*Introduction*

As we learn about faith and how we are to live by faith, it is worth stopping for a moment and looking at the character of God.

The reason for this is that often we wonder why God does not appear to answer our prayers, or we don't get the breakthrough that we believe we should have.

As Christians, and even as seekers of God we often fail to understand the requirements of God because of His character and therefore fail to ask, prayerfully, for the things that are according to His will.

So far, on our Faith journey we have learnt that we are to trust in His trustworthiness or have faith in His faithfulness.

But how can we 'be faithful' if we are unaware of what God expects of us that is, or what that means - to be faithful?

As we look at this, there are a few things that I need to spell out clearly, so that there is NO misunderstanding

*Firstly, let me ask you a question. Does God change? - NO*

***Psalm 55:19 God, who is enthroned from of old,  who does not change—***

***Num 23:19 God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?***

***1 SAM 15:28-29Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbours—to one better than you. 29He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”***

***Malachi 3:6“I the Lord do not change***

***James 1:16 Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.***

So we can not only assume, but we can know for sure - that God does not change.

God has always shown mercy, and he lavishes His grace upon those He has saved, but the principle is the same, God does not change.

*The second thing is this - We are not talking about salvation through works this morning.* Let me say emphatically! that Salvation, being born again, is only available to those who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ the Messiah. ONLY through His work upon the cross, his shed blood, His resurrection, can we be saved.

But we are called to walk in faith

***3 John:3-4 It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.***

In order for us to walk in faith, we have to understand something of the character of God, so that we can understand:

Why we think God does not answer our prayers,

Why He seems to be quiet, so often,

Why we don't have that peace we so desire

and so many other things.

We are only going to get a glimpse of His character this morning, because we could never more than scratch the surface of Him who is I AM that I AM.

*The way we see God's character is through the lens of Israel.*

Why do I say that? It is because the Bible was written to the Jews and much of it is about the Jews.

The whole of the Old Testament is history, in one form or another, about God dealing with His Chosen people - the Jews or Israel.

As we look on how God dealt with them, we will see His character, and we will understand how God deals with us in our walk with Him, through Christ Jesus.

Right at the beginning of the Bible we see God dealing with Cain and Abel when they brought their offerings. Abel was accepted but Cain's wasn't:

***GEN 4:6-7Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”***

Right from the beginning, God sets out what he expects of us, and what happens when we do not do as He expects.

***Ex 15:25-26Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.***

***There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. 26He said, “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.”***

When God provided the manna and the quail for the Israelites in the wilderness, they were given instructions on how and when to collect it. Basically it was enough for each day, with nothing to be left overnight, and collect twice as much on day six, because day 7 was a Sabbath and they were to rest.

There were those who did not do as they were told - and it went rotten over night or they found nothing on the Sabbath.

Moses was considered a friend of God, and on one occasion Moses asked God:

***EX 33:13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”***

God went on to say a few verses later:

***17And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”***

But Moses also disobeyed God

***Num 20:8-12“Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”***

***9So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him. 10He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” 11Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.***

***12But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”***

All through the early history of Israel in their battles for the Promised Land, there was victory for obedience and defeat for disobedience.

The book of Judges is full of the ups and downs of the Israelites - Obedience and disobedience

So we see that the character of God *demands that we walk in his ways if we want to be successful, and we pay the consequences if we disobey.*

***1 Sam 12:14If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! 15But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.***

***ISA 1:16Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.***

***“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land;but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.”For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.***

Throughout the book of Jeremiah you will also see God saying numerous times

"If you do this... then I will bless you, but if you do not...then..!!

Even in the last verses of the OT we read

***MAL 4:5-6“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”***

Jesus makes the same principle quite clear:

***John 14:15-17 “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.***

same chapter, a little later he says:

***23Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.***

***Matt 16:24Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.***

***Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.***

*Conclusion*

I believe the scriptures are clear, the character of God is such that He lays down as it were conditions for us to follow if we want to enjoy the favour and blessings of God.

The Israelites knew that if they disobeyed, they forfeited their blessings, but if they obeyed, they were blessed abundantly.

I am not preaching a prosperity gospel here, but it seems clear that to walk in faith, means to follow the teachings of Jesus, to be obedient, to carry our cross.

This characteristic of Gods is active everywhere:

You obey the rules - you get the benefits

You follow the directions - you get to the location

If you go to work - you get paid

If you claim to walk the Christian life, but are not, if you are really pleasing yourself, whether deliberately or through misguidance, or misunderstanding, as the Galatian church were told ***Gal 6:8*** ***Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction;***

We start the Christian walk in faith, we repent and believe. But we have to continue to walk in faith, there are many examples of the Israelites being disobedient to show us the consequences of not walking in faith.

We walk in faith, trusting in Him, doing the works that he has for us to do on the way,

and our reward is a crown of righteousness, awaiting the faithful in heaven.