

Two weeks from yesterday we will be gathering together on a Saturday evening to celebrate the fact that Arrowsmith Baptist Church has been in existence for 50 years. Usually, when organizations or groups of people get together and celebrate such significant anniversaries, the focus tends to be on taking time to recognize and thank those who faithfully played a significant role in accomplishing what had happened over the years. But in our case, when our Leadership Team and deaconesses and staff and ministry leaders began organize and talk what we should do on our upcoming evening, there was a clear commonality of opinion that our focus should be to use our time to recognize and thank God for His faithfulness to us throughout the past 50 years. His role in accomplishing what has happened – as well as what is happening and what will happen - is more than just significant. Anything and everything that anyone and everyone has ever done, is doing and will do at Arrowsmith has happened, is happening and will happen because God has and is and will do it with us and through us and for us. Two weeks from now we will be celebrating 50 years of the faithfulness of God at Arrowsmith Baptist!

As we continue in our series on the Fruit of the Spirit – today our focus is on the spiritual fruit of “*faithfulness*.” Back in Galatians 5:16-25 we learned that our natural fallen inclination to “*gratify the desires of the flesh*” which will cause us to produce “*works of the flesh*” - but if we “*live by the Spirit*” and “*keep in step with the Spirit*” we will bear the “*fruit of the Spirit*” of “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.” We’ve also seen that this should be the priority, purpose and passion of every follower of Jesus Christ because “*the fruit of the Spirit*” in the emotional, intellectual, and physical *manifestation* of the presence of the Spirit of God in the life of born-again Christian that has been dramatically and powerfully transformed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. We also learned that spiritual fruit is not something we can do on our own but rather a gift of God’s mercy and grace that we receive and experience when we humbly surrender our hearts, minds and wills to the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul’s point in Galatians 5 for today is that the only “*faithfulness*” we can know on earth is that which is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word translated as “*faithfulness*” is *pistis* which literally means “persuasion, assurance, moral conviction, belief” – or in other words “*faith*.” *Pistis* is the common Greek word used in the New Testament that is translated into the English words *faith, faithfulness, belief, believe and trust*. Now there is a slight but significant nuance regarding how *pistis* is translated into “*faith*” or “*faithfulness*” which hopefully you should recognize in the difference between how the apostle Paul used “*kindness*” and “*goodness*” in our last two messages. *Pistis* as “*faith*” is something *within us*, whereas *pistis* as “*faithfulness*” is the *outward action* of that which is within us. *Pistis* as “*faith*” is a gift we are given, whereas *pistis* as “*faithfulness*” is putting that gift to use. We see this much more clearly in how *faith* is spoken of the Old Testament. While there is only one word (*pistis*) in the New Testament for “*faith*” and “*faithfulness*” the Old Testament contains five words that speak of faith and faithfulness in that all five of those words come from one basic Hebrew word that means “*to be verified*.” So our “*faithfulness*” verifies the “*faith*” that we have. If we say we have faith in God, but we don’t do anything that reveals our faithfulness to our faith in God, we are not showing ourselves to be faithful to what we believe.

The dictionary defines faith as “a complete trust or confidence in someone or something.” For all of us – Christian and non-Christian, faith is central to all of life. We go to doctors whose degrees we have never verified. That doctor gives us a prescription that we cannot read. We take the prescription to a pharmacist who we probably don’t know and they give us a chemical compound we do not understand - and we go home and take the medication according to the instructions on the bottle, without reason. And so we believe, we trust, we have faith that we will hopefully be healed and healthy. But faith is not positive thinking. It’s not a hunch we follow. It’s not hoping for the best. It’s not feeling optimistic. Faith is none of these things, though all of them have been identified as faith. Faith *is* a complete trust or confidence in someone or something – and for us our faith should be about a complete trust and confidence in God. God’s Word clearly defines “*faith*” and “*faithfulness*” for us in Hebrews 11:1-6.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:1-6

