

# Weak Faith

a sermon in the series  
*Sermon on the Mount*

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by S. Michael Durham  
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## Matthew 6:25-34

*Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

I want you to focus on verses 30 and 33. "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Then 33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." The connection between these verses is astounding; they're joined by context but also by concept. Here is the connection: the kingdom of God operates by faith in God. The kingdom lives, breathes, and moves by faith. You're brought into the kingdom by faith and you live in the kingdom by faith.

The writer of Hebrews said it succinctly when he said "Without faith it is impossible to please God." The Apostle Paul said the same thing in different words when he said, "For whatever is not from faith is sin." The whole kingdom of God depends upon faith in God. That is the connection these two verses have.

Today I want to focus on verse thirty when Jesus said "O you of little faith." If the whole kingdom of God operates on faith, then "little faith" is quite dangerous. Little faith is not a luxury, it's a liability. I hope to prove to you this morning that you cannot afford to have little faith. It is the devil's business to convince you otherwise. He will say, "Great faith will cost you much more in the end. You don't want to go that route, it will be nothing but difficulty, you'll suffer for it, you'll

be miserable, it is a painful path to live by. It's a path of insecurity and instability, no, just believe God for your soul and that's enough." That is the devil's lie and unfortunately way too many Christians have believed it.

But what are we missing, what are we losing, what's the cost for believing God with little faith? Could it be possible that we have settled for much less, that if only we could see what we are missing we would refuse to live another day without it? That is my hope. May God grant it.

## I. Puny Faith

*Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

I want to first direct your attention to puny faith. When Jesus says, "O you of little faith," what does He mean? Some believe Jesus is using sarcasm to tell his disciples that they had no faith. "Little faith" means they were "faithless." Their argument is based upon Jesus' statement to nine of His disciples who asked Him why they could not cast a demon out of a boy. He answered, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

The problem with this argument is that Jesus does not accuse them of having little faith, but no faith. He says, "Because of your unbelief." You can't be any more sarcastic than that. In addition to Matthew 6:30 and Luke's repeating of this same statement, there are only three other times Jesus' accuses someone of this little faith. And in all three cases it is directed to one or all of His disciples. He says it to the disciples when they thought they would perish in a storm and woke Him up to save them. But here, though their faith was indeed small, they had enough faith to implore Jesus to save them, meaning they believed He could do something. They were not altogether absent of faith.

Another occasion for the use of the words, *little faith* is when they did not understand what Jesus meant when He said, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." In this case, the problem was not that they didn't have faith in Him; it's that they were not applying the faith they had to the situation.

The last use of these words is directed to Peter when he walked on the water. He began to doubt and sink, yet he had enough faith to call on the Lord to save Him, to which Jesus said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Again, the problem was not that Peter had no faith, for how could he have climbed out of the boat and walked on the water if he had no faith?

So, the interpretation that Jesus is really claiming His audience had no faith is wrong. "But what about the verse," you ask, "that says if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you could cast a mountain in the sea? It seems you can't get any smaller than that. So, if the disciples' faith was

smaller than a mustard seed they must have had no faith at all. Little faith must mean no faith.”

I answer saying that the amount of faith is not what Jesus is referring to here in our text, Matthew 6:30. Yes, faith that is quantitatively smaller than a mustard seed must be non-existent, no faith at all. That is why Jesus uses the metaphor of a mustard seed. The point is if it was any smaller you couldn't see it. For all practical purposes it would be non-existent. But I propose to you that in our text Jesus is not dealing with the amount of faith, but the quality of faith.

The word our Lord uses here for *little faith* is a Greek compound word comprised of two words. The first word can be defined as *little*, or *short*, as in time, or *puny*. It is not limited to quantity, but can be used to describe quality as well. The second word is of course, *faith*. Instead of thinking quantity, which is what the word *little* suggests, why not think quality, which the word *puny* would imply. In other words, the person has faith but something is wrong with his faith.

This must be the meaning of the word. Jesus' statement about faith the size of a mustard seed dogmatically determines that it's not the size of the faith that matters. Rather, what matters is this, whether or not your faith is real, it's pure, and genuine. If your faith is so small that you would compare it to a mustard seed, that is no problem. Size makes no difference at all. If it is genuine faith in God, it will move mountains, even if it is as tiny as a mustard seed.

There is no way that Jesus is referring to the size of faith. He would not contradict Himself. If size is not the deciding factor, but the genuineness of your faith, well then a little faith will be sufficient. It is not quantity but quality; it is not the size of your faith, but the state of your faith that matters.

