

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

Found Faithful

Acts 9:32-43

32 Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up. 35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. 36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. 37 And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." 39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

As we began last week, there is a verse that has greatly impacted me as both a Christian in general as well as a pastor as found in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and says this,

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

Let me remind you that there is just one requirement in this relationship with Jesus. If you have become one of his servants, the word there in verse 1 referring to one of the under-oarsman who sat under the deck of an ancient boat, helping to propel it forward; and if you would be a steward of the mysteries of God, which, according to Ephesians 3 is the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then that quality that is to characterize our lives is that of being trustworthy; faithful, true to the task.

A faithful person is trustworthy and reliable. Faithfulness is what spouses long for in each other; what employers desire from employees; and what serves as the mark of most genuine of friendships. But let me remind you, that the faithfulness that matters most is the faithfulness each one of us shows toward God.

Let us be reminded that God Himself is the very essence, the very pinnacle; the Mount Everest if you will of faithfulness. In trying to capture the greatness of God and His faithfulness, along with some other attributes of God, hear the words of David from Psalm 36:5-6

Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep. O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

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God is faithful, which tells us that God is reliable, that He will do all that He has purposed and promised to do. It is because of this attribute of God that we who have called upon the name of the Lord can even dare to trust in Him and to expect His promises to come to pass.

The fact of the matter is this, that without the faithfulness of God, all creation would fall into utter chaos. Every animal finds its food, makes its migrations, goes through its breeding cycles because God has faithfully fixed within them "laws of nature." Every plant and tree brings forth its fruit and seed according to the faithfulness of God. Every Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring is the result of God being reliable, trustworthy, faithful. Yet, among humanity, we are the only created things that struggle with having faith, trusting in this one true and faithful God.

Hear the words of Proverbs 20:6 and the reality of our struggle with trusting God. We read:

Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?

Or as the ESV puts it:

Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?

Being faithful to the faithful God does not come easily or naturally. Not one of us is born with a desire to be faithful to God; in fact we are born with the exact opposite, a desire to be unfaithful to God. Yet, in all of this, we are called to be faithful. According to 1 Corinthians 4:2, it is the one easily understood, even if not always easily lived out, requirement upon our lives. If we would be faithful to God, we must believe God's Word and expect Him to fulfill His promises. If we would be faithful to God, we must actually live according to what we know to be true about God. If we would be faithful, we must commit ourselves to our heavenly Father in spite of any seemingly unfair or evil circumstances. If we would be faithful, we must do God's will the best we can because we know our faithful Creator will set all things right in His time and in His way.

But what does being faithful look like? How can we know whether we will be found faithful? We started to answer the question by looking at the life of Peter as found in the verses before us. In our text we find five characterizes of a faithful person; five qualities that distinguished Peter as a faithful steward and thus he becomes for us an example to follow. We explored the first three of these five qualities last week. Let me quickly remind those of you who were here as well as bring anyone who was not up-to-date concerning what are these first three characteristics of faithfulness: ^[slide 04]

I. A faithful servant is not perfect (9:32a)

Now as Peter was traveling...

The first thing we noted as we came to this text was the consideration of the character of a faithful servant as seen in the actions of Peter beginning with what faithful servant is not. A faithful servant is not perfect; not in himself and Peter was not exception. This passage becomes for us all the more insightful when we remember Peter's utter failure back when the Lord Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. The first lesson then is this, that there is always hope for those who have failed (and this covers all of us). For faith itself is the gift of God, not the result of our good works. Faith causes good works; good works are not the cause of faith. Or to

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put it one more way, faith is the root (planted by God); and works are the fruit (our experience of the faith). A faithful servant is not perfect, but he is persistent in his pursuit of the Perfect One, Jesus Christ.

II. A faithful servant is passionate for the saints (9:32)

Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

In verse 32 we saw our second point, that a faithful servant is passionate for the saints. Here we find Peter busy, busy as a shepherd, **“travelling through all those regions,”** meaning throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria as spoken of in v. 31. We see Peter’s shepherd’s heart as he visited, went to, believers. Peter reveals his faithfulness in going to them to shepherd them. Having learned from his Master, Jesus, Peter was passionate for the spiritual welfare of the people and sought out opportunities to minister to others. This is the mark of the faithful servant, a passion for Jesus and His people.

