TITLE: The Rewards of Faithfulness

TEXT: Josh. 24:14-15; Mal. 2:1-2, 8-9; 1st Pet. 2:9-10; Ro. 8:16-25; Gal. 2:20

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about the rewards of faithfulness. Do you realize that faithfulness has its rewards?

 Most often, if you are faithful in and to your marriage it will result in the reward of trust and an unconditional love by your spouse.

 Most often, If you are faithful in your job it will result in the reward of trust by your employer and, a lot of the time, advancement in the workplace.

 Most often, if you are faithful in taking good care of your body, feeding it right and exercising it, it will result in the reward of good health…

 Whatever area of this life that we live faithfulness has its rewards. Even if that reward is just in our knowing in our heart that we have been faithful and we experience the peace and comfort that faithfulness brings.

 As Christians Faithfulness is our highest calling.

 As a Christian we are called to be faithful in our marriages! We are called to be faithful in our jobs!

 We are called to be faithful in all areas of our life!

 But we are especially called to be faithful in our relationship with God!

 And that too has its rewards..

 One of my favorite portions of Scripture is found in the book of Joshua…

 It is at the time when the Israelites, Gods chosen people, have been delivered from the hard bondage of over 400 years of slavery in Egypt. God has brought them out of Egypt with a mighty deliverance and many mighty miracles…

 Then, Because of all their grumbling and complaining God has them wonder in the desert for 40 years until that grumbling, complaining and faithless generation dies off.

 And now Joshua has led this next generation of Gods people into the Promised Land…

 This is the command that Joshua has for the people of God in his day….

**Josh 24:14 (NIV) "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.**

**15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."**

Joshua’s command to a people of God…

 **Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.**

And this is a command that rings just as true for us the Church, a people chosen by God today.

**To…fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness!**

 So just what does it mean to be faithful?

There are at least 3 different Hebrew words that are often translated as faithful in English.

 One is “ee-oo-maw” which means: firmness, fidelity,

steadfastness, steadiness…

 One is “eh-meth” which means: truth, sureness, and reliability..

The third is the word that Joshua uses here…

{**taw-meem'}**

**1d) sound, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity**

**1e) what is complete or entirely in accord with truth and fact**

In essence faithfulness is fidelity, steadfastness, truth, sureness, reliability, integrity, always in accordance with the truth!

 Our faithfulness to God is shown in our fidelity to Him…

 We are to have no other gods before Him. We are to place nothing in a higher place of priority in our lives then our relationship with God.

 Our faithfulness to God is shown in our steadfastness to Him. That we allow nothing to stand in the way of our love for Him.

 We show our faithfulness to God when we live our lives enveloped in His truth. When we hold truth, His truth, as our highest standard.

 We show that we are faithful to God by being men and women and children of integrity.

 And we show that we are faithful to Him by our being one that can be relied upon by Him. Relied upon to be a reflection of Himself to the world in which we live.

God has called us to live lives of faithfulness to Him and faithfulness always has its rewards.

 The only mutiny in the long, illustrious history of England’s Royal Navy took place in 1933.

 What happened was that the seamen’s wages had been cut in a desperate political move to head off the effects of a nationwide depression. In retaliation, the seamen attacked their officers in an effort to take over the ship.

 But the men of the Royal Marines defended their officers against the rest of the crew. As a result, to this day the Marines are quartered on board ship between the officers and the crew, to act as the ‘officers’ guards and to maintain the security of the ship. In Britain’s navy today, this is mainly symbolic, but it symbolizes a reward for faithfulness. And it remains a source of pride of the Royal Marines today.

 When King David’s son Absalom staged a mutiny against his father, many of the king’s men went over to the side of the young revolutionary. But one man in particular, Zadok the priest remained faithful and protected the king (see 2 Sam. 15:1-37).

 As a result, he and his descendants were rewarded by being appointed as the priests in Jerusalem right up through the time of the Exile.

No doubt they accepted this position with great pride and, as faithful men; they endeavored to fulfill their roles.

It comes as a great surprise, therefore, to read what Malachi had to say about the priests in his day, after Israel returned from exile.

Mala 2:1 (NIV) "And now this admonition is for you, O priests.

**2 If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me.**

….**8 (NIV) But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty.**

**9 "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."**

Malachi reminded the priests of their privileged position and their profound responsibilities. They had been called to greatly reverence the Lord, to stand “in awe” of him, to pass on to the people “all the truth they received,” to live “good and righteous lives” before the people, and to turn “many from lives of sin.”

 They were called “to guard knowledge” and to function as “messengers of the Lord Almighty”

 But something had gone wrong. They had “corrupted the covenant”, they had failed to live in obedience, and they had “shown partiality in their interpretation of the law”. As a result, their “‘guidance’ had caused many to stumble into sin”. This was a monumental disaster for Israel, and God did not treat it lightly.

 The faithful men, the priesthood, had become unfaithful.

 And when the priesthood had become unfaithful to God the entire nation started to follow suit and suffered because of it.

 Listen again to what the prophet Malachi has to say about these priests who had become unfaithful to God….

**Malachi 2:7-8 *“The priests’ lips should guard knowledge, and people should go to them for instruction, for the priests are the messengers of the LORD Almighty. But not you!***

***You have left God’s paths. Your ‘guidance’ has caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites,” says the LORD Almighty.***

Just as faithfulness has its rewards unfaithfulness has its rewards as well..

