TITLE: SEMPER FI

TEXT: Ps. 12:1; Prov. 20:6; Rev. 3:14; Ps. 145:13 & 101:6; Mt. 24:45-46; Lu. 9:1-6; Mt. 25:21; Rev. 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about what may be becoming more and more of a lost art within our world and that is the art of faithfulness.

 King David cries out to God in the Psalms…

**Psalms 12:1 (NIV) 1Help, LORD, for the godly are no more;     the faithful have vanished from among men.**

King Solomon ponders this thought….

**Proverbs 20:6 (NIV) 6Many a man claims to have unfailing love,     but a faithful man who can find?**

 Have you ever felt like the faithful have vanished from among men? That faithfulness is becoming something of a lost art?

Maybe we first need to define just what BIBLICAL faithfulness is…

**Faith·ful  *adj.* 1. Adhering firmly and devotedly, as to a person, a cause, or an idea; 2. being full of faith. 3. Worthy of trust or belief; reliable. 4. Consistent with truth or actuality**

The word faithful comes from the Greek word: **pistos**

***pis-tos'* objectively *trustworthy*; subjectively *trustful:*— faithful, sure, true.**

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***SYNONYMS of faithful, loyal, true, constant, fast, steadfast, staunch.***

We seem to be living in a world were where faithfulness is becoming a lost art….A world that is slipping away from living lives of faithfulness….

The divorce rate within America is running somewhere around the 50% mark! What does that tell us?

 One thing it tells us is that we have a problem with faithfulness in our nation when it comes to the covenant bond of marriage!

 Statistically, there will be over one million non-therapeutic abortions performed in the United States alone in this coming year! What does this tell us?

One thing it tells us is that we have a problem with faithfulness in our nation when it comes to the area of love and devotion to our children when they are in their most vulnerable condition—while yet in their mothers’ wombs.

Someone made the statement that what used to be the safest place for the un-born child, their mother’s womb, has become the most dangerous place for an un-born child in America!

As an employer for many years one thing that I found to be more and more true within the workplace was how difficult it was to find people who would be faithful in their jobs…

 One of the most difficult tasks that I had in management was getting people to come to work on time or getting them to show up as scheduled at all!

I would rather have 10 employees with limited capabilities who were consistently faithful to their jobs than I would 100 super qualified employees who were not faithful to their jobs and who you could never be sure if they were going to show up or not!

 I would choose faithfulness over capability any day of the week!

And, by the way, this is a Scriptural concept as well!

God prefers faithfulness over capability, doesn’t He?

 Scripture has a lot to say to us about the subject of faithfulness.

 One of the names used for God in Scripture is faithful!

Faithfulness is an attribute of God, part of who and what God is.

**Deuteronomy 7:9 (NIV) 9Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.**

**Revelation 3:14 (NIV) 14“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.**

**Psalms 145:13 (NIV) 13Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures through all generations.     The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.**

And just as God is the faithful God of creation, faithful to keep all of His promises throughout all the generations-- He has called us as His children to be a people of faithfulness as well!

**Psalms 101:6 (NIV) 6My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,     that they may dwell with me;     he whose walk is blameless     will minister to me.**

 God says that His eyes will be on the faithful! He says that the faithful will dwell with Him and that, in fact, when we live a life of faithfulness and walk blamelessly before God our life will actually become a ministry to God!

**He whose walk is blameless  will minister to me.**

We all understand the concept of being ministered to by God, but did you realize that your life can actually be a ministry to God? That God can receive ministry from your life?

The Hebrew word we translate as ministry here is:

***shaw-rath'***

**A primitive root; to *attend* as a menial or worshipper; figuratively to *contribute* to:—minister (unto), (do) service unto.**

Our faithfulness is not just an act of service to God, but our faithfulness actually ministers to Him!

 God is uplifted and encouraged by your and my faithfulness!

Even so, faithfulness is something that we all struggle with at times isn’t it….

To be always faithful in our love and devotion and service to the Lord can be a struggle for us at times….

Jesus often taught on the subject of faithfulness…

After talking about the signs of the end of the age and the events that must take place before His return, Jesus says this…

**Matthew 24:45 - 46 (NIV) 45“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?  46It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.**

How is it that we are to be found when the master comes back for us? We are to be found faithful!

One thing that I want to point out here that I hope will bring about a newfound sense of freedom and liberty in your walk with the Lord, is that your calling, that which God expects of you, is to be faithful not necessarily successful.

I don’t know of a Scripture that demands success but there are many that call for faithfulness.

 Our calling as a Christian is to faithfulness not successfulness.

And there is a reason for that. We and only we can control whether we are faithful or not…we have no real control over our successes. Unless those successes are a direct result of our faithfulness.

Our faithfulness may lead to personal success in our own life, but our faithfulness will not guarantee successes in the lives of others.

