on television or in the newspaper. And all over the world there's war, bloodshed, and hostages being held and, starvation and, inflation and, shortage of fuel and whatnot. It's a sick sad, sorry, old world. And it's good to have something to, sink your spiritual teeth into, times like these. And Jeremiah discovered something in the midst, of his lamentation, that gave him a spiritual uplift. He looked up to God and he said, "O God, great, is thy faithfulness."

05:16 Now if I were to pass out paper and pencil and ask you to write, one of the attributes of God on the piece of paper, I'm confident that in a school like this there would be, many fine answers come. Somebody would say the love of God. The grace of God. The mercy of God. The omnipotence of God. The omnipresence of God. The glory of God. The omniscience of God. But one of the essential attributes of deity is the faith-fulness, of, God. Now an attribute is a quality or a characteristic that is attri-bu-ted to someone. Our very, faulty English language which is extremely difficult for people coming from other countries. It's not easy to grasp. For example the word, "at-tribute" and "attri-bute" are spelled the same way. You have a noun "attribute", the

verb "attribute." You simply put the em-pha-sis on a different syl-la-ble and you come up with two different words.

[Audience mild laughter]

Now there's certain attributes, qualities or characteristics that are attributed to God. We do not have them. They are unique. They are essential, to deity, without which, God would, cease to be God. And one of them is the faithfulness of God. Now the word "faithful" is a verbal adjective, which suggests or connotes the idea of the, dependability, reliability, trustworthiness. And when you read that God is faithful, you're certainly reading the fact that God's reliable. God's dependable. God is trustworthy. You can always, count, on, God. And that's not true of our, world governments. It's not true of the best of human beings. We're frail, we forget, we're finite, we're faulty. We blow it, so many times. But in the midst of the chaos, and the turmoil of our, current society, I'd like, everyone of us to know that, we are worshiping and serving a God, who is reliable, who's dependable, who's trustworthy. And my dear friends you can always, count, on, God.

07:37 Now if you were to take your concordance and trace, the word, "faithful" through the Bible, where it is related to God you'll find some very interesting and informative and inspiring, passages. I've selected a few this morning as far as time will allow. And in each verse, where God is said to be faithful you will find a word in your Bible beginning with the letter "C". Now I didn't write the Bible I merely teach it. But these verses are there, and they've always been there. Maybe the Spirit of God will help us to, see them in a little different light. The first one is over in 1 Peter chapter 4. Will you turn please if you have a Bible or a New Testament to 1 Peter chapter 4. We're gleaning now some verses which tell us that God is faithful and in each verse, a key word, beginning with the letter "C", that word is in your Bible. 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 16, "Yet if any man suffer, as a Christian." Do Christians suffer? Oh, yes. Two of our hostages, in Iran by their own confession are, Bible believing Christians. Oh yes Christians suffer. Don't let anyone tell you that, when you, become a Christian your suffering days are over. God's servants suffered all through, Jeremiah suffered. Fact a guy clobbered him, for preaching the truth. Actually socked him. Belted him right in the chin. Hit him! And then the ecclesiastical hierarchies threw him in jail, for doing nothing but, telling the truth of God. Oh yes, Christians suffer physically, sometimes mentally, emotionally, economically. "If any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed or let him not be put to shame but let him glorify God, on this behalf." Verse 19, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God." Say, are you trying to tell me that those two Christian hostages in Iran are suffering according to the will of God? That's right. If God didn't want them there he could have prevented them from being there. I'm not a fatalist but I believe for the child of God that all things work together for good to them that love God. To them who are the called according to his purpose. And when those two fellas get home and they're going to get home, God's gonna bring them back. When they get back, those fellers are gonna look back at that Iranian experience and they're gonna say, "Hey, we didn't see it then, but God had a plan in that for us." All things were working together for good to them that love God. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit to keeping of their souls to him in well doing," Now here's your, theme, "As unto a faith-ful cre-a-tor."