 For Israel the reward of unfaithfulness to God was the downfall and destruction of a nation and a nation left in ruins with just vague memories of its former greatness.

 All because of the lack of faithfulness on the part of the priesthood.

 So what does this have to do with you and I, the Church, today?

 Peter in speaking to you and I the Church has this to say to us in…

**1Pet 2:9 (NIV) But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

**10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

Did you catch that?

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light!**

God has called you and I to be a royal priesthood!

 The priest of the Old Testament were part of a priesthood, but we have been called to become part of something even greater, we have been called to become part of a **royal** priesthood!

Royal

**934 basileios {bas-il'-i-os}**

1. **royal, kingly, regal**

 As Christians, you and I have been called by God to be, not just a kingdom of priests, but we have been called upon by God to be a kingdom of Royal priest!

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**

 So, what does it mean to be a part of a royal priesthood?

 Example: Several years ago at a men’s retreat in lake Geneva there was a young black man, not too well dressed, looked like he didn’t have much in the way of material wealth, but always had a smile on his face that illuminated the area that he was in and one of the guys from our group came up to this man and said, how you doing....

 This mans reply was…I’m great! I’m wonderful!

 Because I am a prince! My daddy’s a king!

And not just a king but my Dad’s the king of all kings!

 Why wouldn’t I be great!

 I am a prince because my daddy’s a king!

 This guy knew what he was! He may not of had a lot of money or owned a lot of material possession but he came from a royal bloodline! He was royalty! His dad was a king! And he knew that he one day would inherit all that His father owned! He would one day take his place by his father’s throne! One day he would rule by his father’s side!

 This is our promised reward for faithfulness!

 If we have embraced Jesus as the Lord and Savior of our life we have become part of a royal family! We have been adopted by a King!

 That is what Scripture is telling us in:

**Roma 8:16 (NIV) The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.**

**17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.**

**18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**

**19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.**

**20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope**

**21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**

**22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.**

**23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

**24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?**

**25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**

 Folks if we have come to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin and allowed Him to become the Lord and Savior of our life we are adopted into the family of God. We become a child of God through adoption.

 An adopted child is no second class child.

 Example:. When parents conceive a child they get what they get. They may want a boy but get a girl or want a girl and get a boy.

An Adopted child is chosen, selected , the parents make a choice, I want you!

And by Hebrew law an adopted child was a child forever and could never be disinherited.

So Scripture says, **Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ!**

 Do you know what a co-heir is? It is a joint heir. Or one who holds jointly the inheritance.

 This is exciting stuff here!

 In other words what Jesus inherits all of us who are Gods children stand to inherit also!

 Now reflect upon the assets of our Heavenly Father…

 He owns it all! He reigns over the heavens and the earth and everything else that there is!

 He owns, not just a cattle on a thousand hills but He owns the hills!

 He holds eternity in His hand.

 And we stand to inherit all that our father’s has including eternity itself!

 Church, We are royalty! You are a prince! You are a Princess!

 Your daddy is a king! And not merely a king but the king of all kings and Lord of all Lords!

 And here and now He has called and appointed you to be part of a royal priesthood! A holy nation! A people belonging to God!

 We are royalty in the highest sense of the word and we are called to be a royal and holy priesthood…

 Do you know what priesthood is?

**2409 hiereus {hee-er-yooce'}**

**1) a priest, one who offers sacrifices and in general is busied with sacred rites.**

**2) of Christians, because, purified by the blood of Christ and brought into close intercourse with God, they devote their life to him alone and to Christ.**

This is to what each of us have been called to as a Christian! To be part of a royal priesthood!

 To be one who offers sacrifices and in general is busied with sacred rites! One who, because we have been brought into close relationship and fellowship with God through the blood of Jesus Christ, devotes our life to Him!

 A priest of God is to live a life sacrificed to God, set apart unto God.

It is what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said:

Gala 2:20 (NIV) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

This is what being part of a royal priesthood is all about.

 To come to the determination to die to self and live faithfully for God. To come to the place of determining to allow Jesus to live His life vicariously through us!

 That is what this faithfulness we are called to as a Christian is all about. That is what being part of the royal Priesthood of Christ is all about.

 Dying to self and living for God!

 It is what Joshua was talking about when he said:

Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.

 It was what Peter was talking about when he said:

 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God!

 As Christians, We have been called to live lives of faithfulness. We have been called to be faithful in our marriages, faithful to our families, faithful in our jobs, and most importantly, live lives of faithfulness to our Lord.

 Living our lives faithfully to our God as though we are part of a Royal priesthood, because that is exactly what we are.

 So, as a Christian, one who has been bought and sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, the question isn’t if we are a priest of God or not…The question is what kind of priest are we being?

 Are we faithfully serving Him as one of His faithful children, as part of His royal priesthood?

 The promise if we do, if we are…..

 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

 Church, if you are being faithful to your calling, if you are living faithfully for your Lord, be encouraged! Take heart! Because you are royalty!

 You are a prince! You are a princess! Because your daddy is a King! And you stand to inherit and share in all that your heavenly Father has…You are an adopted child, a special child, a hand selected child that is a co-heir with Jesus Christ Himself!

 Faithfulness has its rewards…. This morning, are they rewards that you can claim?

 Are you living your life as a faithful son or a faithful daughter or a faithful child?

 Are you living your life as if part of a royal priesthood?