

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

EVANGELISTIC LESSONS **“Be Faithful Unto Death”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

One of the greatest challenges that a new Christian can face is staying faithful unto death. There is no doubt about it—obeying the Gospel is a joyous thing. Acts 8:39 teaches us that the Ethiopian nobleman went on his way rejoicing. He had great joy because his sins had been washed away. But that is the point at which the journey **begins**, not when it **ends**. It takes every ounce of our being, every fiber of our bodies, and everything we can do to remain faithful unto death. Welcome to our study on “Be Faithful Unto Death.” This lesson is designed to help those who have just obeyed the Gospel, or who are young in the Christian faith, to have the desire, the ability, and the tools to stay faithful unto death in the face of temptation and all that Satan is going to do to try to tempt you. You can rest assured that when you become a Christian, Satan is going to do whatever he can to try to cause you to fall away. The text of 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” But Jesus teaches that we **can**, and that we **must**, remain faithful. Notice the words of Christ in Revelation 2:10. Jesus is writing to suffering saints, and He says, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” In our lesson today, we are going to ask four basic questions. We are going to ask: (1) Does Jesus demand our faithfulness?; (2) Does the Bible teach us about certain hindrances to faithfulness?; (3) What does it really mean to be faithful?; and (4) What are some motivations for us to be faithful to God? (or, what encouragements do we possess that can keep us “in The Faith?”)?

Let’s begin by asking, “Does Jesus demand our faithfulness?” The answer, of course, is a resounding “Yes!” Jesus absolutely demands our faithfulness. When we become a Christian, we are claiming our allegiance to Jesus Christ, and we are stating that we intend to follow Him all the days of our lives. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. Paul wanted the Christians to whom he wrote to know that they were no longer their own. When they became Christians, they said, “Lord, we are giving ourselves over to you.” We were bought at a price. Jesus died on Calvary to pay the ultimate debt for our sin, and so we must give our lives to God every day. Paul said in Romans 6:4 that when we rise up out of the waters of baptism, we rise to walk “in newness of life.” Consider the example found in 2 Corinthians 8:5. Before certain people put their money into the offering plate, they first “gave themselves” to the Lord. Paul understood this, because he said in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Think of Paul’s words in Romans 12:1. Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you pre-

sent your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Does Jesus demand our faithfulness after we become a Christian? Absolutely! Becoming a Christian does not mean that we come to worship to sit on a pew two or three times a week. Becoming a Christian means that every day, every moment, we are going to do our best to be faithful to Christ. In fact, the Bible teaches that without faithfulness to God, we will not be saved. It is not possible for us to be saved if we are not going to be faithful to God. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 that Jesus will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the Gospel. I suggest that the phrase “those who do not obey the Gospel,” represents those who do not continue to obey the commands that Jesus set forth in the Bible. In fact, in Mark 13:35, Jesus warned, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming.” We are told to be ready always so that we can go to Heaven when Jesus returns.

Yes, Jesus **does** demand our faithfulness. But it will be a help to us if we can recognize some of the hindrances to faithfulness. What are some things that will hinder us from being faithful to God? Things that hinder us are things that get in the way—things that keep us from doing the best we can. They are like a roadblock that keeps us from traveling the straight and narrow path. What are they? Sin is the greatest hindrance to faithfulness. Nothing will do more harm to us as new Christians than us going back into a life of sin. After we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, after our lives have been cleansed, and after we have been given a second chance, it will do great harm to our souls (and to our spiritual journey) if we try to go back to a life of sin. In Romans 6:23, Paul said, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We can know that sin hinders faithfulness because there are some clear examples in the Scriptures of people who were hindered by sin. Think about the Old Testament example of Balaam in Numbers 22:18. Balaam seems at first to be a good prophet of God. He said that he could not go beyond, or do more or less, than what the Word of God teaches. But we find later that Balaam somehow got involved in sin, and was even tempting God’s people to commit adultery. He eventually died—opposing the people of God! Balaam could have done a lot of good, but instead sin got into his life. Think about Judas. Do you think that when Jesus originally called Judas as one of the twelve apostles, he was a bad apple to begin with? Absolutely not. Judas had some good qualities, but he got involved in sin. He became greedy as he kept the money bag, and he eventually sold out the Lord. Sin entered into his life. Think also about Demas, of whom Paul said, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:9). Demas no doubt was at one time a faithful child of God. But when he got caught up in the world, sin entered his life and kept him from being faithful. Probably one of the clearest (and quickest!) examples of sin hindering faithfulness is the example of Simon in Acts 8. Simon heard the Word and obeyed the Gospel, thereby becoming a Christian. But he had some baggage, since previously he had been a magician who had tricked others by sleight of hand. When he saw an actual miracle performed by the apostles, he wanted to do one, too. He offered the apostles money if they would give him the ability to do miracles. Peter told him that he was “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity,” and that he needed to repent so that the bad thoughts of his heart might be forgiven. Simon then asked Peter to pray for him. But sin had hindered Simon from being as faithful as he could have been. The writer of Proverbs said it this way in Proverbs 13:15, “The way of the transgressor is hard.” If we have been brought out of the life of sin, why would we **ever** want to go **back** into that? If we know the feeling of joy and peace, and what it really means to be forgiven, why would we ever want to return to a life of sin? We need to know that if we do, God **will** know, and He **will** see our sin. If we go back into a life of sin, we will not fool God. Hebrews 4:13 says, “There is no

creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” The all-seeing eye of God sees everything. Proverbs 15:3 teaches us that God sees all things. We must not go back into a life of sin. If we have been cleansed and have been called out of the world, we need to stay pure by living faithfully to Christ.

Another important hindrance to faithfulness is worldliness. If there is a problem that is occurring in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ today, it is that we have become far too worldly and too caught up in the amenities and pleasures of this world. I think that we can sing the words of the song (and really mean them!), “I would like here to stay here longer than man’s allotted days.” But in reality that ought **not** to be our attitude. Worldliness hinders us from being faithful. James 4:4 puts it this way: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Think of a couple of examples of people who, because of their desire to be like the world, got caught up in unfaithfulness. Do you remember Luke 17:32? There are three words that will echo through the pages of the Bible forever: “Remember Lot’s wife.” What is the story behind Lot’s wife? As far back as the Book of Genesis, God told Lot to leave Sodom and Gomorrah without looking back. But Lot’s wife turned and looked back—which was representative of her affinity to that lifestyle or to the pleasures that remained in the two cities. She turned back—and turned into a pillar of salt! Do you remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? These people were Christians who had obeyed the Gospel. They sold a piece of land, and had received a certain amount of money for it. They brought some of the proceeds of the sale and laid them at the feet of the apostles. The apostles asked them, “Did you receive ‘this much’ for it?” They lied and said, “Yes,” when in actuality they had kept back part for themselves. Would there have been anything wrong with them keeping part of the proceeds and giving the rest to the church? Not at all. But the fact is that they got caught up in worldliness and tried to trick God by lying. Both of them dropped dead on the spot, one after the other. Think of the words of 1 John 2:15-17. John said:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

We must not get caught up in the things of this world. Think about Matthew 6:24. Jesus said, “Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also.” Are our hearts set on worldly things? If they are, then we are going to get caught up in worldliness. But if our hearts are set on going to Heaven, as Paul said in Colossians 3:1, then we will not have any problem seeking those things that are above. Think about it in these terms. In Matthew 24:34-36, Jesus said that Heaven and Earth will one day pass away. Think about 2 Peter 3:10-12, where we read that the Earth and all that is in it will one day be burned up with a fervent heat. If the Earth is going to pass away, if everything is going to be burned up with a fervent heat, and if our hope is tied up in worldly things, what will happen to our hope when the Earth comes to an end? When our life here is over and all the pleasures and nice things of this life cease to exist, where will our hope be? It won’t be in anything eternal. We need to realize that worldliness truly does hinder faithfulness to God.

Another hindrance to faithfulness is apathy. By apathy, we simply mean a mindset that has a lack of concern—a mindset that does not care or is flippant as it approaches the Christian walk. We need to realize that apathy can do great harm to the cause of Christ. Maybe people have been Christians for years, and they grown accustomed to being a Christian. Now, they are lethargic and apathetic about it. They do not get involved any longer

in the cause of Christ. Apathy keeps us from putting our priorities where they ought to be. Jesus told us in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Another hindrance to faithfulness is the external appearance of religion. Some people, by an external appearance of religion, are being greatly hindered from doing what God said. By "an external appearance of religion," we mean that these people look, act, and talk religious, but that is only a shell. Their religion is not really who they are. We need to know that just because we dress or act like a Christian, or do things that a Christian does, that does not mean we are a faithful child of God. We must take our faith beyond looking, acting, or feeling like we are a Christian. We must be faithful to God each and every day. I know that Israel got caught up in this external appearance of religion. In Jeremiah 7:4, the Israelites cried out, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!" What were they saying? They were saying, "Save us, oh our temple!" Were they living correctly? Absolutely not! They were caught up in idolatry and wickedness, and they were not trusting God. Yet they still wanted to appear religious. So, they said, "Save us, oh our temple!" Many people today have that same attitude. While they may not live as faithfully as they should, or do the things that they ought to inside the walls of their own homes, they want to look and feel religious. Those looks and feelings will not count when it comes time for Christ to say, "Good and faithful servant," but will instead lead to His saying, "Cast them into outer darkness" (Mt. 25:30). So we must continue to be faithful to Jesus all the days of our lives.

