

~Other Speakers A-F: Rich Carmicheal:

"Â...This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints" (Rev. 13:10).

As the days grow more difficult, and as pressures against our faith increase, I encourage you to renew your commitment to remain faithful to the Lord to the very end. The Lord deeply values faithfulness and gives this promise: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

The Apostle Paul serves as a powerful example of living and serving faithfully to the very end: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day Â– and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Dear reader, I encourage you to fight the good fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith. No matter how difficult your circumstances are, remain faithful to the Lord. Do not give in to weariness, discouragement or despair. Do not give in to the temptations and temporary pleasures of sin. Do not allow suffering, persecution, financial troubles, or other difficulties to draw you away from the Lord. Remain faithful to Him at all costs. Be steadfast, loyal, trustworthy and dependable. The Lord will honor your faithfulness by helping you in this life, and by rewarding you in the life to come.

In order to encourage you to remain true to the Lord, I draw your attention to the following truths about faithfulness:

The Lord Will Always Be Faithful to You

The foundational truth regarding faithfulness is that faithfulness begins with the Lord and is an integral part of His nature, character and actions. He abounds in faithfulness (Psa. 86:15) and His faithfulness surrounds Him (Psa. 89:8). His faithfulness reaches to the skies (Psa. 36:5) and is firmly established in heaven (Psa. 89:2). In perfect faithfulness He does marvelous things (Isa. 25:1) and all of the works of His hands are done in faithfulness (Psa. 111:7-8). His faithfulness continues on through all generations (Psa. 119:90) and endures forever (Psa. 117:2). He is inherently faithful, and it is impossible for Him to be otherwise. He will always be absolutely faithful toward you.

If you are growing weary and are uncertain about whether you can press on to the end, remember that because the Lord is faithful, He is able to "keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8-9). Keep in mind also this wonderful prayer and promise: "May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it" (1 Thes. 5:23-24).

If you are facing strong temptations toward sin, find strength and encouragement in the truth that "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" and that "when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Remember also that Jesus, our merciful and faithful high priest, was "tempted in every way, just as we are Â– yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He suffered when tempted, and is able to sympathize with us and help us when we are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). If you have given in to sin, keep in mind that when we "confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If you feel like your situation is impossible and your hope in God's promises is waning, remember that we can "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Take to heart Abraham's confidence in God's faithfulness to His promises: "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age Â– and Sarah herself was barren Â– was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise" (Heb. 11:11).

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the difficulties of life, remember that when your soul is downcast, you can still have hope! As Jeremiah declares, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him'" (Lam. 3:22-24). David likewise reminds us that when troubles pursue us, and our spirit grows faint and our heart dismayed, and we cry out for mercy, the Lord in His faithfulness is able to come to our relief (Psa. 143:1-4). In His faithfulness He is also able to strengthen us and protect us from

the evil one (2 Thes. 3:3), deliver us from our enemies (Psa. 54:5), work His salvation into our lives (Psa. 98:1-3) and bring forth justice (Isa. 42:3). As we take refuge in Him, His faithfulness is our shield and rampart (Psa. 91:4). In times when we suffer as Christians, we can commit ourselves to our "faithful Creator and continue to do good" (see 1 Pet. 4:12-19).

Faithfulness Is a Matter of the Heart

Another important truth about faithfulness is that it is to flow from a heart of love. The Lord is faithful to us because He loves us, and we in turn are faithful to Him because of our love for Him. Love and faithfulness go together, and they are both a matter of the heart: "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (Prov. 3:3).

While faithfulness expresses itself in various actions, it means little to God unless it springs forth from a devoted and loyal heart. This was one of the main problems with the Pharisees. While they tried to follow the letter of the law faithfully, they failed miserably in God's eyes because their hearts were not right with Him. Jesus' words toward them reveal how serious it is to have an outward display of obedience without a true heart for God: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.... You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean" (Matt. 23:23-26).

On the other hand, a man such as Abraham pleased the Lord because the Lord found his heart faithful to Him (Neh. 9:7-8). Hezekiah is another example of one whose heart was right as he was able to declare to the Lord, "I have walked before You faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in Your eyes" (2 Kgs. 20:3). Similarly, Jehoshaphat appointed judges, charging them to "serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:9).

David's life also reveals much to us about how highly the Lord values a faithful heart. When the Lord sent Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint David as king, the Lord shared that He "does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The Lord chose David, not because David was perfect, but because of David's heart for Him. Even when David fell into terrible sin, he never lost his love and passion for the Lord. For example, in the midst of his confession regarding his sin with Bathsheba, notice his deep concern for his relationship with the Lord: "Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Psa. 51:11). He longed for restoration in his relationship with the Lord, and therefore sought the Lord with a "broken and contrite heart" (Psa. 51:17). The Lord was gracious to forgive and restore David, and he finished his life as one who was faithful to the Lord and upright in heart (1 Kgs. 3:6; 11:4).

As we face various pressures and struggles, we must guard our hearts from drifting away from the Lord and becoming hardened. Such drifting and hardening can happen even if we are very busy in the service of the Lord. For example, the church in Ephesus had commendable deeds, hard work and perseverance, and yet the people had forsaken their first love (see Rev. 2:1-7). They were faithful to the work of the Lord, but not faithful in their love for the Lord.

If you sense your heart for the Lord beginning to drift and becoming cold or indifferent, or possibly even bitter and hardened, address your condition immediately. Bare your heart and soul before the Lord and make David's prayer your own: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me..." (Psa. 139:23-24). Ask the Lord to create in you a pure heart and to renew a steadfast spirit within you (Psa. 51:10) so that you can "be sure to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart..." (1 Sam. 12:24).

Faithful Stewardship

One of the ways we show faithfulness to the Lord is in faithfully managing the various resources, responsibilities and gifts that He entrusts to us. As the Apostle Paul teaches, "...it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). We are to be faithful in service and ministry (Neh. 13:14; Col. 1:7; 4:7), in prayer (Rom. 12:12), in showing love to others (3 John 1:5), in our witness (Rev. 2:13), in giving (2 Chron. 31:12; 1 Cor. 16:2) and in sharing God's Word (Jer. 23:28; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). We are to faithfully administer God's grace in its various forms (1 Pet. 4:10).

Our faithful stewardship is all the more significant in light of the fact that "the end of all things is near" (1 Pet. 4:7). This is surely a time to give yourself "fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Your faithfulness to all that the Lord has entrusted to you matters deeply to Him and carries eternal significance for yourself and for those to whom you minister.

The Lord Rewards Faithfulness

In keeping with this is the truth that the Lord rewards you for your faithfulness. As the Apostle Paul teaches, in the context of faithful stewardship, the day is coming when the Lord will "bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Cor. 4:5). In the parable of the talents, Jesus hints at the tremendous joy that awaits faithful servants: "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!" (Matt. 25:21, 23). But even at the present time the Lord promises to share many blessings with you as you are faithful to Him and His work. For example, He promises to preserve you (Psa. 31:23), to watch over you (Psa. 101:6) and to reward you (1 Sam. 26:23).

So be faithful now and to the very end! Be faithful in your relationship to the Lord and in your service for Him, remembering that "He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him..." (Heb. 6:10).