Marks of the Faithful

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. As we study this morning, we will culminate our time of worship tonight by taking the Lord's Supper together and setting our hearts and minds upon the reason why we can be faithful.

That is because of the salvation that we have been given. We know that every good and perfect gift comes from above. We know that the Lord holds us and sustains us.
And so ultimately, all the praise for our salvation goes to the Lord. All the praise for securing us goes to the Lord. And one day, to the praise of His name, when we are home with Him in heaven, it will be all of Him.
Just a reminder, Paul and Silas and Timothy had been to Thessalonica. They spent a short amount of time there.
They were then forced to leave, thrown out of the town essentially, and so they went to Berea. While they were there, Paul was then forced to leave that area and went to Athens.
[1:17] Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea. And then eventually, a little bit later, what Paul does is he sends Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there.

Paul, by that point, has made his way to Corinth. And Timothy meets up with Paul to give him a report on how things are going with the church in Thessalonica.
Paul is able to find out that the church is doing well. And while he has taught them and they are continuing on in their faith, Paul knows there is more to teach them.
And the result of that is this letter that we are able to read. So in verses 13 to 16 of chapter 2, he's going to remind this young church what it is to be faithful.
What are the qualities? What are the hallmarks? What are the traits of a faithful church? There are some things that churches can do differently.
[2:23] Biblically, there are some personalities and some style of ministry that may look different church to church. But biblically, there are some things that should be true of every faithful church.

Let's look at what that would be. Verses 13 to 16. And we also thank God constantly for this. That when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is.
The word of God. Which is at work in you believers. For you brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.
For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews. Who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets.
And drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind. By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.
[3:38] So as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last. In this short paragraph, I want to show you a few things that should be true of us.

That should be true of every church. Should be true of every believer. And let me encourage you to use this passage as just a way to test your own heart.
These would be some specific things you could pray for in your own walk with Christ. To ensure that you bear the marks of the faithful. Number one, there is an understanding of the word of God.
There is an understanding of the word of God. And I want to show you in verse 13 two things that we understand about God's word. Number one, it is from God.
And number two, it is living and active. Verse 13 says, and just notice the prepositions. We also thank God constantly for this.

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[4:43] That you received the word of God. Which you heard from us. And you accepted it not as the word of men.

But as what it really is. The word of God. Which is at work in you. Of God.
From us. In you. This is how believers understand the Bible. This is how we view the scripture. It is of God.
It is from his apostles. And it's alive in us. Of God. From us. In you. This is the way that we view the scripture.
It is not only from God. It is also living and active. This is the idea here in verse 13. That we accept the word of God.
[5:44] Which is at work. He says in verse 13. The Bible is at work. It's working in us. So when you read the Bible. You want to seek to discern.

How is the Holy Spirit working in my heart. The Holy Spirit is doing heart surgery on us. Every time we read the Bible. Convicting us of sin.
Encouraging us where we're weak. Giving us hope where we're in despair. Humbling us where we're prideful. Teaching us where there's things we don't know.
That the word of God is at work. Hebrews 4.12 as you know says that the word of God is living and active. The Bible is from God.
And it's living and active. It's at work among us. This is why all the ministries of our church. We want to be thoroughly rooted in the Bible.
[6:45] Not because it's the most productive way to draw a mass crowd. Because it's the only way that we can know that what we are doing is right.

And so we want to be a church firmly rooted and established in the scripture. And it's why we want to have high expectations in all of our ministries that they are people, however, wherever they gather, that are in the word.
Because the word is at work. It's at work. And so for us, it's not just about getting 120 students on a Sunday evening behind us to rehearse and to come lead us in music.
I mean, just look. It's about having students that are 13, 14, 15 with Bibles open on a Sunday night right up front listening. Why?
Because the Bible is at work in their life. It's at work. It's alive. It's living and active. And whether it's choir rehearsal on Sunday afternoons or for adults Wednesdays or whether it's Awana on Wednesday nights or Sunday school, whether you're in here on Wednesday nights at 630 for our adult Bible study that Jeff is leading, wherever you gather throughout this church all throughout the week, we want the Bible to be the foundation of that.
[8:13] And you don't outgrow that just because you graduate high school. We don't want just our children's or youth ministries to be about the Bible. We want everything to be about the Bible. So they graduate high school.

