

Title: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Faithfulness*

Text: Galatians 5:22,23

On Dec 5, 1914, Ernest Shackleton embarked on what he called “the last great polar expedition.” His goal was to cross Antarctica by dogsled—an uncharted journey of 1,500 miles across the most inhospitable terrain on earth. His crew of 27 was handpicked from a field of 5,000 applicants. The ship that would carry them there was named *Endurance*. For six weeks they fought their way through frigid seas and ice floes trying to reach the continent, until finally their ship became frozen into the ice pack. There was nothing to do but hunker down for the winter and wait for the spring thaw to release the ship. After ten months in their wooden icebox, spring finally arrived. But instead of releasing the vessel, the shifting ice floes crushed it to pieces.

At this point, Shackleton gathered his men and announced his new mission: to get everyman home safely. With the ice pack breaking up, they set up camp on a giant ice floe, hoping the current would carry them toward Paulet Island, where they had provisions stored. Shackleton devoted every waking moment to preserving his men’s health, morale, and unity. Day after day he walked from tent to tent, checking on each man. When spirits began to sag, he would order the cook to come up with some hot drink, or call for a talent show. When it became apparent that the floe was carrying them out to sea, Shackleton ordered the men into three lifeboats they had preserved from the *Endurance*. After seven harrowing days and nights fighting powerful currents, freezing rain, and massive icebergs, they made it to an uninhabited slab of rock called Elephant Island.

For the first time in 497 days, they set foot on land. But they were far from safe. Elephant Island was far from any shipping route, and no one on earth knew they were there. With morale and provisions running out, Shackleton determined their only course of action was to take one of the boats and head for a whaling station on South Georgia Island for help. That would mean a journey of 800 miles across the most treacherous waters on the planet. As he shoved off with a portion of his crew, Shackleton promised the rest he would come back for them, and the 22 men left behind assured themselves that if anyone could save them, it was Shackleton.

For 14 days the small boat battled gale-force winds and 20 foot seas. They took only four navigational readings during the 800 mile journey. If they were off by even a degree, they would miss South Georgia entirely and be lost at sea. On the 14th day, they spotted land, but the outgoing tide wouldn’t allow them to get to shore, so they had to spend another night in the waterlogged boat. That night a hurricane hit, and for nine hours they fought for their lives. When daylight broke, they were able to land in a rocky cove, only to discover they were on the wrong side of the island. The only way to get to the station would be to hike across 22 miles of mountainous terrain that had never been charted or crossed before. Shackleton and two others trudged 36 hours straight before stumbling into the whaling camp like walking corpses.

Shackleton allowed himself one night’s sleep, before setting about the task of rescuing

the rest of his men. He would have to acquire a ship, and re-cross those hazardous waters. His first three attempts failed, as sea ice prevented him from reaching Elephant Island. During those months, Shackleton's hair literally turned from brown to gray with worry over his men. On his fourth try, Shackleton made it through the ice, and as he approached the island, he saw men gathering on the shoreline to greet him. Anxiously he counted one, two, three...but it wasn't till he reached 22 that he breathed a sigh of relief. "They're all there," he said to his mate, "they're all well." Shackleton kept his word, and delivered every one of his men safely home. That's loyalty. That's commitment. That's faithfulness.

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. Faithfulness is reliability. Dependability. Doing what you say you're going to do. It stems from our faith in God and our faith in Jesus Christ. The word that is translated in most translations as faithfulness is the Greek word *pi,stij* – the word that we translate as faith.

In Romans 1:16,17, Paul says, "¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

There is a debate among Bible scholars as to what that means exactly. Does it mean, basically that we are saved by our own faith or that we are to rely on the faithfulness of God? Isn't that really a both/and kind of answer? Isn't it ridiculous ever to put your faith in someone or something that is not faithful? One of the reasons that we can stand up here today and encourage you toward greater faithfulness in your life is because of the faithfulness of God. The point of preaching a sermon series on the fruit of the Spirit is to say to you, this is the character of God, this is the character that His Spirit wants to produce in you and this will enable you to be the kind of person you've always wanted to be.

In I Corinthians 10:13, Paul writes, "¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." The point is that when you're at your wit's end and you're up against something that you don't know if you can handle it or not, God is faithful.

I wish we had time this morning to go around the room and hear testimonies from folks who have been following Christ for some time and to hear stories of how God's faithfulness has been displayed in your life.

In II Corinthians, Paul says, "¹⁸ But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."

Paul is saying, basically, as God has shown His faithfulness to me, I want to demonstrate that faithfulness in my ministry as I serve Him. As God is faithful to us, He wants us to demonstrate faithfulness in our relationships and our commitments as we serve Him. So this morning, I want us to look at God's faithfulness to us, our faithfulness to him and our

faithfulness to each other.

What does it mean to say that God is faithful? The short answer or the easy answer would be to say, God does what he says he will do. He always acts in a way that is consistent with his character which is revealed in His written word, the Bible. It involves dependability, integrity.

God indicated his intentions in the earliest pages of the Bible. In Genesis 3, he promised the serpent that he would get what's coming to him for leading Adam and Eve astray. In Genesis 12, God's plan begins to unfold as he chooses the old man named Abram and says to him, "Leave all of your familiar surroundings and go to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, I will bless those who bless you and through you, all nations on earth will bless themselves." The rest of the Biblical story is the demonstration of the faithfulness of God to the promise He made to Abraham, thousands of years ago.

