

Faithfulness

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[0 : 0 0] We turn to Galatians chapter 5. We've been looking for ages, it seems, now. We've been looking at this verse from Galatians 5 and we're coming towards the end of our section, here, Galatians 5 and verse 22 and 23. But the fruit of the Spirit, it's on page 1172, fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control against such, there is no law. And we've been looking at each of these individually and today we're looking at the fruit of faithfulness. Now just again, just to bed it in what we've been saying, these are all kind of intertwined and they're all depending on one another. It's the fruit of the Spirit as opposed to individual fruits and so we're kind of, there is a sense of overlap sometimes, there's a sense in which you just can't have the one without the other and all of it is dependent, remember, on our early studies from John's Gospel which spoke about remaining in Christ. Jesus being our vine and the fruit that comes from the vine can only be fruits, it can only bear fruit as it is connected to the vine, you know, it's just a very simple picture for us. And so spiritually this is the same, this is not saying, oh I need to work really hard at trying to be faithful in my life because we can't do it on our own. This is not a self-help sermon, it's about recognizing our need to be reliant on Jesus Christ and therefore as we are we bear His fruit. So I don't want people to walk away thinking I really need to try myself to be more loving and joyful or faithful. There is a sense in which we have responsibility but that responsibility comes as we rely on and depend on Jesus Christ and ask Him for these gifts. So what I want to do is bed what we're saying and I'm sorry if this appears a little bit repetitive, I can't think of another way of doing it. But what I want to do is bed first of all the characteristic of faithfulness which is here at a Christian characteristic because we're following Christ on Jesus Himself. So He's our example. So I just want quickly to remind ourselves of His own faithfulness as He lived, then ask the question, do you trust Him? And then ask the question, how we can bear that faithfulness in our own lives? So a quick whistle-top-stop tour through the life of

Jesus. He's a boy and as a boy remember when he's 12 years old he's found in the temple and he's found there doing the work of his father. Remember his parents are really confused where he is, they've gone away and eventually when they come back they find Jesus and he's answering questions in the temple because even at that stage he recognises that he is to be faithful to his father. He and the father are one, there's this divine unity but there's also this recognition that he has come, he's emptied the glory of himself and he's come to do a specific work and he begins that even from that early age by being faithful to his parents then he's in the desert for 40 days, God the Son, Jesus Christ in the desert and throughout that time he's hugely tempted by Satan for these 40 days and as he's tempted by Satan, Satan tempts him in different ways, he tempts him to deny God, to mistrust God and not to worship God, to give up what he's doing. I'll show you an easier way of saying this but right throughout that huge and intense and deep temptation Jesus remains faithful to the Father unto his calling. Then when he's in Nazareth as a public itinerant preacher going back to his own people, you know he was brought up in Nazareth and he preaches to them but they don't like what he has to say and they probably all knew him but they didn't like what he had to say so they kind of dragged him to the top of a cliff where they were going to throw him off, murdered him, he was about to be murdered and yet he simply walked away and remained faithful to his calling even though he was hated in such a overt and public way by the people that he grew up with. And throughout the Gospels as we look through the Gospels all his dealings with people whether they're rich or poor, homeless or otherwise homed, whether they're sick or well, whether they're religious or religious he has this tremendous ability to be honest and to be clear and to be faithful in his presentation of the truth and of his message to them. He doesn't play into any particular characteristic, he doesn't fawn the company or the favour of the rich nor does he simply ignore people for whatever different reason he might do so. He's faithful in all his dealings with people, with their spiritual need, he sees through the kind of outward conditions that they're in and he brings to them the gospel and their need for

Jesus Christ in their heart, the poverty of people's hearts, he brings them to that point where he tells them their need of redemption. It might be a rich young ruler who thought he was really good in thing, moral and upright, it might be a prostitute who was hopeless and despairing but he brought hope and he brought forgiveness but he also brought absolute truth. When his disciples continued in their lives, we note this don't we and we note it for ourselves, when they continued in their lives to misunderstand him and not really follow his teaching and also his mission, he was patient with them, that's maybe going back to another fruit of the spirit but it's linked to faithfulness, he was constant in his love for them, he didn't turn them, he didn't spurn them, he didn't throw them aside and start with another group of people. When he went to the religious leaders of his day, the Pharisees and called them sons of hell, he was being absolutely faithful to the gospel and he said when they made converts that they would become twice as much as son of hell as they were and he was faithful. It wasn't an easy thing to say and it hastened as it were his crucifixion. He set his face to Jerusalem knowing that he was going to his death, he was faithful to his calling. When the crowds that loved him as he went thinking that he would be a national redeemer, when they turned their backs on him and asked for him to be crucified, he remained faithful to what he had come to do. When everyone turned their backs on him, he remained faithful to the cross, to the crucifixion and to his calling.

