

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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How can God use me in the world today: A Faithful Life

So the shortlist was down to two. On the one hand is a physically impressive man, who also tried to involve God in the decision making. He was clearly the people's choice and his son was a most promising young man. On the other hand, was a murderer, adulterer, scheming poet whose family life was little short of a shambles. One would have been forgiven for thinking that there was not much of a choice to be made. And yet choice there was to be made, and God was to make it in favour of the latter candidate. You see His earthly people, the Israelites wanted a king, and God had acquiesced to their demands. Saul had seemed such a promising choice, but his intruding into the priestly office that we read about in 1 Samuel 13 and then his disobedience in 1 Samuel 15 revealed the true man. David, on the other hand, was given the promise that it would be his descendants who would rule over Israel in perpetuity. We might well ask what it was that made the difference. I think the answer is to be found in the following two verses:

"So Ahimelech answered the king and said, 'And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honourable in your house?'" 1 Samuel 22:14.

"And that the LORD may keep His promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before Me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'" 1 Kings 2:4 (New International Version)

The key to David's success and the future blessing of his family line lay in their faithfulness. It was a characteristic that governed David's life, and which his descendants were encouraged to emulate.

This morning we begin a new series looking at how God can use me in the world today. Today, we shall look at a faithful life. Next week we shall consider a fulfilled life, before concluding the series by thinking about a fruitful life. I am aware that not everyone lives a happy, fulfilling Christian life; some feel that they are past it or useless, some look for a great work instead of being content where God has placed them. In this series, we will look at how each one of us can live a life that is God honouring.

Faithfulness is one of the least valued virtues in the world today. It has become boring, a virtue for those who cannot achieve anything of significance. It reminds me of the Christmas newsletters that go round. Once a year, folk give an account of all the things that they have been doing throughout the year - it leaves me quite breathless when I consider how much they have packed into a year. All I have done is just kept going at what I have been doing!

However, as we come to the Scriptures, we find that faithfulness is one of the greatest qualities that a believer can cultivate. When I look at the dictionary, I find that one of the words used to define it is "steady". Have you ever considered that what God is looking for today, as He was when Israel first asked for a king, is for those people who will be steady in their response to Him. It is being true to that initial commitment we made to Him, as we believed in Him as Saviour. We asked Him to forgive us for our sins and to take control of our lives, that we might live for Him. That desire can so easily blow hot and cold, as we find that, in fact, there are areas of our lives over which we want to retain control. Over the years, we need to be steady in desiring His rule in our lives.

Recently, I heard of a couple who had been married for 75 years - what incredible faithfulness! A promise made in a matter of five minutes three-quarters of a century earlier still had its impact all those years later. The great thing about faithfulness is that it is something all of us can do - indeed it is something that all of us should do. Some fields of Christian service will never be open to me, because I do not have the gift, or time or character. But every one of us can remember our promise made to Him and live up to it.

The other great thing about faithfulness is that it enables us to be imitators of God, for He is a faithful God. This morning, we will look at three verses that show us the character of God and its impact upon us today. As we shall see there is nothing boring about any of these, and the consequences are most far reaching.

"Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" Deuteronomy 7:9. Wow! That makes the faithfulness over one or two generations of the married couple mentioned earlier seem pretty insignificant.

We have a God whose word is as reliable over the span of time as time itself. His covenant has two essential strands to it, Firstly, the unconditional promise of the land of Israel as an eternal possession for the Jews. Secondly, His blessing if they would obey Him, but conversely His judgement upon the people should they turn to idolatry instead of wholeheartedly following Him. As we read the history of the Jews throughout the Bible period and down through the centuries to the present day, we see that God has faithfully honoured His word. The land promised to Abraham is back in the possession of the Jews, but the people have suffered terribly because of their disobedience to His commands. Man has tried to solve the seemingly intractable problems of the Middle East, even going so far as to offering the Jews a homeland in Uganda, instead of Israel. But where man makes plans, God overrules. In an uncertain world, we can be sure that the Jews will always be the only true nation to call Israel home. They will also find that only by obedience to His word can they as a nation be blessed. Their security does not, and can never lie in strength of arms or carefully worded treaties with the nations.

