

BUILDING OUR VOCABULARY OF FAITH

Water from Rock, April 11, 2017, Tim Smith

¹³*You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand.* ¹⁴*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*

Psalm 89:13-14

INTRODUCTION

In the past weeks we have sought to build our vocabulary of faith by reflecting on God's:

“Righteousness” (tsedaqah) God acting to honor His covenant and deliver and care for His people;

“Justice” (mishpat): God acting to establish the heavenly norm or pattern on this earth;

“Steadfast love” (hesed): God acting loyal, passionate love to keep His covenant vows;

Today we reflect on God's “faithfulness” (emeth); God acting in accord with His trustworthy, firm, reliable character.

EXPLORING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (EMETH)

1. Emeth is derived from the verb aman, that means to be firm, reliable, stable, and expresses the image of the strong arm of a parent supporting a helpless child. When we say “Amen” in our prayers we are speaking Hebrew; we are expressing reliance on God's firmness, reliability and support.
2. An emeth witness is one whose testimony can be trusted because it is trustworthy and reliable: (Proverbs 14:25). *“A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer.”*
3. Emeth is also used of a friend, a slave or husband; someone who acts with emeth is a person who can be trusted and relied on. He is dependable, loyal and honest (Genesis 24:49; 42:16; Joshua 2:14)

4. Emeth was used of things that had to be proved to be reliable; of the word that was really true, on which a person can rely; of a man who is really trustworthy, and thus to whom an office can be entrusted; of judgment that is righteous; and in general, of the innermost nature of man, that which determines his character and his actions. But OT admonitions to emeth and laments over its absence show that such emeth is not something that is obvious in man. Indeed, only rarely does the OT dare to say that some man (or men) is a man of emeth, and it is almost astonishing when a word is really true. . . . *emeth* is that on which others can rely. To this extent, emeth involves a personal relationship, it is not merely an objective fact.” (Alfred Jepsen, “*aman*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1)
5. The Old Testament uses emeth again and again to describe Yahweh; He can be trusted and relied on; His actions are always in harmony with His character and promises.
6. We can say that God is “true” (emeth) in this sense. We can count on Him. God keeps His word. He will always do what He says. He never lies to us.

REFLECTING ON GOD’S FAITHFULNESS (EMETH)

Exodus 34:5-6 ⁵*The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, ‘The LORD.’* ⁶*The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (emeth).*

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 ³*For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!* ⁴*The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful (emeth) God, without deceit, just and upright is he.*

Psalms 91:1-4 ¹*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,* ²*will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’* ³*For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;* ⁴*he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (EMETH)

1. In response to God's emeth the people of God are called to walk in emeth.
2. 1 Samuel 12:24: *Only fear the LORD, and serve him faithfully (emeth) with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you.*
3. Psalm 86:8-11⁸ *There is none like you among the gods, O LORD, nor are there any works like yours.* ⁹ *All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O LORD, and shall glorify your name.* ¹⁰ *For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.* ¹¹ *Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth (emeth); give me an undivided heart to revere your name.*
4. "In Hebrew thought the essence of true godliness is tied primarily to a relationship, not to a creed. The Lord is the God of Israel and Israel is the people of God... Here is the leitmotif of biblical theology. The Torah gives direction to Israel on how to relate to the Creator, his people, and his world. Sin ruptures that relationship, but repentance brings forgiveness and restoration to fellowship. For the Hebrews, personal or individual relationship has always been far more expressive of the heart of religious faith than mere intellectual assent to abstract statements or religious ideas. In the same vein, today's Church must not forget that the earliest theology in the New Testament is relational or existential rather than propositional or creedal. This is not to imply that doctrine plays an inconsequential role in the New Testament. But note that Jesus initially appoint the Twelve 'that they might be with him.'" (Mark 3:14). (Marvin Wilson, *Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*)

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (EMETH) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. In the Greek Old and New Testaments, Hebrew writers are using "grace" and "truth" as the equivalent of hesed and emeth. Compare John 1:14-18 ¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.* ¹⁵ *(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.')* ¹⁶ *From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* ¹⁷ *The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸ *No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's*

heart, who has made him known.

2. In Greek thought “truth” has to do with what is factually correct. True means to be “without mistake” like the choices on an exam. The word “true” for the Greek culture means having the right answer, being without error, thinking correctly. Truth is a cognitive term. It’s about what happens in your head. But truth in Hebrew thought is personal. It is relational, a way of living, a mode of existence.
3. Pilate should have asked “who” is truth, rather than “what” is truth. Truth is not something studied at a distance, but something up close and personal.
4. Jesus said, “*I am the truth*” (John 14:6), not “I have the truth”, or, “I know the truth.” Biblical truth is not facts but personal engagement.

FOR REFLECTION

- In this Holy Week take some time to reflect upon God’s faithfulness (emeth) to you. What are ways in which God demonstrates reliability, trustworthiness to you?
- How is God’s faithfulness (emeth) demonstrated in the Cross?
- How do you want to respond to God’s faithfulness (emeth)?
- Take some time to talk with God about His faithfulness (emeth) and your desire to live in (emeth) for Him.