

God's Promise: To Be Faithful

By Scott Runyon

First Baptist Church of Birmingham

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1 Cor. 1:1-9

CHILDREN'S TIME

Have you ever read the story, "Horton Hatches the Egg" by Dr. Seuss? It is a wonderful story about an elephant named Horton. The story begins with a lazy bird named Mayzie sitting on her egg in a tree. Mayzie didn't like sitting on her egg. It seemed boring and tiresome. She didn't like it one bit. She wanted a vacation and looked for someone to sit on her egg for her.

Then Horton walked by. Mayzie asked Horton if he would sit on her egg while she took a little break. Horton didn't want to at first, but Mayzie promised that she would not be gone long, so Horton agreed and soon he was sitting on the nest while Mayzie flew off to Florida for a vacation.

Mayzie had so much fun in Florida that she decided she would never return to her nest. So there was Horton day after day, then week after week, and then month after month. Winter came and icicles formed on Horton's trunk and feet,

but still he was faithful to the promise he made to Mayzie.

"I'll stay on this egg and I won't let it freeze," he said with a sneeze. "I meant what I said and I said what I meant. An elephant is faithful, 100%."

Now, I don't know if elephants are really faithful 100%, but I do know someone who is. God is faithful 100% of the time! The Bible is full of God's promises to people and to the world, and God is always faithful to keep every promise.

SERMON

READ 1 Cor. 1-9

When reading this passage, it is quite clear that Paul was preoccupied with Jesus, considering the number of references he makes to Jesus, who for him is at the center of everything that he was writing, and all of his ministry. In fact, Paul saw Jesus at the very center of all of history. There was nothing more important, and nothing that was worthwhile in life without Jesus. Paul wanted to make this clear right from the beginning of his letter to the people who are part of the new church in Corinth, Greece.

Because he wanted the very best kind of life for the Corinthians, he was working hard to help them see Jesus as the centerpiece of their life story as well.

He wanted them to see that they had been caught up in the great story of God's power and love. Jesus was given as a gift to move them forward in the expansion of this story.

Paul told them that it was through God's grace that they had everything they did, regardless if they deserved it or not. God's riches had become their riches. God's life was their life. God's community was their community. And God was faithful to work in them to bring about all good things.

God had called them in the past, was equipping them in the present, and God would provide for them in the future.

This is true for us as it was in Paul's day. God's faithfulness is consistent throughout our lives, even when our faithfulness falters.

We often attribute faithfulness to people, not God. In the news, we hear about people like Tiger Woods, who, a handful of years ago, was unfaithful to his wife leading to a bitter divorce. More

recently, there has been all kinds of attention given to President Trump's marital unfaithfulness and efforts to keep it hidden during his campaign for President.

Faithfulness continues to be about how people live up to or fail its test.

King David, who was a big time celebrity of his day, was unfaithful when he had a relationship with Bathsheba and had her husband killed.

After being confronted, David broke down in guilt, face to face with his own failings. The turning point in the story of King David was that because of **God's** faithfulness he was able to plead for forgiveness saying,

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions. Wash
me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

Without God's faithfulness, David would not be able to approach God for forgiveness. What David relied on was not his own ability to be faithful, but on God's ability to be faithful.

Throughout scripture, story after story affirms that God is faithful.

We read that God remembered the covenant God made in ancient times with Abraham and others time and again.

God will not abandon the people.

God will not break the word God gives.

God won't withhold forgiveness.

God doesn't hide.

God is remarkably, undeniably, and profoundly faithful today and always to the promises that God has made.

But we are different.

We forget our promises.

We abandon others.

We break our word.

We withhold forgiveness.

We hide.

Amid all of our successes, and with our best efforts we fall short in our faithfulness.

But sometimes we buy the lie that being a Christian has everything to do with us. In order to be part of God's family, we have it lodged in

our minds that we have to be faithful.

With this mentality, we get to thinking that doubting, and our weaknesses, and sin are considered signs of our unfaithfulness, and therefore separate us from God and God's family. We can even feel undeserving of God's love.

This is the consequence of guilt and shame.

This lie that everything depends on our faithfulness creeps in and infects us with perfectionism, and the need to depend on ourselves, even save ourselves by being good enough.

When we buy this lie, we are negating God's grace. You know, God's grace — the free gift that affirms there is nothing at all that we need to do to earn God's love. Grace is freely offered again and again by our God who is consistently loving, and faithful.

It is not by our own faith that we are righteous, but rather by God's faithfulness to forgive and love us.

This reminds me of a poem that perhaps you have heard.

Footprints In The Sand

One night I dreamed a dream.

*As I was walking along the beach
with my Lord.*

*Across the dark sky flashed scenes
from my life.*

*For each scene, I noticed two sets
of footprints in the sand,*

*One belonging to me and one to
my Lord.*

*After the last scene of my life
flashed before me,*

*I looked back at the footprints in
the sand.*

*I noticed that at many times along
the path of my life,*

*especially at the very lowest and
saddest times,*

*there was only one set of
footprints.*

*This really troubled me, so I asked
the Lord about it.*

*“Lord, you said once I decided to
follow you,*

You'd walk with me all the way.

*But I noticed that during the
saddest and most troublesome*

times of my life,

*there was only one set of
footprints.*

*I don't understand why, when I
needed You the most, You would
leave me.”*

*He whispered, “My precious child, I
love you and will never leave you*

*Never, ever, during your trials and
testings.*

*When you saw only one set of
footprints,*

It was then that I carried you.”

We assume that we are at the center, but then discover the grace of God.

It is the same with the spiritual gifts we have, such as: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and the like. We sometimes treat them as our own achievement and are prideful to possess them. However, Paul reminds us that they are actually gifts from a faithful God who desires us to use them wisely for the benefit of others.

Our job, which will keep us humble if we honor it, is to receive God's love, grace, and faithfulness, and respond with our own faithfulness. This will help to maintain that harmony and peace in the world that we talked about last week.

God's faithfulness is the real prime mover in us and in the world. And when we are open to receive it, God's grace then moves through us.

Time of Focus and Reflection

By Pastor Scott

2018 Annual Meeting

First Baptist Church of Birmingham

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We are a Christian community. I say this not because we have tried hard to be one, or because we have the right kind of programs to develop community. I am not saying this because it is part of our mission statement. I say that we are a Christian community because God has called all believers the community of God and family. By virtue of our identity as followers of Jesus, we are part of the world-wide Christian community that God has created.

Our job now is to find our way to participate in what God has created. We do this with intention, with devotion, with self-evaluation, with community-assessment, and with prayer for the Holy Spirit's leading. With awareness, we also use our imagination and creativity to live out the values we are committed to as part of God's family.

So, we each go inward to listen for how God is teaching us and leading us individually. We also discern as a community what we value, and sort out how to support each other to live out those values as a Christian community.

This is our work.

Today, in this Annual Meeting, we hold up a snapshot of how we are approaching this work of being a Christian community. We hold up successes. We hold up challenges. We hold up a mirror to the past year that we might celebrate what we and God have done together in 2018.

My hope is that each and every one of you might find real growth and transformation in your life in this coming year by the Holy Spirit's power.

Consider the picture that the Apostle Paul paints of the life of Christian community in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 12:1-8 (Common English Bible)

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.