

“God’s Standard for Faithfulness!”

Matthew 25:14-30

Intro. – Each of us have a general concept of what faithfulness is. I’ll illustrate what I mean:

- Illus. –
- 1) Would we consider our car “faithful” if it started 3 out of 4 times?
 - 2) Would we consider our dog/cat faithful if they showed up just for holidays? etc.
 - 3) Would we consider friends faithful if after being invited once a week for a meal they would show up only once in awhile?
 - 4) Would we consider our phone/mail etc service faithful if the weather had to be just right...?
 - 5) Would we consider our mate “faithful” three weeks out of four every month?
 - Note: couple in 2007 in Bosnia were cheating on line live chat-room... They were cheating ON each other WITH each other!

To each of these would immediately say “no.” Why? Because our general concept of faithfulness is complete enough to point out these glaring inconsistencies.

But, what of our concept of faithfulness? Is it complete? Are we concerned enough about God’s standard of faithfulness to be measured by it?

This is what we want to do through this message

Purpose: to better understand God’s standard of faithfulness individually/collectively

I God’s Definition of FAITHFULNESS

A. Definition within the Text

1. Most of us very familiar with the text – parable about master returns and calls servants to evaluate their work... whether they succeeded or failed.
2. The servant entrusted with five gained five more:
 - *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”*
3. Servant entrusted with two gained two...
4. Servant entrusted with one buried the one = *“You wicked and lazy servant...”*

B. Definition in Simplest Terms

1. Jesus defines faithfulness = accomplishing as much as possible with resources available...
2. “Faithful” = dependable, trustworthy, one who inspires confidence...
 - Illus. – unlike the following cartoon saw one time: 2 guys on skies standing before their instructor (arm is in a cast, black eye, head bandaged... “I just wish I could have more confidence in our instructor.”

C. Definition with Qualifications

1. Christ does not expect us to produce more than we can, just all we can with His help!
2. Note in parable the servant that gained 5 and servant that gained 2 – the Master gave identical commendations – both succeeded equally, both declared “faithful”!
3. Our personal faithfulness is not determined by how much we accomplish, but, how much we -- accomplish compared to our potential!
 - a. 5 talent servant had more with which to work, he succeeded in proportion to what was avail.
 - b. thus, when any servant of Christ does all that they can – however much or little that may be, they have succeeded and proven themselves faithful!
4. Same true for the local church
 - a. one may be capable of growing 1,000 or better while another may struggle to reach 200
 - b. depending on the opportunity, smaller church may have succeeded just as much as larger one..
 - c. Illus. – preacher whom I respect (B. Merold) traveled to 10 largest churches in US... Asked what thought greatest church was. Response? Church in Kansas located in county of less than 1,000 people; yet, the church was running over 400 in attendance...
5. Caution – never underestimate our ability and potential:

- a. need to realistically assess our opportunities and compare that with our accomplishments...
- b. experience has taught me there is more danger in *underestimating* our potential than *overestimating* our potential...
- c. we live in a time and a place of great potential – may God help us to accurately assess our opportunities and then compare these with our accomplishments!

II God's Definition of UNFAITHFULNESS

A. Definition within the Text

1. 3rd servant – not a thief, scoundrel or bum – didn't waist, risk, or lose = preserved it!
2. First glance might wonder, "What's wrong with that he did...?"
3. Note: Master calls him "wicked, lazy, unprofitable, slothful, worthless, unproductive, unfaithful"

B. Definition in Simplest Terms

1. To be *unfaithful* (to fail) one doesn't have to run amuck or do anything dreadful
 - i.e. you don't have to deny the faith (although certainly unfaithful), adopt doctrinal heresy... run off with someone's mate... rob a bank etc.
2. To be *unfaithful* all we have to do is NOTHING – not talk, walk, and show Christ... not be concerned about the lost and building brothers/sisters in Christ up...

C. Definition with No Qualifications

1. Master's inescapable question = "How much have you produced (fruit-wise) in My enterprise with what is available?"
2. 3rd servant unfaithful because did nothing to produce in the enterprise Master commissioned him.
3. His failure not that he didn't produce 5 or 2, he didn't produce what he could... Had he, he would have been equally successful as the other two!

Do what you can with what you have = faithfulness – Do nothing with what you have = unfaithfulness!

III God's Desire for US

- too many churches trying to redefine *faithfulness* = unity, doctrinal purity, political/social action...
- all "redefining" of this term fit the mold of the 3rd servant = all about terms of maintenance/protection rather than productivity... all about terms of activity rather than results...

A. Look at the Nation of Israel

1. Jews illustrate the error in redefining faithfulness...
2. Began to think they had been chosen because they *deserved it!*
3. Forgot they were chosen for the purpose helping God achieve His goal... they were blessed to be able to be a blessing...
4. Being God's people became an end in itself – dead end goal led them to be static, defensive people
5. Illus. – Pharisees = redefined *faithfulness* by building a fence around law... Sunk into a maintenance minded thinking – thinking that led to paralysis of God's enterprise.

B. Look at Christians Today

1. Many today make same fatal error – proudly declaring themselves "keepers of the faith" but produce no fruit by burying their talents...
2. How can fault anyone who "keeps the faith" – we can't unless fruit of their faith keeping evident!
3. Illus. – in athletic contest, best a team can hope for if all it has is a good defense is what? A nothing to nothing tie! You can't win without scoring or producing fruit!
Illus. – basketball team knew they were going to get creamed so they stalled to the very end to take the only shot... Been better to have played their heart out and lost by 100 points!
4. Application is clear – we can't afford the mentality to cut our losses, hold the enemy at bay and survive – we're here to win!!
5. Apostle Paul often compared Lord's Church (Christians) to athletics (athletes) – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way

that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Conclusion: Faithfulness, as defined by the Parable of Talents = achieving maximum results with what we have to work. Unfaithfulness is failure to even try...

Historically, when God’s people try to redefine *faithfulness* to mean something other than God’s purpose. His purpose will not be achieved and His Son’s Church will languish...

Invitation/Decision: sign that said: “I’m not lazy. I’m just highly motivated to do nothing!”