



Faithful in Doing

Recently in this column I introduced the theme we are using extensively throughout the Covenant: found faithful. I believe it is the core desire we all share. At our best, each of us simply wants to be found faithful walking with God and for God.

In Matthew 25:21 (and repeated in verse 23) we find the related and oft-quoted phrase “Well done, good and faithful servant” frequently invoked to honor a person for a term well served or a life well lived. The full context is instructive. The phrase comes within the parable of three servants entrusted with bags of gold—one five, another two, and the last, one. The servants are assigned to bring a return on the investment. The one with five bags brings back an additional five and receives the commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The second servant also doubles what he received and is likewise commended. The third servant buries the one bag and brings only it back. He is harshly critiqued.

There are two things to note. First, faithfulness is tied inextricably to doing. “Well done” is the affirmation. The parable does not say, “Well pondered, good and faithful servant,” nor well intended or well strategized. It says, “Well done.”

Jesus makes the same point many different times in different ways. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say?” “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” He even makes the inverse argument: “Everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them is like a foolish person who builds a house upon the sand.”

To be found faithful, then, is not merely to be found in agreement with Jesus. As William Willimon observes, churches are full of people who agree with Jesus but whose inaction is the catch. That’s why James says, “Be doers of the word, not hearers only who deceive themselves.” James is making a link between inaction and self-deception. Willimon says, “We deceive ourselves into thinking that we have been faithful to the word when we have merely listened, reflected, pondered, and agreed with the word.”

If we say we are committed to pursuing Christ we must be equally committed to pursuing Christ’s priorities in the world. Otherwise we are

deceiving ourselves about the state of our faith.

And second, what is the evidence of our doing? Broadly, it is effectiveness. I believe it was Peter Drucker who said the religious world’s word for effectiveness is fruitfulness. Jesus comments fruitfulness. Five more bags and two more bags are the tangible results presented by the commended workers. Well done is the estimation of the boss. Nothing additional beyond what had been given is presented by the third, to the disappointment of the owner.

To be found faithful, then, consists in part of this: to take action that brings a discernible result to God’s interests. There is more to being found faithful, but there is not less.

Yes, there is an important caveat. Not every faithful action in and of itself appears to bring discernible progress. I know that as a pastor I worked just as hard in lean years of growth as I did in bountiful years.

Also, sometimes the environment at any given point is not conducive. This summer I visited Covenant churches in several farming and ranching communities—Albert City and Lanyon, Iowa, as well as Herndon, Lund, and Oberlin, Kansas. These are some of the best farming and ranching communities in the world, yet this year the drought has been devastating to the agricultural heartland, through no fault of the stalwarts who work the land. Likewise, environment can be a factor at any given moment impacting fruitfulness in kingdom work. But, over time, I do believe consistently doing the right things the right way does find expression in tangible and evident fruitfulness.

Right now we are embarking on Covenant Kids Congo powered by World Vision. This unprecedented partnership between the Covenant in Congo, the Covenant here, and World Vision seeks to be both faithful in the doing, and effective in results, in order to see a genuine, long-term, and sustainable difference for the children of Congo, their families, and their communities. Make sure you and your congregation are participating. As we together move beyond intention to action, and action to effectiveness, the commendation of Jesus awaits. ■

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