They go to our Crossroads ministries, and it's going to be about the Bible. When they get finished with college or that age group, they go into the next group, and it's just going to be all about the Bible.
And when our senior adults are together, we want it to be about the Bible because it's living and active. It's alive. And God's people that are faithful have first always a right understanding of the Bible.
I don't mean by that that we rightly know everything. We're always learning. What I mean is there's a proper way that we view the Bible.
It's of God. It's from His apostles, and it's at work in us. An understanding of the Bible.
[9:16] Number two, marks of the faithful that they imitate faithful examples. Faithful people imitate faithful examples.

Verse 14, for you brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. This is important.
That the faithful need to have examples to look up to. Now, I'm thankful for every person who teaches kids' choirs and Sunday school.
I'm thankful for every person who teaches in Parents' Day Out. I'm thankful for every person who teaches Awana, VBS. Everything we do. I don't want to slight or overlook anybody.
I'm thankful for every single person who teaches there. And most of the people who teach in all those ministries, most of them are people who probably feel like, I don't know if I'm qualified to do

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this.
[10:30] Most of them feel like they love Jesus. They love the church. They care about children. They want to make an investment. But in their hearts, they're thinking, I don't know. People that teach aren't people who feel like they've arrived.

Our teachers are just people who are trying to pass down what they know. And as much as we want to be right in our doctrine, and as much as we want to be right in our theology, we don't want to get it wrong.
We want to cut it straight, as 2 Timothy says. But part of what happens in classrooms is instruction of theology, instruction of doctrine.
That's significant. But that's not the only thing that happens. Something else is happening. And that is that these young people, children and youth, and these younger people in our classrooms, what they're gaining is not just only instruction.
They're gaining faithful examples to look up to. Which is a good reminder for all of us who teach that while we must have our doctrine right, it's not enough to only have our doctrine right.
[11:51] We must live right. Because there are people who are looking up to us, who are following our examples.

And it's critically important that we've got good examples all throughout our church. And I want to just express my heartfelt appreciation for everyone in our church who week after week after week takes time to study, to prepare, to teach lessons.
And I recognize that on any given Sunday, that class may be over and you may think to yourself, what was that about? I don't think we got anything accomplished today.
I don't think anybody listened. I don't think anybody understood anything. There's weeks we feel like that. And we know that our children learn more than they let on, so be encouraged.
But even if, even if on that given week, even if they really didn't learn anything you taught them, what they did do is get to observe your life for another hour and get to know you personally a little bit more.
[13:24] And as they get older, they've got somebody else to look up to. Somebody else to say, this is how a godly adult lives.

This is what a godly man looks like. That when little eyes look among the congregation during a worship service, their eyes will stop at you because they had you in Awana last year as a teacher. They had you as a Sunday school teacher three years ago. And when their eyes scan the crowd, they look at you adults and their eyes stop at you because they recognize you. They spent time with you and they're watching you to say, show me, not just lecture me, show me what is a faithful believer like.
And the marks of the faithful is that not only do we view the Bible right, but we imitate faithful examples. And if people are going to imitate faithful examples, it goes without saying they need faithful examples in their lives.
One of the things that's so important is that our children and our teenagers have access to real people, not just people on a computer screen, real people in their life that they can see, that they can talk to, that they can watch, that they can learn from.
[14:59] The faithful can look back in their life and be grateful for the role models that they had.

And we want to pass that down. There's a lot of reasons why there's no substitute for gathering together physically. This is just one of them.
There's many, this is one of them that you cannot get to know someone's life from a distance. You get to know somebody's life up close.
And the marks of the faithful is that they imitate faithful examples. That's true individually. That's true corporately.
That there are some commonalities among faithful churches. And so he speaks of that in verse 13. That you heard it from us, you accept it, not as word of men, but what it really is, as the word of God, which is at work in you.
[16:09] And because of that, verse 14, you brothers became imitators of the churches of God. There are some things that all churches do well.

They know salvation is only in Christ. They know the Bible is their authority. They have a right understanding of who God is.

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They have a right understanding of who we are. That there's a desire to live your life to please God, not to be people pleasers. These are things that are true of not just faithful people, but they become true of faithful churches and faithful congregations.
And so when you teach, you want to make sure you get it right because people will emulate and imitate what they hear you say. You also want to make sure that you're living right because they will follow your example.
It's the old saying that some things are taught, some things are caught, and both of those things are true. I was just retelling this story with a young pastor last week that had called me about some things, and I was sharing with him.
[17:20] I may have shared this before in here with you. I think it was a year and a half ago when I was with our Awana students in the Bible Q&A upstairs on a Wednesday night and maybe two school years ago, and one of the children said to me, when you're preaching, does it bother you if someone's not listening?

