Faithfulness

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[0:00] What a word, faithfulness. The sermon actually hasn't planted in me at all until I walked into the building and I've been reading the passages.

I was given the proverb first, which is, obviously it's great, isn't it? You get given a one-liner. Talk about that for 20 to 30 minutes. Don't worry, I'm not going to do 30.
We'll see. But I was like, okay, it says, who is there that's faithful, essentially? Who is there that's faithful? And Daniel came to my mind, so I was like, great, I can get some good meat out of Daniel because it's a big book.
The book is essentially about God's faithfulness and the faithfulness of people like Daniel and his friends. So I thought, oh, I could really get my teeth into this and unpack that.
And as always, I want to find, I want to ground any scripture in our reality today. What's the point of reading the Bible if it's only history, if it's only about the past?
[1:04] Like, it needs to speak to us today. We have to begin by knowing it in its context, of course, and rightfully interpreting it as best as we can. But if it's to speak truth, it needs to be grounded in reality.

And I was worried. I had some stories going around in my head. What could I talk about? And I have a sermon written, but I'm probably not really going to use it because today is dementia-friendly Sunday, right?
You're looking at it, right? That one went over my head. If it was written down, I completely forgot. Sorry, I'm sorry about that. My dad's actually got dementia. And I wanted to give you a story of real faithfulness in reality, grounded.
And I had a story of me standing in the school playground this week while my kids did their sports day, which is two hours of waiting for 20 seconds of running.
And mainly betting on which kid's going to fall on their face first. That was pretty much what I was doing. And it was great because I was there. My kids clocked that I'd actually turned up, and they got excited.
[2:09] You could see that it lifted the room for them. It lifted the space because their dad was there. And they said he was going to be there, and he was there. And you could see that faithfulness was amazing. But actually, I thought, do you know what?

There's a really cool, it's a bit heavy, but there's a really cool story of faithfulness that I often forget. And it was a nice reminder this morning. So my dad's got dementia. My dad actually is my mum's second husband.
My mum's first husband was not a very nice man and caused a lot of problems. And they had two kids. I've got two older brothers that I don't see. But yeah, a really messy situation.
My dad met my mum at some sort of camp that she used to. She used to run one of the parks down in Weymouth for her husband's very rich family.
And we didn't see any of the money, sadly. You'd think there'd be some comeback for us, but never mind. One day, hey? Hey. I don't even get birthday cards with checks in them.
[3:12] They're stingy, I tell you. Those rich people. Anyway. My dad was just on holiday. He was a DJ. He used to collect these really rare records. And he met my mum, and he found out the story.

My mum was being, you know, in lack of a better word, she was being severely hurt. And my dad basically smuggled her out of the situation. He planted her in a new situation and tried to give her a new life.
Eventually, they got together. But actually, it wasn't that way around. My dad initially just wanted to help. And they fell in love. It was a lovely story, a happy story. And my dad basically brought up my two older brothers.

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They weren't his. But he treated them like they were. And even today, all the mess is a big story. You know, I'm one of those baggage people. Today, they still call him dad, you know.
And I just thought about how amazing is it that who can find faithfulness. And sometimes you can actually find it. And what was it about faithfulness? Well, faithfulness by the dictionary is this firm adherence to promises or perpetual observance of duty.
[4:25] It's very rigorous and sounds very soldier-like. But actually, it's reflected in words like dependable, reliable, trustworthy, loyalty. My dad just showed that right before I was even born.

In a difficult situation, my dad carried those words. And he carried them through to this day. He forgets lots. I'm going there this afternoon to paint over some stuff that he missed having put up a radiator that fell off a wall.
You know, those sort of things. To this day, he is still, though, dependable, trustworthy, reliable, and loyal. And, you know, when we find people like that, it is really worth taking note.
Like, why are they like that? Why are they like that? Well, faithfulness, according to Scripture, at least, in Galatians 5 there is helpful, because I haven't got it out in front of me there.
It's one of the fruits of the Spirit. It's a spiritual thing. It comes from the Spirit. It grows in the Spirit's power in us. It develops. It's a fruit.
[5:33] And to see that in my dad is actually, today, this morning, especially, it was like a real reminder. Actually, there are some people who nail it, you know. They nail it.

And I wonder for you, it was in the prayers, and that was another reminder. Gene, I wonder for you, who are those people, actually, that you think, they've shown me faithfulness like I've not seen before?
Learn from them. Take notes. For my dad, he's not good-looking anymore, but he was good-looking. And the pictures, I feel like I've got the...
I'm joining him. No, no, I'm joining him. The trajectory's downward. But he was a, you know, he's a stunning young man in the photos, super cool with his beer and his vinyls, first time around.
And he could have had anybody, just so the story goes, according to my mum. But he saw mum, and he knew what was the right thing to do.
[6:33] And because part of who he is, is he's a faithful guy. And he can't ignore an issue. He can't ignore a problem. And he wanted to help. So faithfulness is, is a, is, is a spirit thing, but it's, it's rare, I think, I'm going to be honest.