Now the word “*faith*” (*pistis*) is used six times in these six verses – all of which define for us what biblical “*faith*” and “*faithfulness*” truly is. In the first three verses we see most specifically what “*faith*” means in terms of *what we believe*: “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*”

“*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*” Notice how “*faith*” begins with “*hope*.” Faith begins with “*things hoped for.*” Faith begins, starts, with a sense of discontentment - *hoping* for something else beyond ourselves. You can never truly know faith unless you are dissatisfied with the way you are now. If you are satisfied with the way you are, it will be impossible for you to exercise any faith. The greatest enemy of faith is a complacent spirit, an attitude of self-satisfaction with the status quo of life. If you are content to merely be a cultured animal living out a life of eating, sleeping, working, playing and eventually dying, you will never know the fullness of faith. God loves us too much to leave us where we are - and we should love God so much that we are dissatisfied with where we are. Faith is looking for more in life than what is visible on the surface. Faith is dissatisfaction with a life that is all length and all breadth, but no real depth. “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for*” in the deeper things of God.

Faith is also “*the conviction of things not seen.*” Faith is not only a desire for more of God in life, but an also a keen awareness of something else – *in that* faith is becoming aware that we are surrounded by an invisible kingdom which is of the spirit; that all we see is not all there is to life; that there are realities which cannot be seen, weighed, measured, analyzed, touched, or controlled - *yet* which are as real as anything we can see – *but* in fact that are *even more real* because the things we cannot see are the source, the foundation, the cause of all the things which can be seen. Such is the faith it takes to believe in God. The truth is, the easiest thing in the world to do is to believe that God exists - because everyone in the world, without exception, is born into the world believing that God exists. Romans 1:20 tells us “*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they (we) are without excuse.*” It is only when we are carefully trained to *disbelieve* that any of us come to the place of declaring God does not exist. Romans 1:21 says: “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*”

What this means is that *faith* (what we believe) requires no effort, but lack of faith (unbelief) requires effort on our part. *Light from God* breaks through the darkness; *life from God* flows through from above and below and from all sides - and all we need to do is open our eyes to see and know that God is there. Little children have no problem with this. The concept of God ought to be one of the most difficult ideas for children to grasp, since God cannot be seen. But the amazing thing is, little children have no problem, no difficulty at all in believing that God exists. It requires long and careful effort to train the mind to reject the evidence of God and explain Him in other terms and in other ways. This is why Jesus commended his followers to have a child-like faith: “*Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3-4).

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” The genius of faith, the glory of faith, the value of faith, is that faith gives us access to *reality*. God is ultimate reality, and faith in God is a way by which we may overcome the tortuous windings of reason, the need to grope by trial and error, trying to lay hold of the basic facts of life immediately. *Faith in God* is the way we pierce through the illusions that tend to distract us and lead us into chasing our own personal self-made rabbits of ego and opinion. *Faith in God* reveals to us things as they really are. Faith in God is fact. Faith grounds us, lands us immediately on top of reality of God. Science cannot tell us how human history is going to end - but by faith in the Word of God we know why *“the universe was created.”* Psychology and sociology cannot tell us why we act the way we do - but by faith in the Word of God by which *“the universe was created”* we know why we do what we do. Atheists cannot tell us what lies beyond the door of death - but by faith in the Word of God *“what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”* Nothing in this world can explain the mysteries of our existence, can tell us how to fulfill our created purpose, can help us realize our dreams, our hopes -- but faith in the Word of God we can know all that matters in the Kingdom of God.

The first three verses of Hebrews 11 defined *“faith”* in terms of *what we believe* - and now in the next two verses our text defines for us what *“faithfulness”* means in terms of *how we are to live out what we believe*. Here is where we see what the spiritual fruit of *“faithfulness”* that flows out of *“faith”* looks like: *“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.”*

In these verses we see two examples of *“faithfulness”* in how we are to live out our *“faith.”* Abel had faith in God and he fully lived out that faith - so much so that he was murdered for doing so. Living out the faithfulness of our faith means living a life of *sacrifice for God*. *“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.”* Cain gave to God, but not sacrificially. But by living his faith sacrificially, Abel gained God’s approval – *“through which he was commended as righteous.”* What does that mean? It means it is not *just what* we do that matters, but also *why* and *how* we do what we do. The motivation, attitude and manner that we do things in faith for God matters greatly. We are faced with this same reality as Christians when it comes to our commitment, our finances, our service, and our time. The extent of our faithfulness is revealed not just in *what* we say or in *what* we do, but in *why* and *how* we say what we say, and *why* and *how* we do what we do.