And I thought briefly about that, and here's my honest answer back to them. It bothers me far more that people are listening and will believe what I say because if you're not listening, I don't prefer that, obviously, but that's between you and the Lord in some sense.
There's a congregational aspect to our worship, and if you're being disrespectful, if you're disrupting, it's a different situation, but if you're just sitting there, you're not bothering anybody else, and you just tune the preaching of the word out, that's not good.
I don't like that. I don't prefer that, but that doesn't keep me awake at night as much because I don't know how that's happening. What bothers me far more is that on any given Sunday, there are people who really are listening and really will believe what I say because I said it, and that consumes me because now I'm accountable for that.
If you don't listen, you're accountable to the Lord for that. You listen, and you trust me and believe me, and I lead you astray, I'm accountable to the Lord for that.
[18:57] And so one of the things that we have to learn as a congregation is we have to take seriously the way we teach, how we teach, the way our ministries are structured, and how we live our lives.

Because people follow leaders. People follow leaders. And every organization has leadership. The question is, are the leaders faithful examples?
When I was brand new in ministry, I started a full-time in ministry when I was 20. And so I went to work. I was telling my son this the day when he was starting at the law firm.
My first day in my office job. Full-time, first day, you know, big boy job. I go to work, and I don't have a clue what to do.
I have no idea. I go to my office, which was a closet with a desk. It had a window with shades, but when you open the shades, it was a concrete wall behind it.
[20:08] So whatever you want to call that. But I went to work. I didn't have a to-do list. Nobody came and sat down and told me what to do, so I sat at my desk. Now, I couldn't walk around my desk because it was a closet.

I had to duke of hazard it over the desk. If you don't know what that means, ask your parents or grandparents, but that's how to get to my desk. And I sat down, and I said, I'm just going to read the book of James.
I knew the book of James pretty well. I memorized it in college. It was near in my heart, so I just thought, I'll just sit down and read through these five chapters. I finished James 5, 20 minutes later, and I thought to myself, I still have no idea what I'm supposed to do.
So I went back to James 1, and I read the book again. And I thought, at some point, I'm either A, going to know this book really well, or someone's going to tell me what in the world to do.
Well, it wouldn't be very long until my life would change quite drastically, and it would no longer be about going to work saying, what do I do today?
[21:12] I would go to work every day, thinking and feeling like I need four more days that week to be able to catch up. I've just kind of lived that way for a number of years. And much of my life is devoted, joyfully so, to trying to study to get it right.

But I'm also keenly aware that if I get it wrong, some people will follow that too.
I don't want you to believe anything I say just because I said it. That's why I want you to have your own Bible and open every time. I don't want you to believe anything I say just because I say it. But

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I'm aware that within any organization, including a church, there are some things people will believe just because the leaders believe it or the leaders said it.
And that's why I wanted to devote so much of my life to striving to get it right. I'm also aware that when my life comes to an end, you're not likely to remember any sermon I've preached.
I hope week by week it's just spiritually sustaining and nourishing and helpful. But when I die, no one's gathering around saying, let's just argue over which sermon was the best and you stay up all night because everybody's got their own opinion.
[22:42] No. I know different. I know that. But what will live much longer than an individual or even a collection of sermons for good or for bad will be the life that I lived in front of you.

That's true for all of our leaders. It's not an excuse to be okay getting it wrong. We don't want to get it wrong. But if your doctrine is airtight and the example you left behind is flawed, then you are going to create mass confusion in the hearts of the people who looked up to you.
And the marks of the faithful is that we understand the Bible but we also imitate faithful examples and the faithful examples includes doctrine and Christian living.
There's a third mark that is mentioned here and that is that the faithful know how to suffer well. They know how to suffer well.
Verse 14 For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind.
[24:07] Paul says Christ suffered the prophets suffered the apostles suffered all true believers have to be ready to suffer. John 15 18 If the world hates you know that it hated me before it hated you and one of the real frightening realities that he mentions are that those who oppose the things of God displease God.

Now the world may not think that's any big thing and the world may make light of that but if you have displeased God you're in danger.
The world displeased God according to verse 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.
The world wants to hinder the work of the church. The world wants to silence the gospel. The world wants to silence believers. But the faithful believer and the faithful church understands how to suffer well.
How to be faithful under persecution. The world understands that if they can get Christians to be silent they don't care what you think.
[25:41] The world doesn't really care what you believe. You know that right? They don't care what you believe as long as you're silent. It's honestly even to the unbelieving God hating pagan it's really nothing to them what you think.