But not only is he a covenant keeping God, He is faithful in His mercy. How many times must I have broken His heart by my selfishness and sinfulness, and yet every time I return to Him, I find Him ready to restore me to His favour. The penitent tax collector was on safe ground as he cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner" Luke 18:13. For us today, it ought to be that we are known as those whose word is absolutely reliable. Do you ever preface something you say with the words "to be honest"? Surely that implies that sometimes when we speak we are not being honest, but in this particular circumstance I need to tell you that I am being honest. How much better if, when we spoke, everyone knew that there was no question that what we were saying was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It ought also to mean that we are known to be full of mercy to others, unlike the servant in Matthew 18:21-35, who remembered debts owed to him, completely overlooking the debt that he had had forgiven him.

Next, we come to 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." As I listen to some believers, they always seem to live in such close communion with the Lord, and things always seem to work out so well for them, that they exude a joyfulness that leaves me feeling rather guilty. Very often a good day amounts to little more than getting to the end of the day, and that's about it. We live in a world where life can be very unforgiving: pressure of work, pressure in the family, financial pressure - it all just adds up and there sometimes seems to be no way out. The idea of just giving up on everything, even on life itself, can be very attractive.

As Christians we are not immune from these problems. Firstly, we need to recognise that these are real issues for the believer. It is all very well thinking that Christians should live in a permanent state of mountain top euphoria, moving from one spiritual triumph to another, but that is an unreal lie that the devil would peddle to make us feel guilty. We are, to some extent, what we are, and a stressful situation that nearly breaks one individual apparently has little impact on another. But that same individual may poorly handle a different situation. We need not feel guilty because we are finding life hard to bear. But in this verse we do have a wonderful promise that is given to us by a faithful God.

There is nothing uniquely different in the situation that drives us to the point of desperation. The external situations may be different for each individual, but it is not "just me." I am not the only one who is suffering, nor am I alone in finding life hard. God has promised that He will not allow us to be tempted to give up, perhaps on life itself, beyond what we are able to bear. And who knows where that limit may be? Only God does, and He may well surprise us as we look back, perhaps after many years of suffering, showing us that in His strength we were far stronger than we ever realised ourselves to be. In His great knowledge He may take us to the very edge of our endurance, but He will never take us one step further. And He has promised to strengthen us for each day. The way may be hard and dark, but it is never one step further than is good for us.

Perhaps most of the time we will live without any understanding of what He is accomplishing by the trying circumstances that we are going through. That is not a cause for concern - who of us can ever really understand the ways of God? This morning, if you are at the very end of your being then know this, that God is right there beside you, sharing in the pain of your suffering, knowing exactly what you are going through. Know also, that at the end of this broadcast, at least one person in the world will be praying for you - for help that will enable you to know His presence in your life. In the very darkest of circumstances, may you know the truth of His company in the "garden of your inner being."

Finally, in our consideration of the faithful God, we read in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Sometimes we lose sight of the sinfulness of sin. It is absolutely abhorrent to God. But we know that we are forgiven, and that now we are clothed in His righteousness. So we act as though sin in our lives does not really matter that much. How very wrong we are! Even as believers, we sin - and God hates that sin as passionately as ever. However, the wonderful promise of God is that **if we confess** our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. Just, in that someone

else has already taken the judgement for that sin, and He would never judge my sin twice over. But there is a very real need to confess. It is not just owning up to my sin - God knows those already! Confession involves acknowledging my wrong doing, but also His rightness in judging it and how He feels about it. There needs to be a real desire to view my sin with the abhorrence that He views it with. It would do us all good to make time each day to quietly come before God and bring to Him our faults, and let Him probe our inward parts to reveal to us our true self. We need to just pause and wonder if our seeming ineffectiveness in prayer is not a result of unconfessed sin in our lives. It goes without saying that we can hardly confess our sin, and then go out and sin the same way again deliberately!

What a wonderfully faithful God we have! If only we recognised this and acted upon this, how our lives would be the better for it. I just want to think about three individuals now, whom Scripture tells us were faithful. You may be thinking that it is wonderful that God is faithful, but it is not for me. The cost is too high or I might miss out on the best. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Firstly, we shall look at Moses. "Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face" Numbers 12:7. It would be all too easy to think of several of Moses' faults, but that is not the point. Faithfulness keeps us true to God despite our faults. The reward for Moses' faithfulness was **revelation**. God spoke to Him face to face. I often feel that there must be more to Christianity than what I currently experience. What a wonderful thing it must have been to have such a close experience of God! To have the plans that God has revealed to us clearly, must be a prize worth living for. Moses never lost sight of who he was, nor who God was. Having been brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, he could have chosen to live as an Egyptian, enjoying all the earthly benefits that that would have entailed. He was just one step removed from the world's most powerful man. Instead, he chose to be associated with the Israelites, despised and subject to slavery, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" Hebrews 11:25-26.