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.” Living out the faithfulness of our faith also means living a life of *intimacy with God*. By faith Enoch lived in the continuous intimate presence with God so powerfully that he stepped immediately from life into eternity. Because of his faithfulness to God Enoch did not die. As a little girl in Sunday school once said: "Enoch was a man who learned to walk with God, and they used to take long walks together. One day they walked so far that God said, 'Look, Enoch, it's too far for you to go back; just come on home with me.' So he walked on home with God." This is what it means to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. . . . strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light”* (Colossians 1:10-12).

We are called to live out our faith through *sacrifice for God* and *intimacy with God*. That is the power of *faithfulness*: it is by sacrifice for God and by intimacy with God that His power rests on us. We will bear the spiritual fruit of *“faithfulness”* when we *“live by the Spirit”* and *“keep in step with the Spirit.”* We are able to bear the spiritual fruit of *“faithfulness”* because our God is a God of *“faithfulness.”* All throughout the Scriptures we read of God’s faithfulness. Hebrews 6:18 tells us that God cannot lie nor can He break His promises – and God has *faithfully* fulfilled each and every promise His has made.

The epitome of God's faithfulness is His promise and ultimate fulfillment of sending a savior into the world to deliver us from sin, evil and death. There is no greater act of God's *faithfulness* than the crucifixion, death and resurrection of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:9: *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* 2 Thessalonians 3:3: *"The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one."* 1 John 1:9: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

One of the most misinterpreted beliefs about God's faithfulness in the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God is always unconditionally faithful to us regardless of what we do. In believing this is true we forget that God must first and foremost be faithful to *Himself*—because He is purely perfect, fully righteous and completely holy. The fatal error of presuming upon God's faithfulness is that just like in the case of His *goodness*, God will not spare us His sharpness and His rebuke in order to stay faithful to Himself. Thus *"faithfulness"* means that sometimes we must correct or be corrected, and sometimes very severely, and in order to bear the fruit of *"faithfulness."* In 2 Timothy 2:11-13 the apostle Paul wrote: *"If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself."* At the end of Psalm 96 the psalmist wrote that someday when the Lord returns He will *"come to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness"* (Psalm 96:13).

In the first five verses of Hebrews 11 we saw that we will bear the scriptural fruit *"faithfulness"* when live out our faith in God. But our last verse for today tells us, that in the context of Enoch stepping from life into eternity because his faith *pleased* God, that *"without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."* In other words we will bear the spiritual fruit of *"faithfulness"* when live out our faith in God in way that pleases God. Why does *faith* please God? We've seen first that faith believes that God exists. Second, we've seen that faith is revealed in how we live our lives for Him and with Him. We see the same in this verse as it stands alone: God is pleased when we *"believe that he exists"* (faith in God) and God is pleased with *"those who seek Him"* (faithfulness in sacrificing for Him and seeking intimacy with Him).

"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." God *"rewards those who (faithfully) seek him."* God blesses those who have faith and believe in Him, and who in faithfulness live out the belief that God is the only answer, the only fullness, the only complete sufficiency in life. Rather than needing *our* service, *our* opinion, *our* power God is the never-ending spring of life; He is our energy and joy and beauty and goodness and power. Therefore it pleases God when we come to him in a way that affirms Him and in faithfulness live out what we believe about Him in our lives. God delights in that, and rewards us.

