



The beauty of Jesus

Galatians 5:22-23

Fruit of the Spirit—Faithfulness

December 1st 2019 Preacher: Roy Summers

Introduction

A few weeks ago I had an email informing me that there would be a great display of shooting stars one particular evening. Unfortunately, the clouds, as is often the case in England, prevented anyone from seeing the spectacle! But if you have seen a “shooting star” it is quite a dazzling sight. For the briefest moment, a bright streak appears across the sky, traveling from one point to another before it disappears forever.

Shooting stars are fickle, they come and then go forever, but there is one star in the sky that remains constant. It’s not flashy, no-one gets an email to say it is out tonight, but it stays in the same position, night after night, year after year, decade after decade, even millennia after millennia. It is so reliable that sailors navigate by it. It is the Pole Star, or North Star, or Polaris.

This astronomical parable is our introduction to the seventh fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness. The Holy Spirit who lives within every believer is growing Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control in our hearts and lives, making us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is easy to find earthly examples of fickleness, the opposite of faithfulness - shooting stars are one example: something fickle is transient, temporary, unpredictable and unreliable. Oh yes, perhaps flashy for a brief moment, they like to put on a show, but in the end they are unstable and flighty. It is much harder to find examples of faithfulness in this world. The Pole Star, is one example; the sun which rises every morning without fail is another, perhaps someone like Queen Elizabeth. We can all think of believers whom we could call “faithful.”

Here is a definition of faithfulness: *“Faithfulness is an unchanging character which is expressed in keeping promises.”*

(1) God is Faithful

The deep root of faithfulness, underneath the grace or virtue of faithfulness is a nature that does not change: “I the LORD do not change.” (Malachi 3:16) “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) “Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.” (Psalm 57:10) A hymn we love, puts it so well:

*“Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, There is **no shadow of turning with Thee;***

Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not, As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

This is a most praiseworthy and glorious attribute of God: he does not change, he is immutable, we say. He is the same today as he was a million years ago. In a million years he will be the same. Deep down in the nature of God, there is no change. What he was like a million years ago, he will be in a million years' time!

How different is the world we live in! Empires rise and fall, the seasons change, cities change—I lived in Wolverhampton thirty years ago, and when I visit it these days, everything has changed! And how changeable we are. Our bodies change, our minds change and our families change. Everything in the world is changeable and fickle! Even friends can be fickle: "Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man, who can find?" Laments king Solomon in Proverbs 20:6.

It is wonderful to know that in a world of change, there is One, the Lord our God, the Creator of the Universe, who changeth not! He is our rock, our refuge, our fortress. And in our last earthly moments his unchanging love for us will prove the great comfort:

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away
Change and decay in all around I see
O Thou who changest not, abide with me*

Faithfulness deep down, is about God's fixed holy and loving character that does not change. But faithfulness is expressed and revealed through actions, and supremely it is revealed in keeping promises: God is true to all his promises! "Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." (Joshua 21:45) "The Lord is faithful to all his promises" (Psalm 134:13)

God has kept all of his promises in the past. God promised never to destroy the earth with a flood, and he has kept that promise. After Noah's flood God said that he would never send a flood to destroy all of mankind: "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." (*Gen 9:11*) God has kept that promise. There have been minor floods, since that great flood, but no flood has destroyed all human life.

God promised to send a Saviour into the world, and he did! Many times the Old Testament prophets predicted the coming of God's Messiah! The promise first appears in Genesis 3:15 when he promised to send someone who would crush Satan's head. In Genesis 12 God told Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his descendants, "all the people on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3) In Acts chapter 3 Peter explained that it was through Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, that God would bless all nations. Through Isaiah God promised a Saviour who would be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and who would bear the

punishment that would bring us peace (53:5) Did God keep his promise to send a Saviour? “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5) God has kept all his promises in the past!

God has made to his people many wonderful present promises which he is keeping.

He will keep us from falling, “He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:3-4)

He will not leave our side, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5)

He will keep us from walking in darkness, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

He will meet all our needs: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want” (Psalm 23:1) “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19)

He will continue to work in us: “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6)

Can we not all testify to God's present faithfulness? How many years have you travelled with him, and even though we have so often strayed from him he has been faithful to us?

One of his wonderful today-promises is for anyone who is not yet a believer. Jesus says to you; “Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away” (John 6:37)

Not only has God kept all of his promises in the past, he is keeping all of his promises today!

And the God who has kept all his past promises and is keeping all his present promises will keep all of his future promises, and most especially his greatest future promise to send his Son back into the world in power and glory, to wrap up history, and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth where it will be said of his people:

*‘...they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.*

“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;

“he will lead them to springs of living water.”