I think, it's rare to see it as uniquely as I think I've seen it in my dad. And even my dad, you know, he's, you know, he's, there's been other stuff. It's been difficult. But, you know, faithfulness, I wonder for you, if you know people, where when you hear that proverb, many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find, you can say, I know one.
I was looking around faithfulness, and, yes, the Bible on the whole, is a story of redemption. The Bible is the story of God's redemption, of, of his creation, his restoration of, of it, of what he's made, healing, of the brokenness, is a story of victory, and God is the victor.
God is the ultimate person, of faithfulness. But the heart, that is the heartbeat of the story, is faithfulness. And it's two, it's twofold.
It's faithfulness of God, which we know is consistent. And it's why, the, the, Israel could, could cry, God, where are you? Because they knew, he was the faithful God.
[8:00] That's why the Psalms are full of crying out to God, for, him to be who he is. Because they knew who he was. Um, but the other side of the faithfulness heartbeat, in scripture, is our, story.

And it's the one of, unfaithfulness. You have the story of the Bible, you have the faithful God, and the unfaithful people. That's the pattern. And yet God, in, in grace, and love, chooses to work through, unfaithful people, to bring about, bring about, his kingdom, on it.
And so, again, you can see that this, where is this sermon going? What, what, what is the big, big message we can take? Well, my dad is a, a real human experience, from now, time, of faithfulness. But when we look at scripture, actually, it's not so easy to find someone, that, that we can say, as long as we're not in Sunday school, and Jesus is the answer. We can say, this person really nailed it, when it comes to faithfulness.
And actually, Daniel is, a unique character, in that way. The Bible gives us, no dirt on Daniel. The Bible gives us, lots of dirt on other people.
[9:12] We think of Abraham the Great. Well, he had the Hagar incident. He was a liar. He kept passing off his wife, to the rulers, just to keep himself safe, you know.

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Faithful? Not sure. We have, Moses, guy who brought out, the whole of Israel, through trusting in God, to take them through the Exodus. Yeah, but he was a murderer, he got angry.
Okay, alright, where should we go? So we've got, Abraham, Moses, not so good. David, David, David's good. David's the great king, they've been waiting for us.
Saul was the bad guy. David, loved the Lord, his heart. But he also loved the women a lot. He was an adulterer, and a murderer, to try and cover his traps, and in fact, even on his deathbed, he was a bit shady.
I said I wouldn't kill them. Solomon, off you go. Not the most faithful guy. Oh, there's got to be some in there, there's got to be some. Maybe we need to go a bit further back. Noah, Noah, the guy with the ark, he was a giddy, right?
[10:21] Well, the first thing he did, when he gets off the ark, he gets drunk, and even Glastonbury would be a bit like, mate, steady on. What's going on? Okay, so Noah's not a good one either.

Ah, Job. We all feel sorry for Job. You know, Job, poor Job. Good guy. What was he? Was he covering his family's sins with the sacrifices?
Was he diligent, trying to compensate for the mess of his family? Maybe. And even if not that, well, he finally gave up, and he got a bit annoyed at God. And even he repents of his doubting God, and his relationship with God.
So actually, Daniel, all of a sudden, there's this really awesome character, where we can go, oh my goodness, there is faithfulness possible in human beings. A true example of faithfulness.
And Daniel is that for us. And we read just briefly, an example of why he demonstrates that, he embodies that, is that he, a Jew, taken from his home into a new place.
[11:27] He's, chapter one of Daniel tells us that he's smart, and he's good looking, and all those kind of things. But actually, he's dependable, trustworthy, loyal. He's faithful.

That's why he rises up. That's why he gets put over all these other nation leaders, these subtracts, as you heard, these governors, who would not have been Israel.
You know, he is an exiled person, and he's been given responsibility because of his character, because of his faithfulness. And so I want to take from him, really, a couple of examples, not examples, a couple of points, I guess, about how faithfulness can grow in us.
And so my first point is going to be simple. It's going to be that faithfulness is grounded in relationships. Faithfulness is grounded in relationships.
Our proverb, what does it say? Many claim, many claim to have unfailing love. Many claim to be, you know, devout, committed.
[12:37] We're good at words. We're good at words. We can say we're faithful. We can say we're dependable, loyal. We're reliable. But how do you know if somebody is one of those things?