Let me submit one more piece of evidence that this is the truth of the matter. In Luke 17:5 the same apostles asked the Lord, “Increase our faith.” They were thinking just the way we think—*If I had more faith, then I could be more faithful. I could believe God for more things and see more of His power. That's my problem—I don't have enough faith.*

Listen to how Jesus challenges such silly thinking, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” The disciples didn't need more faith, nor do you. What they needed is true of us; they needed their faith to be of a better quality. It was mixed with too much doubt and unbelief. There was too much faulty and unbiblical reasoning that had polluted their faith. My dear friends, this is our problem also.

Some of you may have problems with my conclusion because you correctly understand faith and doubt as completely opposites. But that does not mean that the two cannot coexist in the same person. They can, and that's the problem! There was something in the people that day that Jesus was speaking to, namely His Apostles, that was faulty and unbiblical. To every Christian God has given a measure of faith, you don't need any more faith, you need your faith to be purified. Isn't that what the Apostle Peter says, “the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire”? Why is gold put into the fire? To purify it. Puny faith

is polluted and that's the problem.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, acknowledges that the disciples have faith, but there is something wrong with it, because their faith cannot prevent them from worrying about material things. They must have had faith in order to be in the kingdom. They had to have faith to follow Jesus. They had to have faith to leave their businesses and families to follow this young, unconventional rabbi. And so do you, you must have faith to be in the kingdom following the King. Therefore, the problem is not faithlessness, but a faith that is somehow puny or weak.

Let me give you three characteristics of puny faith.

### **I. Faith that believes for salvation but for little else.**

Puny, weak, or little faith is a faith that can believe God for eternity but not for the here and now. How many of you would say that's your faith? *I believe God that when I die He's going to take me to heaven, and that Jesus is my Savior, but from day to day I wrestle with believing God for bare necessities. I have difficulty trusting God for things I need.* Well, that, my friend, is puny faith.

You can believe God in general, but when it comes to the specifics of your life you are challenged; you struggle to believe the promises of God are for you. Many of us are in that predicament today. We're faced with circumstances and need a promise from God that we can go to Him in prayer and believe God to keep His word to us, but we can't believe. You read the Bible but there is no movement of your soul towards God in prayer. You believe God for your soul and sin but can't believe Him in your situation.

Christians become mastered by their circumstances and situations rather than mastering their circumstances. You get up every morning; you may or may not have devotions. You get through the day and come here on a Wednesday night to hear how someone experienced the love of God, or you hear me say to you, "You need to be so sensitive so you can experience the love of God." And you long for that, but can't experience it. Why? Because your faith is puny. You don't need more faith you need your faith purified from doubt and suspicion. I wonder how many in my audience this morning is in this very predicament: You know God can do anything, you sing heartily "Oh what a mighty God we serve," but the least problem that comes along and like a leaf you're swept away with it, carried by the problem rather than taking the problem by the nap of the neck and saying "Here is what my God can do!"

We so often quote that verse, "He can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," the problem is we don't think so. Our faith can't even rise to dare think it much less believe it. This is the characteristic of a puny faith. Notice what Jesus says here in this text after He says, "O you of little faith," He says this is how the Gentiles live. They live without faith, not believing God for anything. Isn't sad that there is a possibility you can be saved yet live like a sinner when you do not walk by faith day by day? Sinners worry over the things of this world and cannot stop worrying, but the Christian can—Jesus tells us to stop it and the command implies the ability to

do it. Yet our faith is so weak that we often think we can't.

## **2. Faith that believes in Jesus but little assurance of His help.**

Let me give you a Biblical example of this in Mark 9:24. Remember the story I alluded to a few moments ago? Nine of the disciples were left at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. A father brings his demon-possessed son to the nine disciples asking them to cast out the devil. Well they tried and failed. Jesus came down off the mountain and the father went to Him with his boy pleading for Jesus to heal his son. Jesus says to the beleaguered dad, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Note what the man replies, "Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.'" What an amazing acknowledgment. Faith and doubt existed at the same time. Jesus said He would heal the boy if the father had faith, which he must have had since Jesus healed his son. The man must have had some faith. But after Jesus' nine disciples tried and failed, the man's faith had been challenged, stretched, and weakened, so he simply confesses, *I do believe. I know You can do this, but for some reason I have this lingering doubt and lack of assurance that You will.*" That is an example of small faith.

What is great faith? The very opposite. It is a faith that is full of assurance, that doesn't doubt or waver, it is certain about what it has asked of God. The Bible tells "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Well, if you can have full assurance of faith it must mean you can have faith that is not accompanied with full assurance but little assurance. This is "little faith."