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

(Revelation 7:15-17)

God is faithful! That’s the first and most important message of this sermon!

(2) God calls us to be faithful too!

But the second, is that the Lord calls us to be like him and to be faithful too. Faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit, it is a work he is accomplishing in his people by his Spirit, but it is a work he calls us to develop in ourselves.

A faithful church, more than anything else, is a church that sticks to the truth. *“It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth..”* (2 John 1:3)

Faithfulness as a church is keeping to God's unchanging Word, sticking to God's truth, while the culture around us drifts from its Judeo-Christian moorings, and while many parts of the church are drifting away from God's Word. (If you want to know how far the Western culture is drifting from its Christian origins just read the manifestos of the three main political parties on matters of ethics and morality!) The reason we spent a whole month preaching through “God's blue print for mankind” in September was to make sure, by God's grace, our ship was still on course!

A church that is faithful to Christ, faithful to truth will not budge on issues of gender and sexuality from the teaching of God's Word. That may result in persecution because Satan hates truth. We're not looking for that, but it may come our way.

The other way we exhibit this fruit of faithfulness is in our individual Christian lives.

Faithfulness is keeping our promises. We should be known as those who are faithful to our word. Psalm 15:4 talks about the man or woman who *“keeps his oath (his promise, his word) even when it hurts”* (Psalm 15:4). We should be careful about making promises, and loyal in keeping them.

Faithfulness is persevering in giving. In the second place, we should be faithful in giving to the Lord's work, giving week by week, month by month. When the apostle Paul was getting together a gift for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem he gave this instruction to help believers give faithfully: “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Paul says, don't give erratically, something one week, nothing the next. Set aside a weekly amount, in proportion to your income, the rich person more, the poor person less (the Scriptures give us the guide of 10% of our income). And don't spend it on anything else, but keep it as your gift.

An American pastor once told me a really sad story. He said that in northern states of America during the winter, churches sometimes have to shut their doors on Sundays because of the snow and ice, but they are very reluctant to shut up for a Sunday, do you know why? Because they never recoup the offering on the following Sunday! I felt so sad when I heard that! Faithfulness is giving to the Lord's Work regularly, and perhaps the best modern way of doing that is through a standing order.

Faithfulness is continuing to pray, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” (Romans 12:12) The first Christians gave themselves wholeheartedly to corporate prayer, “They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching

and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

The fourth expression of individual Christian faithfulness is in marriage, to the promises we made before God, “to love comfort, honour and keep in sickness and in health, forsaking all others to be faithful as long as we both shall live.”

Some time ago, I heard about a church, which banned all its members from using Facebook. I am not sure a church can do that but I understood the reasons. There had been a number of cases in the church of marital breakdown, when husbands and wives were starting conversations and relationships with other people, and some were then breaking their promise to “forsake all others and be faithful as long as we both shall live.”

Finally, faithfulness in the life of a believer, is expressed in trustworthiness in Christians service. God has given to every believer a spiritual gift, to be used in his service to bless others, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 3:10) The Lord wants us to serve him faithfully.

In Matthew 25, the Master gave 5 talent-gifts to one servant, 2 talent-gifts to another and 1 talent-gift to the third. The Master went away on a long journey and told them to use their gift while he was away. Jesus has gone to heaven, he has given all of us some spiritual gift to use in his kingdom, while he has gone away. And when he returns he will want to know how we have used that gift. The guy with one talent did not use it and he was punished. But the other two servants were faithful, and the guy who was given two talents made two more, and was able to give back 4, the one who was given 5 made 5 more, and was able to give back 10 altogether. Both were faithful, and so the Master, the Lord Jesus said to them, “Well done good and faithful servant, You have been faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and hare your master’s happiness.”

3. Our response to God’s Faithfulness

How should we respond to God’s Word this morning?

Someone here will be able to thank God for the faithfulness he has worked in them. Perhaps over many long years of faithful service you have had little human encouragement, well be encouraged, one day you will hear Christ’s “Well done!” and that will be enough!

Perhaps someone else will be convicted about one area of your life where you are unfaithful, and this week, you must, by God's grace put that right

Someone else might be tempted to discouragement: you are thinking I am more shooting star than Pole star! Don’t be downhearted, this fruit of faithfulness, though it may be small now, the Lord will grow over the years—and you make it grow too!

And everyone here, all of us, ought to thank God for his faithfulness, for “if we are faithless, he remains faithful”, wrote Paul in 2 Timothy 2:13.