III. A faithful servant is practice-oriented (9:33-34; 36-41)

33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.” Immediately he got up.

The third point we covered in verses 33-34, seeing that a faithful servant is practice oriented. In the account of Aeneas, as well as in verses 36-41 and the account of Tabitha, we find that the faithful servant is one who seeks to practice his faith; to demonstrate it before others. In the healing of a man paralyzed for eight years and the raising of a woman who had died, we see a person who believed God for that which was humanly impossible. And what I would like to point out is that Peter was focused on what was possible for *God to do*. In verse 34, Peter points the man to the fact that it was not him but Jesus who healed. And with Tabitha, Peter moves everyone out of the room so as not to point people to himself, but again, as he would present Tabitha alive, the glory would go to the Lord.

This is what the faithful servant does, point people to the Lord. For in verse 35, as a result of the healing of Aeneas, many **“turned to the Lord”** – not to Peter. And again in verse 42 we read that after the raising of Tabitha from the dead, it was not Peter who people believed in, but rather, the **“many believed in the Lord.”** A faithful servant practices his faith before others only to point people to Jesus.

This leads us to the fourth characteristic of the faithful servant. This is now new material for all of us.

IV. A faithful servant is productive (9:35, 42)

35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord...42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

As we must note, it is intriguing to find in both accounts the response of the people to each of the respective miracles. The people **“turned to the Lord”** and **“believed in the Lord.”** This reminds us that that the purpose of the miracles was to demonstrate what God would do through a faithful servant. As the servant, in this case, Peter, is faithful to the Lord, the Lord draws people

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to Christ, not to the miracle worker! Because Peter was faithful, God allowed that faith to be productive, allowing Peter to be fruitful; allowing him to see many people saved.

Beloved, we need to know that God blesses faithfulness with productivity. We ought to expect, as we faithfully share the gospel; as we faithfully engage in people's lives, living out the precepts and principles of God's Word, that lives will be changed. If we are not being productive, if we are not seeing people's lives changed, it is because we are not living our faith as we ought. Our passion ought to be to do anything and everything we can to see people's lives changed by Christ and for Christ. To be sure, it will be in God's time and not always in ways or manners that we might expect, but we can expect lives to change if we are rightly living out our faith. Are you living out your faith? How can you know? Are lives being drawn closer to Jesus because of you? Will you labor and strive for others to be drawn closer to Christ? Paul would wonderfully capture this attitude in Colossians 1:28-29 saying, ^[slide 09]

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Notice Paul's expectation to "**present every man complete in Christ**" and to this productivity Paul says he labors (works with maximum effort) and strives (agonizes) but not in his own power but by the power of God at work in Him. Do you want to be more productive for Jesus? Then you must labor and strive to admonish, teach and present every man complete in Christ. This is to what you are to be a faithful servant. The pages of history are filled with believers who faithfully persevered in their service to Christ, regardless of any initial lack of fruit. Their faithfulness eventually resulted in abundant fruitfulness and productively to the glory of God. Our job is to labor and strive and God will take care of the rest.

V. A faithful servant is peaceable (9:43)

And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

Finally, a faithful servant is peaceable. We find the word "peaceable" used by Paul to describe the qualification of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:3 and again in Titus 3:2. To be peaceable is a positive way of saying, "not a fighter". An elder is not to be looking for a fight, but looking to be at peace with others. And this is what we find in the life of Peter.

This will be fleshed out more fully in our study to come, but what verse 43 does reveal to us is that a faithful servant needs to strive to be at peace with all people. After participating in these two great miracles, Peter leaves the scene and is found in the most obscure place, the home of a tanner. Why is this strange and obscure? According to the rabbis, the practice of being a tanner was an unclean vocation, dealing with the skins of dead animals. But here we find Peter, this one who had been a missionary to the Jewish people scatter because of the persecution, staying for a time in the home of a tanner named Simon.

I do not know if this would have shocked the Jewish Christians or not. And I do not know why Peter was here, but of this I am sure, the Lord brought him there to proclaim the gospel message which included that the times were changing and that old prejudices and walls between Jews and Gentiles were to be come down. What we do know is that all of this was a part of God's purpose to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles.

