

Hebrews 10.19-11.1

This Is No Time for Timidity

Sermon #10 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on October 23, 2005.

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Main Idea: *Those who know the faithfulness of Jesus are faithful to him in the day of trouble.*

Scripture Introduction

Around the year 320 AD, the Roman emperor Licinius was persecuting Christians. In Armenia, his 12th Legion, nicknamed the "Thundering Legion," had 40 men who proclaimed Jesus as their Lord. To force a renunciation of their Savior, those 40 were sentenced to spend the night, naked, upon a frozen lake. A warm tent, food, and a hot bath were available to anyone who turned from Jesus. If you had been there, in the descending darkness, you could have heard their song to the Savior. The 40 sang something like this in translation: "O Lord, 40 wrestlers have come forth to fight for You. Grant that 40 wrestlers may gain the victory!" The song became softer as, during the night, one by one, they died. Only one of the soldiers gave in. He left his comrades and went to the tent where the centurion, with the execution squad, kept watch. Now the remaining few sang: "O Lord, 39 wrestlers have come forth to fight for You. Grant that 39 wrestlers may gain the victory!" But the Spirit used their song, and faith, to touch the centurion. Proclaiming himself a Christian, the centurion went to the ice and the soft song was heard again: "O Lord, 40 wrestlers have come forth to fight for You. Grant that 40 wrestlers may gain the victory!"

Faithfulness in suffering provides a riveting testimony. Though our witness likely will be less dramatic, God produces that same faithfulness in all those in whom his Spirit is working.

Galatians 5.22-24: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

In order that we might be faithful in every circumstance in which the Lord places us, let's read and consider God's Word beginning in Hebrews 10.19.

Please Stand. Read Hebrews 10.19-11.1.

Pray.

Introduction

In 1963 the official slogan of Coca-Cola was: "Things go better with Coke."

Somehow a great many people seem to think that the official slogan of Christianity is similar: "Things go better with Christ." As if faithfulness to Jesus had as its goal making our lives more enjoyable. Jesus will make your marriage better; Jesus will make your children more respectable; Jesus will make you feel good about yourself. Apparently, people are asking (even if not in these words): "Is there something in Christianity to make my life better?"

In our small group we have been sensitized to the importance of the right question. "Is there something in Christianity to make my life better?" is *not* the right question! And one confirmation of its being wrong is that Biblical faithfulness makes little sense if Christianity is

judged by whether it makes my life better. Instead, the Bible asks: “Is there something in Christianity better than my life?”

“Is there something in Christianity better than my life?” If the answer is, “Yes,” then faithfulness—even in suffering—faithfulness will result. “Is there something in Christianity better than life?” For us to get to that question and its answer, let us begin where we have each week in this series:

1. We Must Embrace the Biblical Definition of Faithfulness (Hebrews 11.1)

In our English versions, there is a slightly different word in this verse from what appears in the “Fruit of the Spirit” list. Here “faith” is defined; in Galatians 5, it is “faithfulness” we are to possess. But in the original language, the same word is in both places: πίστις. So the context tells whether a passage is speaking of “the assurance of things hoped for [and] the conviction of things not seen” (what we call “faith”) or if the passage is describing the character trait of those who possess such faith (which we call “faithfulness”).

So faithfulness is, in a very broad sense, simply the character trait of those who possess true faith. Now that is true and important, but we still do not know what a faithful woman looks like as she serves her family and her God.

Let’s be more specific: *Biblical faithfulness is the reliability which comes from works utterly consistent with being a new creation in Christ.* How do I get there? Let’s take it apart.

1.1. *Faithfulness requires reliability*

I know that because the Bible connects God’s trustworthiness (his reliability) with his being faithful.

Deuteronomy 7.9: Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

Lamentations 3.22-23: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The faithfulness of God is His absolute reliability because all of his actions are completely consistent with his character. God is perfectly dependable. Every word he has every uttered and every promise he has made has come to pass. What he has said, he will do; you can trust your life to God!

