

# LITTLE FAITH: THE ULTIMATE CAUSE OF WORRY

MATTHEW 6:25-34

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ODAY I WILL TAKE UP AGAIN THE SUBJECT OF WORRYING about such things as what we shall eat and what we shall drink and what we shall wear. But, today I am going to approach the subject from a slightly different angle. The last time I spoke on the subject of worry, I stated that the real cause of worry is a failure to understand who God is and how he relates to us as individuals. The two illustrations about birds and flowers present God as a heavenly Father who will always provide for us our basic needs for survival until our appointed time to die has come. Such a concept of God should drive away any anxiety we have about the future.

The truth that this almighty God who is our loving heavenly Father will not allow us, His children, to die before His plan and purpose for us has been fulfilled—this truth is not an excuse for laziness. What happened at the Fall has put us in a position where we must work by the sweat of our brow in order to survive. It is not Biblical to sit around doing nothing while expecting free handouts. Nor is it Biblical to say, "Because God has promised to keep His children alive until their appointed time to die has come; therefore, I will not take advantage of the medical technology that is now available." We must work to survive and we must work to use whatever is available to us to take care of our health. However, at the same time, we must not worry about our survival.

This is an extremely difficult balance to keep. As we labor to make ends meet and as we do our best to take care of our health, it is very easy to start thinking that the length of our days depends on our ability to labor and it depends on the amount of money we have in the bank and it depends on the number of insurance policies and retirement plans we own. And then, we look at our declining ability to do labor and the small amount of money in the bank and our lack of insurance and our retirement plans that seem so inadequate, and we begin to worry. We lose sight of our heavenly Father, and we begin to worry. Most of us who have left our parent's homes and who are now completely or partially independent have experienced some anxiety about our ability to survive. And, it will not be that many years before those who are now being provided for by their parents will have the same experience.

This problem of worry is already touching or will touch each person sitting in this auditorium. The magnitude and seriousness of the problem justifies using another sermon or two to think about it. I have already addressed the problem in one sermon, and now I will do so again. Without changing the nature of the problem, I want to use different words to describe the problem. I want to draw our attention to a phrase recorded in MATTHEW 6:30. The phrase is, "O you of little faith." What I want all of us to see today is that the ultimate cause of all our worry is that our faith is too small.

The faith I am talking about today is not the faith that leads a person to salvation. Eleven people will be baptized today. Each one of these people will confess to the fact that he or she has faith. By the very act of being baptized, they will testify that they have experienced God's saving grace that comes through faith. They believe that, through the blood of Jesus Christ, God has forgiven them of sins committed in the

past and they want that forgiveness. They believe that the Holy Spirit of God now lives in their hearts, giving them strength to live a holy life pleasing to God in the present; and they want, more than anything else, to live a life that is pleasing to God. And, they believe that they will go to heaven when they die, and going to heaven is something they look forward to, even more than fulfilling the American dream. Such is or should be the nature of the saving faith of each person being baptized today.

Now, we need to understand that the "little faith" we read about in MATTHEW 6:30 is different than the faith that saves a person. It is perfectly possible for a person to have faith that saves without having the other kind of faith that prevents him from worrying. The same, however, is not true in reverse. A person must first have a faith that saves before that person can experience freedom from anxiety based on faith in a heavenly Father who cares. A person who has not experienced saving faith may be free from anxiety, but that person's lack of anxiety is not based on something that is totally trustworthy. It is based on something that is sure to fail. People who have not experienced salvation and who cannot call God their heavenly Father should experience anxiety about their ability to survive, because it is wrath that awaits them in the future whether they admit it or not.

But, people who have experienced salvation should not worry, and the fact they do worry indicates that they have failed to take their faith experience beyond the point of saving faith. This is the general meaning of the phrase "little faith." It is a faith that is confined to the salvation of our souls, and it does not go beyond that. It does not extend to the whole of life and everything in life. This is why people who claim to be Christian are often defeated in their daily lives. They become worried and anxious and they conform to the world in so many ways.

Another way to look at it is this: "Little faith" means laying hold of some of God's promises while letting go of others. God's promises are exceedingly great in number, applying to every area of life.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE FAIL TO TAKE HOLD OF ALL THE promises of God? What happens when we believe on God for salvation, but we do not believe Him when He says He is going to look after our food and drink and even our clothing? It is my observation that there are a number of things that happen.

*First of all, we become mastered by our circumstances instead of mastering our circumstances. The Bible promises us that we can rejoice in the midst of tribulation.* But, a person with little faith is not able to do this. Instead, the tribulation ends up dictating how he feels. He gives into circumstances instead of rising above the circumstances.