In the upper room, he warned the disciples that they would deny him, that they would turn away from him, that they didn't understand even though he said he would die and on the third day be raised again, he was faithful to them and remained strong with them. When they deserted him in the garden, when Judas betrayed him, when he was rejected and beaten and tortured and mocked, when this God, this sovereign God had a crown of thorns placed in his head, he didn't turn back, he didn't walk away. The absolute irony and horror of humanity placing a crown of thorns on the head of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and in the darkness of the cross, when even his father, the sense of his father's presence, the judicial forsakenness of God was his on the cross, he remained faithful, facing the powers, the spiritual powers of darkness and hell. When he had all of that focused on him, he still had time to be faithful to his mother and make sure his mother, as he looked down from the cross, would be looked after by John, the disciple that he loved. Resurrection on the third day, as he goes back to the disciples, he proved his work and he gave them his commission and he promised in faithfulness to say to them and to all his people, I will be with you until the end of the age, a promise of faithful presence and nearness to him, to his people and to his church. So we have as an example of faithfulness, I'm not speaking really today about the faithfulness of God, but Jesus is an example of faithfulness, the character of faithfulness that comes when we are grounded and rooted in him. And so I'm asking you this morning, as we think about our Christian lives, do you trust him? Do you trust Jesus Christ and do you believe that he is faithful? Do you trust in this characteristic of God that we see specifically, explicitly in Jesus Christ, that he is dependable and that he is trustworthy and that he is true and that he is true to his word and he's kept his word and he's true to his promise and he's true to his salvation and to his redemption and the work that he's done. Do you believe in that, the character of God when he says what he says through Jesus Christ? Do you believe what we've been told several years in the last few weeks that were more sinful than we ever imagined, that more love than we ever could dream of? Do we believe in these things and trust what he says? Do you trust that he is right when he says I'm the way, the truth in the life, no one comes to the Father? But maybe if you died tonight and stood at the gates of heaven and asked for entry there, on what basis would we do so? Do we trust him that the only basis for entry into heaven and eternal life is trusting in what he's already done, what he's come to achieve as God in our place as Savior? Do we trust him to do that? Or are we still here thinking that he's not really trustworthy and faithful but that I'm sure I'll get to heaven because I've tried my best, I've done what I can when he says that his way is the way and he has provided fully and fully for us. Do we trust him when he says that we are sinners saved by grace, his undeserving mercy for us? Do we recognize and trust him in these things? And as Christians do we trust him when he says to us, do you trust him when he says to us you will clearly suffer as a Christian? Do you trust that he is right when he says that and do you believe, see it's always easy for us to believe isn't it when things are going well for us? When God's answering our prayers or rather what we want and we're getting what we want in life but when we're suffering, when we're in darkness, when things are difficult for us spiritually, when he's not answering our prayers the way we think he ought to answer our prayers, do we trust him when he says, listen that is what will happen in your Christian life? You'll suffer because I suffered, it will only be temporary, sometimes we don't know why, we're not asked to know why but he says do you trust my faithfulness that I will never leave you or forsake? It's not theoretical, it's not kind of pious religious sentiment but do we trust in him when he says he says, when he prepares us for that, when he says that our life in this world is lived on hell's front door, front step of hell, that the brokenness of the world in which we live, the dysfunction of the world in which we live is only eased because of God's grace and God's love and God's mercy and patience and faithfulness and when that is removed in the end of time justly we will experience all that is separation from his love and grace and lost eternity unless we recognize and come to Christ. And do we trust him when he asks us to watch and see and live this life in the light of eternity?