Faith is coming to God with the confidence that He is God; and that by faith we have the assurance God will reward us, regardless of whatever sacrifice we might be called to make. He is the rewarder not by possessions or power or position, but the rewarder of His glory and grace and beauty for all who seek Him. What pleases God is that our hearts and minds display God's being and God's beauty, that we display God's existence and God's glory, that we display how real He is and how rewarding He is. This is the faith that pleases God. The nature of faith and the vitality of faith is rooted in what God is like, not what we are like. *Faith is the conviction* that there is a great unseen God who exists absolutely and does not depend on us in the least. *Faith is the assurance* that this great unseen God is a God of love and beauty and joy and glory, the never ending fountain of His mercy and grace and love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness for all who seek Him in truth. God is pleased when we find Him to be our greatest joy and passion of our lives. And so He rewards us. And what is that reward? The old tradition says' *"the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."* The reward of God – is God! As the purpose of our created being is to glorify God, God rewards those who in faith believe in Him and who in faithfulness live for Him with the joy of Himself!

As so as we close we need to remember that the “*fruit of the Spirit*” Paul lists in Galatians 5 has to do with *humble character* that produces the *fruit of unity and service*. What does humble character that produces fruit of unity and service in “*faithfulness*” look like in our lives and in our church? Again, as since we started this series, I am going to let God’s Word speak to us about this. Today we will looking at another event in Jesus’s life, who bore spiritual fruit all throughout his ministry on earth - and continues to do so today when our hearts are in harmony with His and with each other. This morning we are looking Mark 4:26-29 where as Jesus is teaching a large crowd about the Kingdom of God, and in the context of the Parable of the Sower Jesus tells them a parable regarding how seeds grow.

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” Mark 4:26-29

Jesus is telling us here that, just like seeds cannot be seen growing because they are buried in the ground, so too we cannot see God at work deep within our hearts. But our focus here is not so much about the seeds as it is about the man who planted this seeds. We read that the man plants the seeds – and that “*he sleeps and rises night and day*” – diligently and faithfully waiting by working and resting as the seeds gradually grow – trusting God for good health and great weather and abundant growth and a fruitful harvest. This is one of the early lessons you learn on a farm: farmers who in “*faith*” plant seeds in the ground must trust in the “*faithfulness*” of God for a good harvest. So too should we in the body of Christ in faith be planting seeds of “*faith*” – and then in “*faithfulness*” diligently and faithfully waiting, working, resting, serving, sacrificing and sharing as God works deeply in us and others. The Word of God speaks of this in Philippians 2:12-13 when it says “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” And we read of this as the work of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians: “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart*” (2 Cor 3:17-4:1).

The basic foundation of faith is reliance, a humble dependence. There is no greater joy than in obediently believing and trusting in God, and in faithfulness receiving the reward of God Himself. Faith is conviction and assurance of this truth of God. Where such faith is absent, every kind of sin will sooner or later appear. The problems of our day in this world reveal a lack of *faith* in God and a lack of the fruit of *faithfulness* for God: the spread of terrorism, millions of aborted babies, the acceptance and aggressive promotion of homosexuality, the pollution of pornography, the self-centeredness of politics, the focus of children as the center of the family, and the militant infection of anti-God teaching in our educational systems. Include also the numbing effects of our self-centered busy lifestyles. With so many other so called-joys to choose from, the joy of *faith* and *faithfulness* has just becomes one of many. Faithfulness seems to be another character quality that not highly regarded by our culture today. Commitment is no longer seen as a necessity – whether it be in friendship or in marriage or at a job or in church membership. But it should be different for those of us who claim Christ. When we truly live by the Spirit, we will by “*faith*” produce the fruit of “*faithfulness.*”

In Isaiah 25:1 the prophet declares: “*O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.*” Faithfulness is the steadfast patient waiting and the constant working out of the trust we have in God. We are called to live out our faith through the faithfulness of *sacrifice for God* and *intimacy with God*. Faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit; it is the result of the working of the Spirit within us. But the Spirit is also our seal of God’s faithfulness. Jesus is the faithfulness of God towards us. He has saved us and sealed us. Amen? Amen!