10:38 First, God is faithful to this creation. This is a wonderful universe, in which we are a very small part. Our earth, a little planet. The size of a pinhead compared, with some of the meteors and meteorites and, planets and planetoids in outer space. We're spinning on our axis revolving around the sun. Has it ever occurred to you, that if this little earth, spinning on its axis and revolving around the sun were to, veer off its course slightly, and move, toward, the sun are you aware the fact that we would melt? Our bodies would melt with the atomic energy of the sun, in a matter of seconds. Or if we were to veer off our course and drift, away, from the sun slightly, in a matter of days we'd all be frozen to death. But relax, it'll never happen. The God who put it together is the God, who holds it, together. My friends, my God is a faithful God. And he is faithful, to his, creation. And you and I are a part, of that, creation. Well God's behind the scenes, and he's controlling the scenes that he's behind it. God knows what's going on. This is God's world, and I'm a part of it. And my confidence is not, in who's going to be elected in the coming presidential election. My confidence is in my faithful, God.

12:17 There's another text, which, tells us that God is faithful and it has an interesting word in it beginning with the letter "C." Incidentally these verses are all the ninth verse. 1 Peter, chapter 4 verse 9. The next one is in Deuteronomy, chapter 7, and verse 9. Deuteronomy chapter 7 in verse 9. It won't take quite as long to find Deuteronomy as it does Lamentations. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Chapter 7 verse 9, "Know therefore that the Lord, thy God, he is God. The faithful, God." The reliable God. The trust-worthy God. The dependable God. The God who can always be counted on. The faithful God which keepeth, covenant. 1 Peter, God's faithful to his creation. Deuteronomy 7, God's faithful to his covenant. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, says, "A covenant is an agreement made between two or more persons." Now I'll accept that as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. Because when you come to the Bible you discover there are some covenants in which two persons are not involved. God introduces. God initiates. God inaugurates a one sided covenant. He doesn't say, "I will do this if you will do that." But God sticks his neck out as it were and says, "I am going, to do this." And when God, tells us he's going to do something, you can count on it. Why? Because he's reliable, dependable, trustworthy. He's the faithful God. There're many, covenants in the Bible. There are, conditional, and un-con-ditional, covenants. There are some covenants in which God says to his people, "I will do this if you will do that." But then there are unconditional covenants where God assumes full responsibility. And every unconditional covenant, is being kept by God and will be kept. For example, the earth will never again be destroyed by water. You may not think so, after the last few weeks in, southern California.

14:33 My wife and I were sitting in the living room of a home, oh, maybe five, six years ago, waiting for our hostess to call us for dinner. She was reading a, something that I picked up a, science magazine from the rack, in which, a scientist with two Ph.D. degrees, one from Europe and one from U.S., said that by the year, of 19--, from 1980 to the year of 2000, there will not, be, enough, water, on the earth, to sustain life. Closed the magazine I said, "Hogwash." My wife said, "What did you say?" "I don't know what did I say?" She said, "It sounded like 'hogwash' from over here." "This guy said a scientist just said by the year, 1980 up to the year 2000 there will not be enough water on the earth to sustain life." She said, "Who wrote it?" I said, "A scientist with two Ph.D. degrees." She said, "You don't have two Ph.D. degrees, but enough say, 'hogwash.'" Now I said, "I don't have two Ph.D. degrees, but I know a God he doesn't know." And if I'm here in 1980, there'll be enough water. You know, where I live, in Escondido,

California, if we do not receive, one rain, one storm, we have enough water, for commercial, industrial, and ah, normal, life, for three years. Boy I wish that, bird were around. I wish I'd remembered who wrote it. I'd like to write him a little letter. If you're here, by the year of 2000 my friend, you can be certain there'll be enough water here for you. We have a, covenant keeping God. Now he will never destroy the earth with water. He's gonna judge it by fire one of these days but never again with water. And in order to give us a little assurance, he put a rainbow in the sky. And he said in Genesis chapter 9, "I'm making a covenant now." He said, "So that you will never forget that I'm a faithful God. I'm a reliable God. I'm a trustworthy God. You can always count on me, every time you see the rainbow." Oh it's nice to say what a, beautiful display of God's handiwork. That's okay. But the next time you see the rainbow just lift your heart, in praise and say, "Thank you, for being a faithful God." God made a covenant.

