

Faithfulness

by J.R. Miller

Faithfulness is the key to pleasing God and achieving success in all aspects of life.

Scripture: Psalm 15:4, Proverbs 12:22, Matthew 25:21, Mark 14:7, Luke 16:10, 1 Corinthians 4:2, Colossians 3:23-24, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, James 1:12, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Commitment"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the paramount importance of faithfulness in our lives, asserting that the highest commendation one can receive is to be called a 'good and faithful servant.' He explains that God does not require grand achievements but rather faithfulness in the small tasks and responsibilities assigned to us. Miller illustrates this through the example of Mary, who, despite her seemingly small act of devotion, provided immense comfort to Jesus. He stresses that faithfulness applies to all vocations and promises, urging individuals to uphold their commitments and perform their duties with excellence. Ultimately, he concludes that true faithfulness leads to divine approval and joy in the presence of God.

Transcript

"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!" Matthew 25:21

No higher praise can be given to any life--than to say it has been faithful. No one could ask for a nobler epitaph than the simple words, "He was faithful." This will be the commendation given in the great account, to those who have made the most of their talents: "You have been faithful with a few things." Faithfulness should therefore be the aim in all our living. It is not great things that God expects or requires of us, unless He has given us great gifts and opportunities; all He requires is faithfulness. He gives us certain talents, puts us in certain relations, assigns to us certain duties, and then asks us to be faithful--and nothing more. The man with the plain gifts and the small opportunities, is not expected to do the great things which are required of the man with the brilliant talents and the large opportunities. We should get this truth fixed deeply in our mind--that God asks of no one anything more--than simple faithfulness.

Faithfulness is not the same in any two people. In the man who has five talents, there must be a great deal more outcome to measure up to the standard of faithfulness, than in the man who has but two talents. Faithfulness is simply being true to God--and making the most of one's life. Of those who have received little--only little is required; where much has been received--much is required. Never is anything

impossible or unreasonable expected of anyone. If we are simply faithful--we shall please God.

Jesus said of Mary, after her act of love, when men murmured at her, "She has done what she could!" Mark 14:7. What had she done? Very little, we would say. She loved Jesus truly and deeply. Then she brought a flask of precious ointment and broke the flask, pouring the sacred nard upon her Lord's tired feet, those feet which soon were to be nailed to the cross. That was one of the ways love and honor were shown in those days.

What good did it do? That was the question the disciples asked. We know it wonderfully comforted the Savior's sorrowful heart. Amid almost universal hatred, here was one of His friends who believed in Him still. Amid maddening enmity--here was one who sincerely loved Him. While other hands were weaving a crown of thorns for His brow, and others still were forging cruel nails to drive through His feet--Mary's hands were pouring ointment on His head, and bathing His feet with the nard. Who will say that Mary's act did no good? We cannot know how her sweet, pure, loyal love--blessed our suffering Savior in His bitter anguish. It seemed a little thing--but little thing though it was, it gave the heart of Jesus a thrill of joy that made Him stronger for all the dark, terrible days that followed, and for that blackest, terriblest day of all--when He hung on the cross!

Call nothing 'little'--which gives comfort, strength, courage, or cheer to a struggling heart. A kindly handshake, when despair was wrapping a soul in folds of gloom and driving it to madness--saved a life from suicide. A sympathetic word, when one was about to yield to a temptation which would have left shame, dishonor, and ruin--rescued a soul and saved it for purity, beauty, and heaven. We do not know what is little. What seems so small to us as to be almost insignificant, may have infinite and eternal consequences, when all its harvest of results is gathered up in the judgment. "She has done what she could." That was blessed praise for Mary. That is all Christ asks of any of us--just the best we can do. He never asks anything we cannot do.