Hebrews 10.23: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

1.2. *Faithfulness requires godly character*

Nearly everyone appreciates faithfulness. President Theodore Roosevelt said, “It is better to be faithful than famous.” Cicero (the Roman politician and philosopher) said: “Nothing is more noble, nothing more venerable than fidelity. Faithfulness and truth are the most sacred excellences and endowments of the human mind.”

And yet, faithfulness is not natural. In fact, mankind is notorious for being *unfaithful*. Solomon warned: “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20.6). King David complained of the same: “Help, LORD.... For the faithful disappear.... Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.”

Faithfulness does not naturally spring from the heart of man; it is a supernatural work of the Spirit.

1.3. Faithfulness requires a new creation

Some of you have seen the Christmas classic: *Miracle on 34th Street*. In that movie, Santa Clause defines faith: “Believing in things when common sense tells you not to.”

The Bible defines faith much differently. It says that anyone with sense will believe in God and his word. The world around us is constantly lying; it seeks to deceive and destroy. Only one can be trusted—God alone!

Imagine there is a fire in a building and you are stuck on the 10th floor. You go to the window hoping to be saved.

If you look down and see nothing below other than pavement, yet jump anyway, well that is Santa’s definition of faith. It is believing that jumping will save you when common sense says it will not.

Biblical faith, on the other hand, looks down and sees your loving Father, holding a giant cushion, ready to catch you when you jump. Then it is seeing your faithful brother, Jesus Christ jumping first and being delivered by the Father’s provision.

So will you jump? Will your works be consistent with a person full of faith?

Apart from a new heart, one created by the Holy Spirit, we will not jump. We are blind to the provision of the Father and ignorant of the protection of the Son until the Spirit possesses us with the new birth. Then we jump because we “*see*” the Father and the Son, we know their character, and we are certain of that which we hope for and sure of what cannot be seen. As **Oswald Chambers** said: “Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.”

The Spirit alone gives that knowledge of God; thus faithfulness requires a new creation. And the Biblical definition of faithfulness is: “the reliability which comes from works utterly consistent with being a new creation in Christ.”

2. We Must Deny Ourselves the Opposite of Faithfulness: Willful Sin (Hebrews 10.26-31)

There is a great difference between “willful sin” and being tempted, struggling with sin, longing for godliness, but failing again and again. Willful sin in this passage is *rejecting the faith*. It is knowing the truth and turning your back on it, even in the face of convincing evidence.

Matthew Henry: “The sin here mentioned is a total and final apostasy, when men with a full and fixed will and resolution despise and reject Christ, the only Savior, despise and resist the Spirit, the only sanctifier, and despise and renounce the gospel, the only way of salvation, and the words of eternal life; and all this after they have known, owned, and professed, the Christian religion, and continue to do so obstinately and maliciously. This is the great transgression.”

There may be times when some of you here face this great a temptation. You know the truth; you know God has done what he promised; you know the call on your life. Yet you are so displeased with God’s will and works that you consider chucking it all. Maybe you are considering a life of absolute unfaithfulness. If so, heed carefully this warning and deny yourself this sin: “for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain and fearful expectation of judgment...”

3. We Must Be Cautious of the Counterfeit of Faithfulness: Timidity—Drawing or

Shrinking Back (Hebrews 10.32-39)

Earlier I suggested that people are asking: “Is there something in Christianity to make my life better?” Apparently, many believe there is. The message that “things go better with Christ” is filling churches and causing Americans by the millions to claim to be Christians. And in the past, such a counterfeit of faith would have no reason to fail because it would likely remain untested.

But times are changing; our country is turning against the faith. Some who stand for Christ suffer loss. More will.

One of the benefits of suffering is finding out whether our faith is genuine. Counterfeit faith is timid. It shrinks from the chains which belong to the faithful (verse 34a); it draws back from the plundering of our goods (verse 34b); it is timid when endurance is called for (verse 36) and when doing the will of God brings suffering. It draws back because its purpose was to make life better. Faithfulness in suffering makes no sense to those faith is counterfeit.