Now let us turn our attention to what it truly means to be faithful. Let's say that we become Christians, and we want to get involved in the work of the Lord. What does it mean for us to "be faithful unto death"? Let's begin by noting that it means that we must be faithful in our service to God. We must be faithful as a servant in the cause of Christ. We have been called to be workers and to serve. The text of 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." A great statement can be found in John 9:4 where Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." We must take advantage of the time we have now so that we can work in the kingdom. In Revelation 14:13, we read, "'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" Who were these blessed people" who died in the Lord? They were laboring, working people who were committed to the cause of Christ. In Matthew 20:1ff., the church is likened unto a vineyard. What is a vineyard? It is a place of work where fruit is produced. That is the way we need to see our faithfulness to God. We need to be in that place of work, doing God's will so that we can produce fruit for the kingdom. Think about the words of Jesus in Mark 10:45. This passage teaches us the attitude that Christ had and the attitude that we should have. Christ's disciples began to bicker and complain. They wanted to know who would be "the first" (or "the greatest") in the kingdom. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus, as God in the flesh, did not come for us to serve Him. Rather, He came to serve us. And that is the attitude that we, too, ought to have. When we become Christians, we should say, "We are going to be faithful in our service, and we are going to be a diligent worker in the kingdom of God."

Another way in which we can be faithful to God is by being faithful in our worship of Him. When we think about faithfulness, worship definitely is not the only area in which we need to be faithful. Worship is not the totality of the Christian life. But our faithfulness in wor-

ship is a good indicator of our faithfulness to God. The psalmist said in Psalm 122:1, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" Do **we** view it that way? If we are really going to be faithful to God, we need to say to ourselves, "Aren't we glad that it's the first day of the week so we can worship God? What a joy it is!" To some people, however, it is not like that. Rather, worship is a duty or a burden that causes them to say, "Oh, no. We **have** to go to worship." It ought not to be that way. "Being faithful unto death" should mean that we enjoy going to worship every time the church-building doors are open so that we can praise God and encourage fellow Christians. Beyond that, the Bible teaches that we must be faithful in our worship attendance. Notice the words of Hebrews 10:25—which clearly teaches that faithfulness in worship is an absolute. The Hebrews writer said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." If God wanted to say, "Do not skip worship services," how would He say it? He surely would say something exactly like Hebrews 10:25—"not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some." The point is that we should not do as some people have done and "skip out" on worshipping God. Rather, we should be present to give God the glory and honor that He and His Son are due.

Another way in which we can be faithful is by being faithful in Bible study. Nothing will encourage us more, or help us to grow stronger in our faith, than growing in our knowledge of the Word (and will) of God. We are taught in the New Testament to grow. The text of 2 Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior." Peter said in 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." The psalmist said in Psalm 119:11, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." Consider, too, the example of Job in Job 23:12 where Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Have you ever thought about that? More than three square meals a day, Job treasured the Word of God. That is the way we ought to feel. Jeremiah had what we might call a "spiritual heartburn" for the Word of God. He said, "His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:9). Jeremiah had God's Word in his heart, and it **was** going to come out of his mouth! He **was** going to say what God wanted him to say. I want you to look at the example of Jesus, Who said in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Who will the person be who has divine happiness and God's blessings? It will be the person who is hungering and thirsting for the Word of God. Paul said, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). In 1 Peter 3:15, we are told, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." While there may be many ways in which we can be faithful to God, perhaps these three can help us to help us be faithful in our service, to be faithful in worship, and to be faithful the Bible each and every day of our lives.