But let us not forget that our Master always does expect and require of each of us--what we can do--all that we can do. Faithful as a measure of requirement, is not a pillow for indolence. It is not a letting down of obligations to a low standard, to make life easy. Faithfulness is a lofty standard. "She has done what she could" is the highest commendation any lips can ever speak. It meant that with her resources, Mary could have done nothing better that hour, nothing that would have meant more to her Lord and Friend. The man with the one talent, who made no use of his talent, keeping it in a napkin, received no commendation of, "Faithful servant! " He had done nothing with his life--and he lost all that he had. Not to use what we have--is to lose it. The stars in the heavens would rot, says someone, if they did not move. Less than our best, is unfaithfulness. With all Christ's patience, He does require of us, our best.

This divine law of faithfulness applies to all callings in life and to every kind of work. Some people try to make a separation between sacred and secular matters, as if religion applied only to one part of a man's life. But there is a moral quality in everything that a moral being does. The judgment of God will take in not only specifically religious acts--but also all that belongs to one's business or trade.

The young minister went to see one of his members, who was a shoemaker. He found him busy at his work, and sat down in his shop for a talk. "I am glad to see men who can use the humblest vocation for the glory of God, as you are doing," said the minister, as the conversation went on. The shoemaker replied saying there was no such thing in this wide world as a humble vocation. "You are a minister of the gospel, by the grace of God. I am a shoemaker, by the grace of God. If I make good shoes, I shall be as much

approved before God, as you will for being a faithful pastor. All work is noble and honorable."

He went on to say that the minister would carry up to the judgment--a fair sample of the sermons he had preached; and he, the shoemaker, would carry up a fair sample of the shoes he had made. Both would be judged by the quality of their work. Goodness is goodness, whether you find it in the mill-owner or in a mill-worker. The old shoemaker picked up a pair of shoes which had been left for mending. "If that boy should catch cold some day and get pneumonia, his father, who is poor, would have a doctor's bill to pay, and might lose the child. I propose to mend the shoes as though my salvation depended on it. I can't afford, as a child of God, with a hope of heaven, to put poor work into that job, for much depends on it. I would not like to meet that boy up yonder and have him tell me he died because I was not a faithful shoemaker. Do you think a vocation is a humble one--when it deals with the health and life of our fellow-creatures?"

A man is a plumber. Someone says, "Religion has nothing to do with plumbing." But really it has a great deal to do with it. The health of a family depends largely upon the quality of the plumbing in their house. If it is defective, and typhoid fever or diphtheria creeps into the happy home, causing suffering and perhaps death--will God take no account of the plumber's negligence? No matter how good a man he may be, how consistent in his life and character, how earnest in Christian service--he has proved unfaithful in the business of his life, bringing disaster upon a household.

Or a man is a bricklayer. In building the flues in a house, he is careless at one point, near the end of a wooden beam, not making his work perfectly safe. One night, years afterward, there is a cry of "fire!" in the house, and in the terror and confusion, a child's life is lost. The origin of the fire was a defective flue. Was not the bricklayer responsible? Should there be no religion in the work of the man on whose faithfulness the safety of our dwellings depends?

A carriage-builder uses flawed iron in an axle. The carriage is used for years by a family, bearing its precious cargo without accident. But one day, in coming down a steep hill, one of the wheels strikes a stone, and in the jarring the axle is broken, leading to a serious accident, in which several people are injured. When the iron broke--the flaw was discovered. Is there no place for religion in carriage-building? Is not the man who makes axles for carriages, his brother's keeper?

We may apply the truth to the work of each man and woman. One works in a factory, one in a machine-shop, one in an office, one in a store, one in a school. One man is a physician, one a lawyer, one a merchant, one a mechanic, one a minister. Whatever our calling is--we cannot be wholly faithful to God unless we do our work as well as we can. To slur it in any way--is to do God's work badly. To neglect it--is to rob God. The work of the universe is not quite complete, without our part of its work well done, however small that part may be. The faithfulness which Christ requires, must reach to the way the child gets his lessons and recites them; to the way the dressmaker and the tailor sew their seams; to the way the blacksmith welds the iron and shoes the horse; to the way the carpenter builds his house; to the way the clerk represents the goods, and measures and weighs them. "Be faithful!" rings from heaven in every ear, in every smallest piece of work we are doing.