But what if there were something in Christianity better than life? Jesus said there is: **Luke 9.23-24**: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

This is no time for timidity; yes, sometimes faithfulness will get you killed. But Christ is better than life, and faithfulness never loses him!

4. We Must Actively Cultivate Biblical Faithfulness

4.1. We Must Know the Faithful God

Corrie ten Boom explained faith this way: “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

The corollary is true too: we cannot be faithful unless we know the faithful God. Is He your dwelling place? Is your life safely carried in his everlasting arms? (Deuteronomy 33.26-27). Here are three simple ways to know personally and intimately the faithful God:

1. Read and meditate on the Scriptures which teach of his faithfulness.
2. Memorize verses on his faithfulness.
3. Pray, asking him to convince you of how faithful he is.

4.2. We Must Not Count Our Lives as Precious

Surely the apostle Paul was one of the most faithful men to live. From where did his faithfulness come? It came from his personal and intimate knowledge of the faithful God; but it also required that he not count his life as precious.

Acts 20.22-24: “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear [precious, τίμιος] to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

When we entertain in our hearts the question: “How is Christ making my life better?” we are never faithful because our lives are what is precious to us! Faithfulness means living a life utterly consistent with being a follower of Christ, and Christ was crucified. Paul knew that; faithfulness did not make his life better. But he also knew that Christ was better than life, and so faithfulness was better than life. Therefore, he did not count his life precious.

Will you?

4.3. ***We Must Begin to Live Consistent with Our Profession***

A great many Christians worry that when the time to give their life for their faith comes, they will fail the test. Even if we were not postmillennial, just the statistics suggest that few of us will ever face such a challenge.

The much greater question is: will we be faithful in the little things.

In 1485 at the battle of Bosworth Field, Richard III lost against Henry the Earl of Richmond in the event which caused Shakespeare to pen these words: "My horse, my horse, my kingdom for a horse." He wrote those to describe the fact that Richard lost the battle that day because his horse lost its horseshoe because it was missing a nail, and as a result, he missed the key part of the battle and the kingdom was lost. You may have heard the poem written to remind children of the history event and the lesson in the importance of beginning to be faithful in the small things:

*For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

A bank employee was due for a good promotion. One day at lunch the president of the bank, who happened to be standing behind the clerk in the cafeteria, saw him slip two pats of butter under his slice of bread so they wouldn't be seen by the cashier. That little act of dishonesty cost him his promotion. Just 10 cents' worth of butter made all the difference. The bank president reasoned that if an employee cannot be trusted in little things he cannot be trusted at all.

Jesus said those who are faithful over little will be trusted with much in his kingdom. Let us begin today to live lives consistent with our confession as followers of Christ.

5. Conclusion

The king of Persia needed a faithful servant and had two candidates for the office. He promised each a certain wage for a day's work and told them the job was to fill a cane basket with water from a nearby well. He would return in the evening to inspect their work.

After dumping a few buckets of water in the basket, one threw down his bucket and walked away in disgust, saying, "I'm not going to do such fool's work!" You see, every time they filled a bucket from the well and dumped it into the cane basket, the water poured out of the basket onto the ground like a sieve.

The other man continued until he reached the bottom of the well. On one of the last scoops, when he poured the water into the cane basket and it had all drained away, there was left a diamond ring. "Now I see the use of pouring water into a basket!" he exclaimed. "Whenever the ring came up the basket would drain the water and discover it. Our work was not useless."

Faithfulness sometimes feels like a fool's work. But only if you cannot imagine the great reward for faithfulness which is yours as you pour your life into the sieve. I am here to remind you that there is something—no, Some One—who is better than life. And he is faithful to reward those who are filled with the fruit of faithfulness. Will you come to Him for both the fruit and the reward for the fruit?