It's grounded in reality, and it's found in actual relationships. You know, it's not a theory. Faithfulness is not a theory.
It's grounded in relationships. My dad is the example that I gave earlier. It's clearly there. You can tell my dad was a faithful guy because of the actions, not just the words.
And for Daniel, it's the same thing. In chapter one, right at the start of his story, when he's being prepared to be useful in the empire, they offer him food, and he says, I can't eat that.
That's not what my God says we eat. And he doesn't just say, you know, I'm God's person, you can't make me eat that. He says, let me eat, let me show you, let me show you.
[13:45] Let's have a season. We will eat this stuff, and if it's wrong, we'll eat whatever. But he grounds it in reality. He makes a good relationship with this official who's responsible for them.

and straight away, you can see Daniel is this trustworthy, reliable guy. So that's the first point I want us to think about when we're trying to work out whether there are areas where we're maybe not so faithful or lacking in faithfulness.
Are you actually grounding it in relationships, in your friendships, in your marriage, in your workplaces with your colleagues? Are you grounding it in a real experience where people can say, yes, he is reliable.
Yes, he is faithful. So that's my first thought. And my second one, again, Gene, you nailed the prayers this morning. It's costly, right?
Faithfulness is costly. My dad's example, the unwritten part of the story, is the bit that shows the cost of it, really. But also for Daniel, it was costly.

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[14:56] What if he'd got this wrong right at the start? Might have been a different story. But then we go to chapter six and we see that he's grounded in the relationships.

The leaders, they trust him as in at the top. And all these other leaders, they don't like him. The cost of his faithfulness to the empire, his faithfulness to God first and foremost, means that people are out to get him.
Faithfulness isn't something the world actually wants. We talk about it a lot. But you just read the papers. You use your news app. You tell me if faithfulness is a characteristic of our society, something we really want.
Let's not get into politics right now. But I think across the planet, we're seeing that faithfulness is really not that important. For Daniel, to be faithful meant to be at odds with people in the world. And for us, to be faithful, means that we're going to be at odds with people in the world. Especially when we're trying to protect our relationship with God.
[16:09] But also, our relationship with each other. I wonder if that's something that maybe that is the area for you right now when it comes to faithfulness you're struggling.

Actually, it's going to cost if I'm faithful there. If I'm going to be faithful to God's promises and call on my life to be a Christ-like follower, I'm going to have to put myself a little bit lower on the spectrum. A little bit lower on the scale. Because that's the reality of it. Faithfulness isn't a theory, it's something we are to embody.
Daniel embodied it. The cost for him was great. So much so, it wasn't just that the people were out to get him, he ended up in a lion's den. I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound like a motive to be a faithful kind of person.
I don't even like big cats. Lions are... All of a sudden you're stroking them and they're like pouncing on you trying to kill you or something.
[17:15] It's a tiger in them. It's got to be... That's the problem with not using notes is you get sidetracked by your own terrible jokes. Lion's den.

Daniel. Faithfulness was proven. His loyalty to God was proven. His trustworthy, his reliableness was proven. Even in a lion's den, this guy did not quit.
And then it comes back to, well, okay, so you're saying it's costly. What is it worth it? Sometimes it's going to be my answer. Sometimes it's worth it in the now.
It's always worth it when we talk about the kingdom of God. But sometimes it's worth it. There's another story I tell you which I really... I love and I hate. Has anyone heard of a guy called Kenji Goto?
Yes? Kenji Goto was a Japanese journalist. In about 2015, there was some stuff going on in Syria. And Kenji Goto had a friend called Haruna Yakawa.
[18:23] And Haruna was a complicated character. But these two were friends and they both spent some time in Syria together. One of them... I love this.

I'm just going to... That's so good. That is awesome. Normally a young person is on their phone. Yeah, yeah.
Hello! Haruna Yakawa was a complicated character and he... he ended up trying to do lots of stuff in Syria like bodyguarding and all sorts of things.
And he ended up getting captured by the ISIS bunch of people. And... Yeah... Kenji Goto was at home back in Japan and his wife and two kids and he heard the story and he was compelled to go and try and help out.
He was compelled to respond. He was a Christian, funny enough. And he knew the love of Christ and what Jesus had done for him. And his friend was in prison, literally.
[19:30] His friend was in the hands of an empire of evil. And he could not stay in Japan. He had a wife and kids.

He could not stay at home because he said Christ and greater love have no man and he lay his life down for his friends. And so Kenji went to Syria and he started making noise his faithfulness was costly.
He started making noise. Where is this person? Where's my friend? Finding out where he is. Ends up, no surprise, ends up getting captured. Ends up sat next to his friend.
He found his friend. I wonder what conversations they had sat next to each other in a prison cell knowing what the outcome is because it was always the same.