 And even in our own lives’ faithfulness must precede success.

 Too many times, as Christians we try to live lives of success for God instead of simply living our lives faithfully to Him and the result is often frustration and a feeling of never quite measuring up, never hitting the mark….

When Jesus sent His disciples out to go and minister the gospel, did he tell them that He expected them to be successful? Did Jesus demand success?

NO! He just told them they needed to be faithful in going.

Success was not in their hands, only faithfulness to go was!

**Luke 9:1 - 6 (NIV) 1When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,  2and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.  3He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.  4Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.  5If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.”  6So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.**

Did Jesus admonish them to be successful? No! He just admonished them to be faithful!

They were responsible to God for going and telling…

They were not responsible for whether their message was received or not! They were not held accountable for their success!

**5If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.”**

**-- Corrie Ten Boom shares…**

**A missionary wrote me: "Sometimes adversity tempts me to discouragement in the face of seeming failure. But I take courage and press on anew, as I remember that God does not hold me responsible for success, but for faithfulness."**

Just what are the words that we long to hear as we stand before the Lord? What are those blessed words that Scripture says that we will one day hear as we stand at the door of heaven…**Well done, good and successful servant!**

Those are not the words that I am waiting to hear! I sure don’t want my entrance into heaven to depend upon my success in this life! Successfulness is subjective.

 What may be looked upon as success one day might not be looked upon as success the next day.

 What one person sees as success another may not!

 And I have absolutely no control of success anyway.

But that isn’t the words that we will one day hear, is it?

No, the words that the Lord will one day speak to us as we stand at Heaven’s gate is:

**Matthew 25:21 (NIV) 21“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’**

Well done, good and faithful servant!

 That I can handle! You see it is I and only I that will determine whether I am faithful or not.

 I can control my faithfulness; I am not always the only one that is control of my successfulness. In fact, very seldom are we in control of our success!

Pastors, Sunday School teachers, Youth workers, or any other kind of service to the Lord….teaching or witnessing Christ in our homes, our workplaces, with our neighbors and friends…whatever it is that we do for the Lord if we gauge what we do and our effectiveness in doing it by how successful we are in doing it we will most often walk away depressed and discouraged and defeated….

Why? Because we are trying to do something that we have never been called to do. We have not been called to be successful but we have been called to be faithful.

 Our faithfulness will sometimes lead to successes, but successes are not guaranteed…

 I want you to listen to the message that the Lord has for the Church.. It is in the message that He has for one of the seven Church’s in the book of Revelation…The Church in Smyrna…

**Revelation 2:8 - 11 (NIV) 8“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.  9I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.  10Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.**

By today’s standards the Church at Smyrna would probably not be looked upon as a successful Church.

 It says that they were afflicted and in poverty. They were slandered by those in their community.

 And they had the promise of even more difficulties in the future…Imprisonment and severe persecution, even persecution unto death!

EXAMPLE: How would this look on a Church marquee..

Come and worship with us…. We are afflicted and poor and slandered by many in our community….

We offer severe persecution, imprisonment and possibly even death….Everybody welcome!

Be honest….would this entice you to come and join in their fellowship? Would you say…Wow! This is a successful Church! I think I will join!

 Did the Lord measure them by their successes?

No! He measured them by their faithfulness!

**Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

**-- Ray Stedman, Talking to My Father.**

An old missionary couple had been working in Africa for years and were returning to New York to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They discovered they were booked on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions.

 No one paid any attention to them. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, with passengers trying to catch a glimpse of the great man.

 As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much over him, but nobody gives two hoots about us."

 "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way," his wife said.

 "I can't help it; it doesn't seem right."

 When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were full of the President's arrival, but no one noticed this missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat on the East Side, hoping the next day to see what they could do to make a living in the city.

 That night the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife, "I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly."

 His wife replied, "Why don't you go in the bedroom and tell that to the Lord?"

 A short time later he came out from the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?"

 "The Lord settled it with me," he said. "I told him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'But you're not home yet!'"

 Yes, there will be rewards for faithfulness, but not necessarily down here.

 But when we get home, when we stand before the Lord and hear those long awaited words…Well done, good and faithful servant---enter into your reward…..

 God doesn’t measure us by our successes He measures us by our faithfulness.

Church, don’t measure yourself by your successes in this life….Measure yourself by your faithfulness.

Be faithful within your marriage! Be faithful to your children! Be faithful to your family and friends! Be faithful in your employment! Be faithful to your Lord!

By your faithfulness you will find what true successfulness is..

 Will you be counted among the faithful in the Lord this morning? Our faithfulness is really the only thing that we have any control over anyway….

 The United States Marines have a motto…

 Their motto is Semper Fi. Semper Fi is Latin for “Always faithful!”

Shouldn’t this be our motto as a Christian as well?

 Semper Fi --- Always Faithful!