They only get concerned and upset when you speak it. we've got to know how to suffer well.
We've got to know what do you do when you go to school and you take a stand for the gospel and your friends at the high school mock you.
What do you do when you go to college and you make it clear that you believe the Bible and you stand with Christ and all the organization on campus want to intimidate you?
What do you do when you go to the office and word gets out you're a believer and people want to shun you so that you feel like such an outsider they hope that you quit?
[26:56] How are Christians supposed to suffer well? We do it by being faithful. we do it by reminding ourselves that we are outsiders in this world.

We are just aliens passing through. This isn't our forever home. Here we have no lasting city but we seek the city which is to come.
Our citizenship is in heaven Philippians 3 says. we have to know how to suffer well. Even when people want to intimidate we have to know how to handle that.
Even when people want to mock and belittle we have to be faithful. And then one last thing he mentions in verse 16 the faithful trust the Lord to make all things right.
The faithful trust the Lord to make all things right. Verse 16 but wrath has come upon them at last.
[28:08] That the faithful remember that the Lord will have the final say. Now this is really important that you live with this understanding.

Because if you forget that the Lord will have the final say you're going to wrongly think it's up to you to put everybody in their place. That won't go well.

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It's not up to you to be the final judge and jury of all things. It's not up to you to make sure that every sinful person gets what's coming to them.
It's not up to you to make sure that everything in the cosmos is made right. You're going to drive yourself crazy if you go through life like that. Also if you go through life like that you're going to find yourself paralyzed by fear and frustration because you can't make all things right.
but the faithful trust the Lord to make all things right as we remind ourselves that the Lord's wrath is waiting for them which also should take us from a place of anger to a place of desperate prayer for them.
[29:33] If we forget this part of it then what the church will become is a bunch of militant angry people.

But if you remind yourself that every person who mocks the things of God and rejects the Bible and opposes the work of the church every one of them has the wrath of God stored out and will one day be poured out upon them you really can't help but pray for them.
And the marks of the faithful are that we trust the Lord to make all things right which frees us up to just spend our lives in faithful ministry. And if you die before everybody gets what's coming to them it's okay it's not your role to do that.
Serve intercede do the work of an evangelist be faithful and trust the Lord to make all things right.
The wrath of God according to verse 16 it's already there it's just awaiting the appointed time to be poured out. as I meditate on that verse this last week my mind has gone to at a water park for a number of years we were able to go to this little water park with part of my family and we would do it around my birthday and so I'd have all my little nieces and nephews that would gather there and my father-in-law their grandpa who loves all things roller coasters and water slides there's that little water park where these buckets would fill up like overheads like this big massive fountain would pour down there would be four or five buckets and you could watch them pour up and if you stand underneath them you don't know when it's coming but if you stand back you can watch and at some point those buckets get so full that it pours out and so at the water park it would be like nine little kids and my father-in-law just getting doused with water and they would stand there and because they can't see what's happening above them they don't know when it's going to pour out they they can sense it they know it's coming they don't know when but from a different perspective as you back up you just kind of watch it unfold and you watch the fountain pour out and the buckets may be able to hold a little bit more water and it may be able to bear up a little bit longer but you inevitably know exactly how this ends that bucket is going to get so full that it's going to give way and it's going to turn over and the contents of the bucket are getting poured out on the heads of all who are underneath it and Paul says the wrath is filled up and it will be poured out we don't know when the fullness of
[32:50] God's wrath is going to be poured out but as we take a step back and read the scripture we can see the wrath building and it's not up to us to be in charge of when it gets poured out it's up to us to warn those underneath it to escape while there's time and even tonight if there's not been a time in your life where you've trusted in Christ as your savior and repented of your sin I want to warn you God's wrath is filling up and it will one day be poured out and the only shelter we have is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the faithful never lose sight of that glorious truth and of course the picture of the

Lord's grace poured out for us we see in the elements of the Lord's Supper which we spent our morning today studying that I pray is on your heart even now I'd like to ask you at this time if you would to bow your head and close your eyes with me and invite the deacons of our church to come to the front as we prepare to serve you we talked about this morning the Lord's Supper identifies the bread as his body the cup as his blood we said this morning it also purifies it purifies us as we confess our sin now I invite you right at this time to take just a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart with your head bowed and eyes closed would you just pray you

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