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If we are going to be faithful and productive servants of the Lord, we must strive to be peaceable with all people, willing to go wherever and to whomever the Lord calls us. Peter would have to look past cultural differences and perhaps even skin color in proclaiming the gospel. We must look beyond such things as these, along with where people grew up, where they went to school, where they work. Our look upon people needs to be one of compassion, realizing that everyone is in need of the saving grace of God. We are to be faithful to tell them the blessings of the gospel. Peter would come to realize his own need to look beyond his own prejudices as we will learn in Acts 10.

If we would be productive for Jesus, if we would be practice oriented with our faith and passionate, then we must also be peaceable, with one another as well as with those who need to hear the gospel from our lips. As Romans 12:18 so simply, yet so pointedly states,

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Why is this important? How else can we expect to share the gospel, to minister the grace and mercy of Jesus to one another and to lost souls unless we are first striving to be at peace with one another and with all men? There is but one requirement upon the servant of Christ, that he be found faithful, trustworthy – busy about the Lord's work, which is to spread the gospel message to people. Are you being faithful? If not, why not? What needs to change? What needs to be confessed, repented of and forsaken? What needs to be embraced? Let us labor and strive to be faithful servants of Jesus.

In closing, let us consider a few more practical thoughts concerning this idea of faithfulness the revealed requirement of a steward of God and as revealed in the life of Peter. Let us remember that the only reason why we can be faithful to God is because God is first and foremost faithful to us.

First, let us note faithfulness as an EVIDENCE. If we would be faithful, we must understand as best we can what faithfulness is. *Faithfulness is trusting God to accomplish His purposes, particularly in your life.* You might recall that "faithfulness" is one of the characteristics of what the Apostle Paul calls the "fruit" of Spirit in Galatians 5:22. It is the Holy Spirit who works on our hearts and minds to reveal how much better it is when we do what Jesus would do or say what Jesus would say. As with most things, to be good at anything, we must practice, practice, and then practice some more. As we strive to behave more and more as Jesus behaved on this earth, we become more like Jesus. This should be our desire, not because we should, or must, but because we choose to, we prefer to, because it is in our character to be faithful like Christ.

And faithfulness is one of these Christ-like qualities. Because Jesus is faithful, we learn to appreciate the effect His faithfulness has on us which means that we can rely upon even more Him. There is not one in this room who does not appreciate reliability. And it is interesting to note that generally speaking, for those who appreciate reliability in others, they themselves will strive to be more reliable for those people because they will not want to let the one who has been reliable to them down in some way.

Thus, as we grow in our appreciation of the reliability of Christ, this reliability gradually becomes one of our characteristics. To put this another way, unreliability, not being able to be relied upon, not being able to be trusted, that is unrighteousness, that is sin. Yet, as we learn of the reliability of Christ, the unrighteousness of our unreliability gradually turns to reliability, thus

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reflecting God's righteousness at work in us. Our faithfulness becomes an evidence of the reality of our faith. You know you are becoming faithful when God and God's people see you increasingly reliable. This means being where you are supposed to be when you are supposed to be there. It means being committed and regular in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study/reading, fellowship, and sharing Christ. We saw all of this in the life of Peter. But the real question is do you and others see this in yourself? There is just one thing required of you as a steward, that you be found faithful. By the way, you do realize that being half-faithful is a contradiction. You cannot be "full of faith" – full of reliability – half way!

And let us never forget that to be faithful we need everything of Jesus. It would be arrogant of us to believe that we could become like Jesus merely by trying, by applying our own human effort. We cannot be faithful on our own. The Bible is clear that what was true of David in Psalm 51:5 is true of us all, saying,

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

The beauty of Jesus is that he was and is our ***"high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens"*** (Hebrews 7:26). If we are in Christ, we have the opportunity to behave more and more as Jesus did because the same Holy Spirit that dwelt in Jesus, dwells in believers. For we read in 1 Corinthians 3:16 -

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

This quality of faithfulness is constantly in our reach because God fills us with a desire to live like Jesus. So I exhort you, as believers, to meditate on God and specifically upon our Lord Jesus Christ. As we do this, such thoughts reveal to us ways in which we can obey Jesus more completely. This is what Jesus meant when He called His disciples to "abide" in Him in John 15. To have a firm persuasion that *your life is to be a constant meditation upon Christ and then a modeling of the life of Christ in all you do*. The study of the person and work of Jesus creates an increasing intent upon being like Him, living like Him, and exercising our faith in action as Jesus did. Faithfulness that meditates and models Jesus is an evidence of our salvation.