The first pastor I served under when I was starting out as a youth pastor would often exhort the people in the church by saying, "Look down on your circumstances, because you have been raised with Christ who is seated at the right hand

of God.” From that lofty perspective, look down on your circumstances, and you will not worry.

Occasionally, I will have a vision of being separated from my earthly body where my spirit is actually raised up to a certain height and I am looking down at the difficult situation. On such rare occasions, when I have had this vision, I find my spirit at total rest, totally unaffected by the difficulty I am facing. I sometimes wonder if that is how Steven felt when he was being stoned to death? “Little faith” prevents us from having that perspective, and it causes us to be controlled by our circumstances.

*Another characteristic of 'little faith' is that it has trouble thinking. One of the main thrusts of MATTHEW 6:25-34 is an appeal to think.* Look at the birds of the air. Consider the flowers of the field. Think about these things. There are lessons to be learned in all of life's experiences.

The Bible is an extremely logical book. The more we think about the teachings of the Bible, the more they begin to make sense and match everything we observe happening around us. We have to think about the Bible and we have to think about what we see, and we have to use our minds to see how the two match.

The kind of thinking I am talking about is not lying awake at night for hours reviewing the same miserable details about some terrible thing that happened or some conflict we are having with another person. That is not thinking. That is worrying. It is the absence of thought. We think when we try to understand how the miserable thing we are experiencing fits in with the truth of God's Word. We may never come up with all the answers, but there is an answer and we should think of what the answer might be. “Little faith” fails to think.

*Another characteristic of little faith is that it fails to take the Bible at face value.* We look at the miracles and teaching recorded in the Bible and say that it applied to them, but it does not apply to us. So we reject the possibility of people being healed or raised from the dead. We even reject the idea of lives changing in a miraculous way after being touched by God's grace. We read about the power of prayer and how the early church often met together for corporate prayer. **They prayed for Peter to be released from prison, and their prayers were answered.** But we say, “That was for the New Testament Church and not for us.” The fact that we fail to support corporate prayer is evidence that we don't take the Biblical stories at face value. If we did, then our church would not only have a parking problem on Sunday morning. We would also have a parking problem on Wednesday night.

*Yet another characteristic of 'little faith' is that it fails to realize the benefits of salvation. Salvation not only saves us from sin, it gives us special privileges.* I am talking about benefits such as the privilege of being able to talk to

God as Daddy or “Abba Father.” And, I am talking about the privilege we have to call upon God to anoint us with His Holy Spirit so we can witness in power. This is something that we can do daily, but too many Christians don't do it at all. Perhaps many are afraid of being labeled “Charismatic.” Perhaps others are afraid of what will happen if they do ask. Related to the privilege we have to boldly ask God to anoint us for service, is the privilege we have to ask God to fill us with His Spirit so we can love other people the way we should. There are many benefits that come along with salvation, but ‘little faith’ fails to realize these benefits.

These are a few things I have observed in my short lifetime that help me understand what Jesus meant when He said, “O you of little faith.”

*I hope what I share will challenge everyone being baptized today to go beyond the faith that has saved them.* Today is your time to celebrate the grace of God that has saved you through faith in Jesus Christ. But, today should only be the beginning. There is so much more that not enough people who are baptized these days ever experience, because “little faith” stops them.

Remember the story of Jesus calming the storm. It took place when Jesus was with His disciples in a boat when a sudden and violent storm came upon them. Jesus was at perfect rest. In fact, He was asleep in the back of the boat. Not so with the disciples. They feared for their lives. They were terrified at the possibility that their lives were about to end and there was nothing they could do about it. Remember what Jesus said after He calmed the storm? It is recorded in MATTHEW 8:26. He said, **You of little faith, why are you so afraid.** Jesus was not rebuking His disciples for their lack of ability to believe that a miracle was about to happen and their lives would be spared. He was rebuking them, because they were failing to realize that, even in the storm, their God who cares for them is in control. It is God, and not our circumstances, that determine when we are going to die.

May God grant to all of us—and especially those who are being baptized today—the ability to apply the truths of the Bible to our everyday lives. In two weeks, I hope to address the question of how to increase our faith, but for now we must know that it is possible and desire it with all of our heart. I urge everyone being baptized today to think of your baptism ceremony as the beginning of an exciting and abundant and meaningful life that you will experience as your faith increases.

My prayer for you is the prayer that was read during our scripture reading. *I pray also that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*