[13 : 44] I know we don't think that and I know I don't think that so often, this life for us physically and mentally and even spiritually seems to be all that there is for us, that's just how we're made up, but he says to look at life, trust him to look at life in the light of eternity, that our life is quicker as the Bible says than a weaver shuttle and in the light of eternity we need to be those who have put our faith and trust in the one for whom eternity is his natural environment, the one for whom eternity is his home. Do we trust him for these things and do we live in the light of these things? We need to trust God in our lives and his faithfulness that he is right and that he is good, another of the fruits of the Spirit and he is faithful and he is told us these things because he loves us and he's told us these things because he knows we'll have trouble in this world and he's told us these things because we know we need forgiveness and he's told us these things because he is truth and he is faithful and he wants to share with us his truth and he wants us to live in the light of these truths and to follow him and serve him and if that's the case, if we've seen faithfulness in the person of Jesus and if we are asked and have as Christians put our trust in him and if you haven't then the question is what is your talent or alternative to that? Excuse me. I've drunk a lot of alcohol before I started today. Right. What is your alternative? What is it? If you kind of denied or rejected or don't believe or trust in this God, what is it? That you put your hope in for life and eternity because it all is based on his faithfulness, isn't it? If he isn't to be trusted, if he isn't faithful to his word, if what he's done wasn't significant in its faithfulness, then why are we here? What's it all about? We need to take him and the faithfulness of his revelation, his character in his revelation, seriously in our lives and if we do so as Christians then we need to reflect that faithfulness in our lives as a characteristic. We share, you know it's one of the fruit of the Spirit, we share that faithfulness of life, that Christ-like trait. So I just finish with a very practical application of that which you must make and which I must make. As we remain in Christ, as believers, we are going to show that same characteristic. You're going to show it tomorrow. No, not today.

You're going to show it today. I'm going to show it today. But we are going to show it tomorrow as well in our lives because it's a Christ-like trait, faithfulness, that is steadfastness, a dependableness, your true and reliable and loyal and constant and trusting and persevering. These all are kind of angles of faithfulness that come together to describe what the word means as we recognize it in Jesus and as we seek to show it in our own lives. It will mean as Christians, and we've taken the name of Jesus as Christians, that we will be faithful, faithful to God through Jesus, that we recognize He is our Lord and the implications of that, that we are bought with a price, each of us, and we remain faithful to Him. We depend on Him, we know Him, we pray to Him, we rely on Him, we're going to do Him for wisdom and for grace and for change and for forgiveness and for miracles to happen in our lives because we recognize ultimately it is about Him, our hope and our future.

And so we remain faithful to Him and there will be many times that we will be asked to deny God in our lives and to deny His faithfulness and to do other things first. Lordship is about recognizing our need with His strength to remain faithful to Him. And can I say again, and I hope you don't think I'm dwelling on this too much, especially in darkness, especially when you're struggling with doubt, with experience, with jobs, with family, with relationships, and you think, where is God in all of this? What's the point of me following Him when things are so rubbish? Can I say always the most amazing Christian testimonies of people will come from people who have trusted Him in darkness. It's always the case. Not what I will say, not what a preacher will say, not even necessarily sometimes what we will read in Scripture, but when somebody has lived and remained faithful to a God of love even when they don't understand what's happening in their lives and I'm not for a moment belittling the difficulties and the troubles people go through. As we keep that perspective of living on hell's doorstep, recognizing opposition and recognizing eternity and His promises into eternity of a future and of goodness and of grace, even when we don't understand, even in real difficulty, what a witness it is to remain faithful to God's goodness in darkness, remain faithful to God. And can I also say, I believe it's important for us to remain faithful to the Bible we read there in John 3, verse 3, that John was thanking guys for his faithfulness, his faithfulness to the truth and how he continued to walk in the truth and that whole little letter is about faithfulness and faithfulness to Jesus

Christ and it's important, isn't it? If Christ is our Lord and if we recognize and trust in His faithfulness that we have His book and we read His book, read His word, His living word as a guide on which we rely. If some of you are reading through the Bible in two years that we've been going through, well it looks gospel. It looks gospel is great.

You must be excited through the looks gospel because Jesus speaks so clearly and it's so relevant every day. Man, that's unbelievable. That's amazing what He's saying. It's so absolutely helpful and simple. You know, we're often moaning and grumbling and complaining, look at the word, I can't understand the Bible, it's so boring. You can't be bored in looks gospel. It's absolutely impossible. If Christ is Lord and if He's living and significant and important to us, you will find every day something significant in looks gospel as we hear the story of Jesus that is absolutely life changing. Understanding the word, it's so simple. Where is the Bible? Physically, where is the Bible in your life physically?

[21 : 39] Where do you keep it? We keep things that are important to us, close one way or another. Where is the Bible? Where's this precious letter to a friend? That's what it is, isn't it? It's a precious letter to us in our lives and with a day to day message for us, for our help for us. Where is it? Have we just cast it aside thinking it's too hard, it's too old fashioned, it's too difficult? Or have we prioritized it because it's a faithful living word of a friend to us. We prioritize our meals and our texting and Facebook and all these things. We have time to do all of that every day, but do we have time to be faithful to the Bible, to the word? It's a strange concept, isn't it? If we're Christians but we have a closed book, the Bible is closed to us because that's saying we've got a closed mind, closed mind to His Word and to His faithfulness and to the promises. What keeps us going?