In Deuteronomy, Moses says, "⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

What it means for us is that we don't serve a God who is capricious and arbitrary. He doesn't shift like the winds or the sands in the desert. You don't have to worry about catching him in a bad mood. His love for us is absolute and unconditional. He has told us that he has loved us with an everlasting love and a love that will be faithful to us throughout all of the ages and circumstances of our lives. God is absolutely committed to doing what will result in His glory and our good.

It is interesting that one of the verses that we point to the most regarding God's faithfulness is in Lamentations. Jerusalem has been sacked by the Babylonians. Many of the Jews have been carried off into exile. The prophet Jeremiah is left to wonder about the meaning of it all. He could have been angry with God and indeed if you read the book of Jeremiah, you see a lot of tears and a lot of questioning because life wasn't going the way Jeremiah thought it would when accepted the call to become God's prophet.

In Lamentations we read, "¹⁸ So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." ¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. ²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. ²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

When Jeremiah's worst nightmare came true, he affirmed if it weren't for God's love and God's faithfulness, it could have been even worse. That verse became the inspiration for one of our favorite hymns *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. I have a friend Robert Smith who was a colleague

of mine back when I was in my doctoral program. He now teaches preaching at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. He is an outstanding preacher and an even more outstanding human being and encourager. I found out recently his adult son was murdered recently. Evidently, he was working a convenience store and was shot and killed in a robbery gone bad. I didn't know anything about this until the speaker at the conference I was attending related the story and he said, "When I talked to Robert, he said, 'Now when I sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, I know the truth of those words better than I ever did.'" The faithfulness of God doesn't keep you away from bad things, it promises to walk through those bad things with you.

As in any relationship, if God is faithful to us, He expects that we be faithful to him. In fact, as the Spirit works in your life, he will produce within you this quality of faithfulness. You will be dependable. We can debate eternal security. We can ask, as I've already alluded to, "Am I saved by my faithfulness to God or by God's faithfulness to me?" We are saved by God's faithfulness to us. As fallen and as sinful as we are, do we even have it in us to demonstrate the kind of faithfulness that we would need? Just as we said last week, we're not saved because we are good, we are made good because we are saved. We are not saved because we are faithful, we are made faithful because we are saved. As we yield control of our lives more and more to the Spirit of God, His faithfulness begins to grow and to blossom in our character.

It is interesting that most of the mentions of faithfulness in the Scriptures are of God's faithfulness, but there are times that the Bible does talk about our faithfulness. In Matthew 25, we read about the parable of the talents. A man goes away on a journey and he calls his employees in and says to them, "I'm going away, take these resources and manage them for me. He gave to one 5, to another 2, and to another 1. The one who had 5 managed them well and we find out why he was entrusted with 5 talents because he took the 5 that had been given him and made 5 more. The one with the 2 talents took the 2 talents that had been entrusted to them and earned 2 more, doubling his money. The third one took his one talent and hid it in the ground so he had nothing left to give to the master when he returned. To each of the first 2, the master said, "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!"

Then we see what he says to the one who was not faithful. Who didn't take care of what had been entrusted to him. "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?"²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest."²⁸ "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents."

Faithfulness to God means taking what He has given us and investing it and using it to His glory. It means staying in relationship with Him no matter what. Think about the parable of the soils and how people began their journey with Christ with great enthusiasm and interest but either experienced some adversity and gave up or just became distracted and turned away. As God's Spirit works in your life, you will grow in that character trait known as faithfulness.

Faithfulness is integrity. It is dependability. It is saying to someone else, as much as you

can put faith in another human being, you can put faith in me. People often talk about being faithful to the Lord, and they talk about being faithful to the church. That means serving, attending, being someone here that people can rely upon.

Then we talk about being faithful to each other. Most of the time when we use the word faithful in human relationships, we think about faithfulness to marriage vows. We think about the ability to say, I haven't engaged in any inappropriate relationships with anyone of the opposite sex other than my wife or my husband. That's an important part of it. When you stand before God and your friends and your family and you promise to love and to honor and forsaking all others to keep only unto your partner for as long as you both shall live, that's important that you be faithful.

What about faithfulness to duty? To serve year in, year out, to be faithful in season and out of season because God has led you to a place and to a position and you're going to serve Him with everything you've got because that's what's expected of you.

John Piper makes an interesting distinction between coronary Christians and adrenal Christians.. He says, "We need to be coronary Christians, not adrenal Christians.

Not that adrenaline is bad. It gets me through lots of Sundays. But it lets you down on Mondays. The heart is another kind of friend. It just keeps on serving—through good days and bad days, happy and sad, high and low, appreciated and unappreciated. It never lets me down. It never says, "I don't like your attitude, Piper, I'm taking a day off." It just keeps humbly lubb-dubbing along.

Coronary Christians are like the heart in the causes they serve. Adrenal Christians are like adrenaline—a spurt of energy and then fatigue. What we need in the cause of racial justice and justice for the unborn is coronary Christians. Marathoners, not just sprinters. People who find the pace to finish the race. That's faithfulness.

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