Another application of the lesson is to faithfulness in promises. There are some people who make promises freely--but as easily fail to keep them. Surely we ought to keep sedulous watch over ourselves in this regard.

Parents and older people need to think seriously of the effect of failing to keep a promise made to a child. "One of the keenest sorrows of childhood," says one, "is the disappointment that comes from

unfulfilled promises. A promise carelessly made to a child, will often be cherished and depended on for many months, and when at last it bears no fruit, the child's soul receives a wound which is very slow to heal."

It is told of Dr. Livingstone, that once he had promised to send some mementos from Africa to a little boy in England, and had forgotten to do so. The boy's father was writing to Dr. Livingstone, and the little fellow added a postscript reminding his friend of his promise. Dr. Livingstone was overwhelmed with dismay and confusion when he read the postscript. He hastened to repair the wrong he had done, and refers to the matter again and again, with evident pain, feeling sure, he says, that the boy would forgive him--if he knew how much he had suffered by his fault. This great tenderness in the heart of the great missionary over his failure to keep his promise to the child-- shows the nobleness of his nature.

It is told also of Sir William Napier, that when walking one day in the country, he met a little girl in sore distress over the breaking of a bowl she had been carrying. He comforted the child by telling her that he would give her sixpence to buy another bowl. But he found he had no money, not even sixpence, in his pocket. He then promised to meet the child at the same hour the next day, at the same spot, and to bring her the money. The child went away very happy. When Sir William reached home, however, he found an invitation to dine on the morrow with some distinguished people, whom he greatly wished to see. But he declined the invitation at once, telling his family of the promise he had made to the child, and saying, "I cannot disappoint her, for she trusted me."

That is the true spirit of faithfulness. A promise made to a child or to the lowliest or most unworthy person--should be kept, no matter how hard it may be to keep it. One of the Psalms gives as a mark of a godly man, that when he swears, even to his own hurt, he changes not. "I entirely forget my promise," one says, as if forgetting it were much less a sin than deliberately breaking it. We have no right to forget any promise we make to another. It is a noble thing to find one whom we can absolutely depend on, whose promise we are as sure of--as we are of the rising sun, whose simplest word is as good as his oath, who does just what he says he will do, at the moment he says he will do it.

In learning the lesson of faithfulness, we need to train ourselves to unrelenting self-discipline. We are in danger of being altogether too lenient with our faults--and too tolerant of our sins; making too little of our failures, and not holding ourselves rigidly to account. The only safety lies in habits of utmost exactness.

It is related of a young book-keeper, that just as his summer vacation was about to begin, he found a mistake of eight cents in his accounts. Instead of going on his vacation, the young man set to work to find the error. He found it, after two weeks' search thus losing his entire vacation. His victory over himself, made him ever after a stronger man. If there were more of such self-discipline, there would be fewer failures and wrecks of character.

Judge Tourgee, in one of his books, tells of a young soldier, scarcely a month from his peaceful home, standing now in the excitement of the field, and asking in a tense whisper, with white, quivering lips, "Do you think there will be a battle?" Almost as soon as he spoke, a bomb exploded nearby, that brought death to hundreds. Later in the terrible struggle, this brave boy was still at his post. The weakened line was wavering, however, and the lad's brother, an old veteran, saw it, and rushed for an instant from his post of duty, and sought along the trembling line, for the boy he loved as his own soul. As his eyes fell upon him,

faithful still, he laid his hand upon the lad's shoulder, and said, "Be a man, John!" The tide of battle ebbed and flowed; and when the moon rose after that tumultuous day, its pale beams shone on John's face, white and cold, lying where he had stood, his feet the very foremost in the pallid ranks toward the foe.

We are all in a battle which will not end for us until, in our turn, the moon's beams shine down upon each of our faces as we sleep on the field. We must be faithful. Then at the end, when we stand before God and make report of what we have done--we shall hear the approving word, "You have been faithful!" It will be better to have that at the close of life, "You have been faithful"--than to wear earth's brightest crown, and be unfaithful failing God.

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