It's His promises. Promises are so significant. We should be reading it. We should be part of our day to day living, day to day living faithfulness. That is one of this great characteristics as we show faithfulness, the fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness to Him, to His Word and also faithfulness in life, in our characters so that you are known as a Christian, someone who's faithful, someone who is dependable, reliable. Don't we really love, can I just turn it on its head, don't we really love that characteristic in other people? We do, don't we really love, I love that characteristic in other people, people that are reliable, faithful, dependable, who do what they say, who keep their promises, who wear stupid, I don't think, sorry, it's not stupid, it is for me to wear. And do these, you know, that's just a ridiculous example but we recognize and know we like that dependability. Why?

Because so often in our day to day lives, in our families, in our relationships, in our workplaces, we've been bruised and broken by the opposite, by the breakdown and dysfunction that comes when people are disloyal or unreliable or dishonest or who break their promises or who give up on you so easily. You know, you make one mistake, say, I can't be friends with them anymore and they just turn their backs and they give up high standard for everyone else, low standard for themselves. And isn't it that we love that characteristic in other people? We love it and we're attracted to people who have the gift, this characteristic of faithfulness, we love that, we don't like fickleness, we don't like people that blow hot and cold, that we don't know, we're on eggshells around them all the time so you've got this atmosphere of kind of eggshells and hot and cold and it's not comfortable as we can't walk well in that atmosphere and we don't know how to act and react with people because they're hot and cold, they're independable. And so we love that characteristic of faithfulness in others. We go into someone's company and we say, yeah, they're going to be the same and they're going to just love me even though I'm failing and making mistakes and stupid sometimes and they're not going to give up on me, faithfulness. We love it in others, we just display it ourselves then. Do we display that ourselves? We're asked to be faithful. I'm not asking you to ask anyone else to be faithful, I'm just using these examples that we ourselves because we love it in others. We're faithful. Like Jesus when people let us down, when people betray us, we'll turn their back on us, we don't give up on them. We're faithful in friendship. They were faithful to God and faithful to

His word. Faithful in the church. It's the cement of the Christian community, isn't it? Faithfulness. Not fickleness. Not finding fault with others. Not always looking to failure in others. But seeing faithfulness is such a great gift to share and to live. May it be part of our community as a church. It's hard work and it is energy sapping, which is why we need to remain in Christ, don't we? This is not about personal, it's not like life coaching I'm giving here. I'm not interested in life coaching. I can't life coach. I can't coach myself. It's not about life coaching. This is about remaining in Christ and finding His energy and character and living His way may be part of the cement of our congregation but also part of your character as a person that will make you attractive to people in the sense of being Christ-like. Faithfulness. Let's bear our heads and pray just briefly. Lord, there is so much about your character and your nature that is utterly beautiful and we love the characteristic of faithfulness. We love it in other people.

We love it in Jesus Christ although sometimes we can't understand it in Jesus because you are also pure and true and just and holy and sometimes we struggle with that knowledge of you as one so different from what we are. Forgive us when we bring you down to our level or try and mould you in our own image. Maybe rather let you be God and let you be faithful to who you are. Transcendent and not moulded by the vagaries of any particular culture or thinking or time or generation but true and absolutely pure. The standard by which we all fall short and yet the Savior by which we can all be redeemed and bought back through your great love and great faithfulness all the way to the cross to die the death that we deserved, Lord God, and to give us the life that we couldn't live. So we thank you for that and we ask that it would be a real and living reality for us and Lord help us to be faithful to one another. Grant us the ability to pull down theology from the heavens and from the books of theory and enable us to take theology into our lives, into our relationships, into our workplace, into our employment, our unemployment, our studies.

[28 : 30] Lord, I do remember the young people today in our studies and remember them in the pressures of exams coming up and we pray that they would throughout these times be faithful to you and put you first in their lives and would find that from that all else will flow. Pray for those particularly going through times of difficulty and struggle and faith crisis that they would not question your faithfulness but would seek your grace and would remember that promise, I will be with you even to the end of the age. It's been significant and real. So here as we sing together our parting, Sam and bless our fellowship together beyond that for we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.