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But Iharu no Yakawa knew his friend was trustworthy, reliable, dependable, faithful. And they both died. They both were executed. They were both executed.
[20:36] Sometimes, faithfulness is costly and it doesn't end up good. Now the story is amazing. The story is amazing for us.

But I don't want to make it light. I want it to be real. It's grounded in reality. It's a horrible true story. But it's the reality of trying to be faithful people. Sometimes it doesn't go well.
Yes, faithfulness is costly. but it's what we're called to.
And not only is it what we're called to seek out, it's something that shows we follow Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit.
Those who follow Jesus have the Spirit of God in them. Now, the Spirit can do what it likes and it can work through unbelievers. Of course it can. It can work through non-Christians.
[21:35] Of course it can. The Spirit did that throughout the whole of the Old Testament. Let's not be crazy here. But for us as Christians, the promise is the Spirit. The great counselor will be with us. Yeah?

So those things, one of which we're looking at today, are fruit of that relationship with the Spirit in us. So it needs to be grounded in our reality.
grounded in our relationships, grounded in reality, and yes, it is costly. Now that's the lowest point. We're going to build now. We're going to lighten up a little bit because we began the service, which initially panicked me, with a really clear point about how we're going to learn about God's faithfulness to us.
God's faithfulness to us. Yes. We cannot compare to God's faithfulness. That's why we need Daniel. That's why we need the testimony of people who choose to follow Christ because we can comprehend that level of faithfulness.
[22:44] God's faithfulness is so far above. So far above. We are not worthy, we say in some traditional communion, we are not worthy to even eat the crumbs under your table, yet you welcome us.

God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness. Wow. That's faithfulness. That's dependability, reliability, trustworthiness, loyalty. Even while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.
Wow. Even if we didn't choose to follow him, he still did it for us. He still went to the cross for us. That's something we can never quite, even snippets, Kenji, the snippets of it.
But here's the good news and this is where I want us to feel like we can breathe a bit deeper again. The fruit of the Spirit is not the fruit of Jay's hard work, not the fruit of your hard work, your upbringing, your money, your situation, your context.
No, the fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. How freeing is that to know? That actually, the bottom line is, our job isn't to try and become more faithful.
[24:07] It's not to try and make plans. It's to live our life and trust the Spirit to lead the way. Not to make it happen, but to let the Spirit do what the Spirit does in his people.

The Spirit of God is in us, perfecting us. That was one of the things that I was worried about talking about faithfulness, is actually sometimes when we hear a sermon and it gets to the moral conversation, we get guilty, we feel bad, because for so long you've heard from the front of a church how you need to repent and how you need to be better.
If you really follow Jesus, you need to be better. And that's not the message of the Gospel, the message of you're not better, but I love you anyway. You can't be perfect, but I can perfect you through my Spirit.
I'll do the perfecting, says God. My Spirit will be in you and it will guide you. I'm sending you a great counselor. The guidance, the actions, the words, they're God's.
and we have just got to be willing to take a faith step. That's our responsibility in this, a faith step. And so let's land on a challenge, if I haven't already felt, been a bit too challenging already.
[25:28] Here's a challenge for you. Right now, the Spirit is in you. If you follow Jesus, that's no question. And if you don't follow Jesus right now, the Spirit is still hovering.

Hovered over the waters in the beginning, it's hovering now. The Spirit is showing you stuff. Even now, as I'm talking, the Spirit's probably bringing people into mind.
In relationships, where you need to be more faithful, or you know that that's the issue. Or situations, maybe jobs. Maybe you're in a career path and there's some options going on and you think, actually, am I being faithful to God?

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Am I being faithful to my colleague? The Spirit's giving you opportunity. He's not saying, now I've shown you, go do it. He's saying, now I've shown you.
Trust me. Seek me. God, here's the issue. Be the God that I know you are. Be the God that Daniel trusted.
[26:28] I'm not going to eat this food, and I know it's really unpopular, chapter one. But I need to trust and trust in my God's faithfulness. The fruit was proven.

It's illegal. The only thing we're going to be able, chapter five, the only thing we're going to be able to do to catch him out is to break his own laws, his God laws.
We're going to have to change the rules so that he gets in trouble. First thing he does when he finds out is he goes and he breaks the rule. God, he prays, gets seen praying.
Naughty boy. He's in the lion's den. I'm going to trust my God's faithfulness. For Daniel, it's different than it was for Kenji, but faithfulness is God's to produce the fruit of.
Faithfulness grows when God cultivates it. But we are to be faith-filled people, and our role is to start with the step of faith.
[27:29] Just one step of faith. And you'll be surprised at what God does with that little thing. That little step. How God will fill you with faith-ness.

Amen.

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