Moses could have had almost anything this world had to offer, but he gave it all up for the sake of God and serving His people. He received little thanks or earthly reward for his trouble either. And yet for forty years he persevered in his chosen path, never once turning back to what he could have had. Now that is true faithfulness in action.

Secondly, we shall look at the servants in the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-27. You may remember how Jesus told the story of the nobleman who went on a journey into a far country. Before he left, he had given his servants one mina each. Upon his return, he called them to give an account of what they had done with his money. So we come to Luke 19:16: "Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'" (Luke 19:16-19) Notice here that the commendation is identical for both of these servants because both had been faithful. It was not the fact that they had been profitable that was commended, but rather that, knowing their master's intentions, they had acted accordingly.

How often we feel defeated in our Christian lives because we do not see any sign of outward result from our service for the Lord Jesus. Sometimes this may be because we are serving Him amiss, perhaps with the conscious knowledge of sin in our lives. However, very often this may not be the case. At just such times, we need to remind ourselves that the reward was for faithfulness, and so to persevere in what He has called us to. The temptation to give up can become very strong, particularly if we see others flourishing. However, we just need to remain faithful. He gave us a particular service to do, and we agreed to do it, starting off with a flourish. He is now looking to us to be true to our word and to carry on in our service for Him, until He says that the work is over. We live in a society that is forever looking for some new experience or for instant results. This spirit is all too likely to permeate into the church, but we need to fight against it, and not allow our itchy arms and feet to forsake the place that He has allotted to us in favour of something that looks more exciting to us. Here, we learn that faithfulness brings its recommendation from God.

Thirdly, we will look at Pedaiah, and how faithfulness is always remembered. "Ped... who?" I can almost hear you ask. But that is exactly the point. Have you ever thought about how many famous people from history never made it into the Bible? Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, Tutankhamen. The list could go on for quite some time and I'm sure you could add many other names to it. Nothing is in the Bible by chance. God has allowed what is written to be written for a purpose. It is not a history of the great and the good, for none are as great or as good as God. And so we come back to Pedaiah. I suppose we would call him a middle ranking civil servant today. We read about him in Nehemiah 13:12-13: "Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren".

The quality that marked these men out as being suitable for service in the work of God was that they were faithful. The days in which they lived were days of revival and growth. So much could have gone wrong, quenching the spiritual

renewal that was occurring. In the midst of this, collections were made for those who were in need. Pedaiah was in a position that could have allowed him to just feather his own nest a little. Surely nobody would notice if a little went missing. One could argue that he deserved to be well looked after since he was doing such a public service. Don't we hear just such arguments from so many captains of industry, senior bank managers or senior public servants? We never hear them saying that they are paid too much, that they are ready to take a pay cut to more seemly levels.

Unlike them, Pedaiah realised that his position of responsibility was exercised before a God who sees all. And so he acts in a way that is faithful to God. He ensured that none of God's people went hungry, or short of the necessities of life. Had he not performed his service, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and all the good that flowed from that, might never have occurred. He never had a book of the Bible named after him; he never has made it into the history books, but God has ensured that his name is remembered for ever, and that 2,500 years later he is still being talked about because he was faithful.

We have seen this morning that it is so important to be faithful. It will not be glamorous or court celebrity. Very often nobody will notice and it may well lead to being taken for granted. However, it was the cardinal feature that led to the establishment of the house of David, and through him the coming of the Messiah. God highly values faithfulness because it is a reflection of His nature. That nature will always be looking after us, never allowing us to be tempted beyond breaking point. It always stands ready to forgive us as we confess, and turn from, our sin.

Through Moses, the parable of the servants and Pedaiah we have seen that faithfulness displayed in the lives of ordinary people can lead to a fuller revelation of God and His ways. It will always receive the commendation of God and, in a future that has long forgotten the greatest of men's achievements, will still be remembered for it was done for Jesus. Perhaps this morning, if you are finding life hard and the path of Christian service hard and unpleasant, then be encouraged to remain faithful to God. It will never lose its reward - there can be no better pathway for you and for His glory!

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