16:57 Fifty two years ago come Christmas day a teenage girl led me to Christ. I came from a Jewish background, and not interested in God, Christ, the Bible, church. And she bought me a Bible for Christmas present. And with that Bible, she opened it and led me to Christ. That was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. For 52 years, I have lived, by this book. It's been my roadmap, my compass, my chart, my guide. I want to give you a testimony this morning. In 52 years I've had never found a promise, in this book, that God, has ever failed, to keep. We have a covenant keeping God. Do you keep your covenants? Forty nine years ago, come June 17th, I stood in front of a little church, in the city of Philadelphia. And I made a covenant. Church was full of friends and relatives. Minister stood there. A man on my left, who called himself the best man. That's what he thought. I was the best man in that deal. But I let him have the title.

[Audience laughter]

And I made a covenant. I said, "I Lehman, take thee Elsie to be my wedded wife. To have and to hold from this day forward, for richer, for poorer, sickness and in health, for better or worse, 'til death, do us, part." I would find it easier, to cut that arm off, than I would to divorce my wife. I swore to something. I made a covenant. I solemnly vowed in the presence of God. In the presence of that church full of witnesses, friends and family, that 'til death, separated, my wife and me. We would remain, as the covenant was made. I'm sure my wife has never thought of divorce. Maybe murder a few times, I don't know.

[Audience laughter]

[Strauss chuckles]

19:29 I was in a church, not long ago, with a large choir. And after the choir rehearsal on Thursday nights some of the couples went out, for refreshments. And ah, two couples in particular were friendly and, the husband of one got to eyeing the wife of the other and, vice versa. And in time, they agreed mutually, on a divorce, having both had children. That they would swap wives, and remarry. Not only did they do that but they went off, on a honeymoon together. The four of them. Does that sound funny to you? Young people, that is one of the greatest tragedies that has ever struck the American way of life. And I say to you today if you are anticipating marriage you'd better give it serious thought. If you make a covenant you'd better

plan to keep it. You better not play fast and loose with God. That's a lifetime proposition. I took that girl 'til, death, do, us, part. Say that if you had any problems? Hah-ho, what do you think?

[Audience mild laughter]

No woman's perfect, you all admit to that.

[Audience boisterous laughter, clapping and whistling]

And find me one man, that's perfect.

[Audience boisterous laughter and clapping]

Now I thought we're gonna have a perfect marriage. I really did. I was very young when I got married. And ah, I thought it would be the ideal, marriage of the 20th century. Maybe someday be in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

[Audience laughter]

Look we have a page already, the ideal marriage of the 20th century. The Lehman Strauss-Elsie Strauss marriage.

[Audience mild laughter]

When we got married my wife had \$60 and between the two of us we had \$60.

[Audience boisterous laughter]

No exaggeration. She were here she'd testify to this. We went to Atlantic City, New Jersey on our honeymoon. And I remember saying to her, "Honey we'll never quarrel will we?" On the third day, of the honeymoon, she blew it.

[Audience laughter]

Perfect marriage. I started to shave and she said, "You know, why don't you wait until the night to shave?" Now you women know that a woman who never shaves does not know when it's time to shave.

[Audience laughter]

She had never, shaved in her life! I've been shaving already for 14 months!

[Audience boisterous laughter and clapping]

Now really it wasn't what she said, that started that little tiff, on our honeymoon. But it was my immature, unspiritual reaction, to what, she said. I had a lot of growing up to do. And we learned

how to resolve our problems, when we discovered we had a faithful God, we learned that we could come to our faithful God and he could find a way out, of our difficulties. And so together we've used, this guidebook. And we've discovered that our faithful God, can, teach us, to be faithful.

23:14 If there's one thing that God requires of all of us it's, faithfulness. 1 Corinthians 4:2, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." God didn't call any one of us in this gymnasium, to be successful. Not one of us. Now many of you will enjoy a measure of success I'm sure. And I trust you will. But the basic ingredient my friends in the Christian life is that of faith-fulness, to the faithful God. And we can never be faithful as he is faithful, but it's something that we can cultivate in as we, imbibe the truth of the Word of God and it lays hold of our hearts. We find as we mature spiritually, that faithfulness becomes a more vital part, of our everyday thinking and in our behavior. Well I see by the inflection the hands of the clock, which have refused to stop moving that I must, terminate my deliberations.

24:13 I have two more texts I'd like to, bring to you on the faithfulness of God. Both containing key words, with the letter, "C" in them. But maybe, Mike, will pull some strings and, get me back one of these days, and allow me to bring the other half. If not, I'll see you here, there, or in, the air. God bless you.

[Audience boisterous laughter and clapping]