Now we want to notice some motivations for our faithfulness. What should motivate us to live faithfully before God every day? When life throws something difficult our way, or when Satan places various temptations before us, what should motivate us to not give in, but to instead be faithful unto death? I want to suggest to you today that the greatest motivation of faithfulness is the hope of Heaven that we have. There is nothing in all the world that can motivate us more than the hope, the joy, and the beauty of one day leaving this life and going to Heaven itself. Consider what Paul said in Romans 8:18—which is a passage that teaches us that Heaven will be worth it all. Paul said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Paul is saying, "Look at your suffering, but then look at the glory that you will re-

ceive. You will see that the suffering does not even begin to compare.” Heaven is truly going to worth it all. Think about the beautiful place called Heaven described in Revelation 21:3-4. There will be no graves there, and the hillsides will have no grave markers. There will be no reason to call a doctor, because no one will get sick. There will be no undertakers, because people will not die. God will wipe away all our tears. Don't you want to go to a place like that? If you really want to go to Heaven, you are going to have to decide right now that as a new Christian, or a Christian who has not been as faithful as you should have been, that you are going to give your life to the Lord, and that you are going to do whatever it takes, to make it to the wonderful place called Heaven.

Another motivating factor for faithfulness is the reality of the Judgment Day. There is a positive side to faithfulness, and there is a negative side to unfaithfulness. We need to know that if we do not live as we should in this life, then we are going to have to stand before God and give an account. Revelation 20:12-15 depicts the Judgment scene, in which the Book of Life is opened and in which each one is judged “according to his works.” The Bible tells us that those who are not faithful will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. God knows if we are being faithful, and on the Judgment Day, if we have not done what we should, we are going to have to stand before God and give an account. Look at Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:10 where Paul said, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Yes, in this life, the things we do will one day be judged by God. If we have been doing good, that is great encouragement. But if we have been doing evil, God knows that, too, and we will have to give an account for it.

A third motivating factor is the reality of Hell. We need to know that, at Judgment, if we have not lived faithfully, then we will be cast into that place called Hell. Luke 16:19-31 describes it as a place of torment and fire—a horrible place that no one would ever willingly go to. Let's pause for a moment and think about what Jesus said in Mark 9:44. Here is a great motivating factor. Jesus said that Hell is a place where “the worm dies not, and the fire is never quenched.” Can you think about going to a place like that—a place where it as if a maggot is continually eating at your flesh, and where no one ever reaches over and turns down the thermostat? That is what Hell is depicted as being in the Bible.

Here is another motivating factor—the amazing love of God. What—outside of the beauty of Heaven and the horror of Hell—can motivate us to live faithfully? It is the love of God, which ought to motivate each one of us to want to be faithful each and every day. When we think of God and all that He has done for us, how much He gave up, and how much His Son loves us, that ought to motivate us to live faithfully every single day. That is exactly what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, where he wrote, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” God's love, as it speaks to us, says, “After all that I have done for you, won't you be faithful unto Me?”

That is the question we are asking today. Won't you be faithful to God? Jesus demands your faithfulness. There are things that can hinder your faithfulness. There are motivations to faithfulness. And, yes, there are tools that can help keep you faithful. Today, we are praying that you will remain faithful all the days of your life—and eventually go to Heaven.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH”

1. Acts 8:39 teaches us that the Ethiopian nobleman “went on his way rejoicing” after his baptism. Why was he so happy?
2. What is the message of Revelation 2:10?
3. According to 2 Corinthians 8:5, before the Corinthian Christians put their money into the collection plate, what had they done previous to that?
4. In Galatians 2:20, Paul said it was no longer “him” who was living in his body after his conversion, but someone else. Who was that someone else?
5. According to Paul’s statement in Romans 12:1, what is a Christian’s “reasonable service”?
6. What, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, will happen to those people who either never knew God or failed to keep His commandments?
7. What valuable point for us today is contained in Balaam’s statement in Numbers 22:18?
8. What kind of life, according to Proverbs 13:15, does a sinner live in the long run?
9. What sin did Simon commit in Acts 8 that caused Peter to tell him he was in “the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity”?
10. In the context of Luke 17:32, what is the importance of the three words, “Remember Lot’s wife”?
11. In Colossians 3:1, what did Paul urge Christians to do?
12. From the teaching contained in James 4:4, what can we say about friendship with the world?
13. The text of 1 John 2:15-17 tells us about something that we are **not** to love. What is it?
14. What important message is contained in Matthew 6:33?
15. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, what did Paul admonish us to do?
16. If Christians today wanted to imitate Christ’s attitude and actions in Mark 10:45, what would they end up doing?
17. Summarize in only a few words the message found in Romans 8:18.
18. According to Revelation 20:12-15, by what will we one day be judged?
19. According to John 12:48, by what will we one day be judged?