In addition to faithfulness as an evidence, it is also an EXPECTATION. Faithfulness is not optional for the believer. When a bride and groom stand before God, a congregation and a preacher, the expectation is that they are committing themselves to faithfulness. It is not an optional clause in marriage. How much more is this to be so in our relationship with God? Being faithful is not something we choose to do or not do; it is God's expectation upon us. He expects us to know, love and do His will. And He even gives us the grace to do this. As part of the New Covenant, the new promise confirmed by Jesus Christ on the cross, we read these words from Ezekiel 36:25-27

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

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Notice that faithfulness to **“be careful to observe”** God’s ordinances is both an expectation in this text (**“you will be careful to observe...”**), but that this faithfulness then is also granted by God’s gracious Spirit whom He puts within us. The LORD says there at the beginning of verse 27, **“I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk...”** Are you faithful to God? Do you see His Spirit at work in you causing you to carefully do God’s will? Beloved, we demonstrate faithfulness by obeying Him. His desires, purposes and will becomes our own. A person cannot be faithful to God if he purposely does what he pleases in opposition to God. Does God really expect and look for faithfulness from us? Absolutely! Hear the words of our Savior who taught about God’s great interest in our trustworthiness toward Him. In Matthew 25:21 and the parable of the talents that teaches on this very subject of being faithful with what God has given us, Jesus said,

His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

God expects faithfulness. Now it is true that not everyone has same opportunities or the same abilities. However, we all have something from God to use for God and the only requirement of God is not wanting more or less, but of being faithful with what God has given you. We each have the capacity to be faithful in our own circumstances. The sad thing is that we do not always prove ourselves to be trustworthy when tested. This is what Jesus was reminding His disciples here in Matthew 25.

If you are a servant of Jesus, you are also a steward of Jesus. You are called to be faithful with everything in your life because it has been given to you by God. How are you doing? What needs to change in your life so that you are found faithful? What can I do to be more faithful some might ask? Good question.

If we want to see our faithfulness toward God increase; if we are truly serious about it, knowing it is both God’s expectation as well as our evidence of God’s working in us, then this is what you need to do in order to be more faithful; *develop the habit of obeying God promptly*. As soon as you read in the Bible something that speaks to your heart that you need to do; do it! When that still small voice speaks to your heart calling you to read your Bible, to pray, to share your faith, to stop speaking so harshly to or about someone; or whatever it may be, do it immediately. Beloved, we are the biggest procrastinators and justifiers, are we not? But when we delay in doing what we know God has called to, we are simply saying, “God, I want to have my will for a time. I will obey You when I’m good and ready.” That is neither obedience, nor faithfulness to God.

Start immediate obedience by following what you read in the Word of God. It is immediate obedience, not partial, not delayed, not half-hearted; but immediate obedience that sets us apart as those whom God can trust to carry out His will. I love what David said as recorded in 2 Samuel 22:33

God is my strong fortress; And He sets the blameless (the one who walks, obeys in integrity) in His way.

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I charge you in the presence of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, to apply every effort to becoming a man or woman whom God can trust to carry out His instructions. This is our one requirement, that we be found faithful. Therefore, let us serve God with all our heart in unwavering, uncompromising obedience. We need not wait for difficulties to come in order to be faithful. We start today with life's smallest details, learning to be faithful in these in order that we will be ready for greater tests to come.

Let us abide in Christ, even as Peter did. Let His words dwell richly within us even as they did in Peter. Let us please God in our words and actions, rather than pleasing our own hearts in the flesh. As we do this, we will find ourselves increasingly faithful, accomplishing God's purposes in our lives to His glory.

Soli Deo Gloria

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