We often say it this way, "I know God can do it, but I'm not for sure He will." That's puny faith. If that's your faith no wonder you worry and are anxious. Your faith is not able to address the subject of "Will He?"

## **3. Faith that will not persevere.**

You trust for a little while but when God delays the answer, your faith begins to wilt. Let me give you another example of this in the scriptures in Matthew 15. Peter was walking on the water and began to sink, what does Jesus say to Him when He grabs him and pulls him out of the water? "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Let me paraphrase it this verse this way, "O you of brief faith, why did you let your faith give way to doubt?"

We cannot get around the fact that Peter got out of the boat. I've yet to drive past Kentucky Lake at any point and see somebody walking on the lake. These men had never witnessed someone walking on the water until Jesus approached. Peter is so mesmerized by this that he says, "Lord, if this is You, command me to come to You on the water;" Jesus said, "Come," and Peter climbs over the side of the boat.

"Preposterous, nobody can do that!"

But something was happening to Peter that you can't explain except by faith. He'd heard the

directive of God and it put faith in his heart, the gift had been implanted in his soul, and he leaps over the edge of the boat and begins to walk. I don't know how long he walked but I imagine it was a good distance, but not far enough. He began to look around and see the waves and wind and became afraid and therefore he sank. Jesus' words are right, he had faith but it was brief.

Why did Peter's faith give way to doubt? Why didn't it persevere? Remember the word *little* can be translated *short, brief*, "O you of brief faith." When a need arises and we find a promise of Scripture and take it to God in prayer, and say, "Here is Your promise." You are fully confident God is going to do something. You bring your petition to Him and you believe it's going to happen. But a week goes by and nothing happened, followed by another week, followed by a month, followed by six months and now you don't even bring it up anymore. You don't ask and you don't pray. Why? You don't want to be confronted by your weak faith. It's much easier to quit praying about it and say it must not have been God's will rather than continue to take God at His word and believe Him.

That is hard to say but it's the truth. I can testify of too many of those prayers. Just like Peter, I walked a little while in faith but did not persevere. The first few moments in heaven are going to be awesome. Joy will explode our hearts like nothing we have previously experienced. But soon thereafter there is going to be an awful awareness of how little our faith was, how puny it was, and how we settled to live so far beneath what God had promised us. Would you say your life is the fulfillment of life more abundant? Would you say that characterizes you? I didn't ask if you were saved, I asked if you were experiencing the abundant life. God does not offer life, but *abundant* life. He doesn't just give forgiveness but life at its best. Sweet communion with God is seeing Him provide according to His promises.

Well, those are the characteristics of puny faith, but it's not good to tell you the problem without the answer. So let me direct your attention to the recovery of weak faith.

## **II. The Recovery of Faith**

### **I. If our faith is to grow in quality, we need to experience afresh the love of God.**

That is most definitely the greatest need for the recovery of our faith. If your faith is often plagued by a lack of assurance of even the promises from God's Word, you need to be reacquainted with the love of the Father who loves you more than you love your own life. Why does Jesus ask you to lose your life in the first place? So you can replace your life with a life that is fueled by the love of God. That is what Paul is praying for the Ephesians, that they would have their eyes open and would experience the height, depth, and breadth of God's love in Christ so they can be full of God Himself. That's what revival is—faith renewed by the love of God. But, there is a conjunction here, the disciples were continually experiencing Christ's love for them yet they still had weak faith, therefore it is more than just experiencing the love of God.

## **2. If your faith is to recover and be strong you need correct reasoning.**

That doesn't sound very spiritual but it is. If you remember the message from two weeks ago titled "Reasons to Not Worry", I outlined nine logical and rational reasons Jesus gave us why we should not worry. We saw that if you didn't trust God, but were full of worry, it was very irrational and insensible. Jesus was assaulting weak and polluted faith with logical arguments. His logic requires thought from the heart and mind.

But dare try to do that today and you will bring your church down to a manageable size. If you suggest to your church that they should think, they will check out immediately and leave you. I'm thankful that is not the case here, but even here we must develop the discipline of critical thinking. If your faith is to be strong you must learn how to think according to the Word of God. You've got to do some hard, rational thinking.

I want to go through some of these verses again. Watch Jesus argue and teach logic to these people. This demonstrates how faith requires logic and deep thinking. Verse 25,

*"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"*

This is an example of logic, taking the greater and reducing it to the lesser. If the greater truth is true, then the lesser truth must also be true. If life is more important than what you eat or drink or wear and God has preserved and purchased your life, will He not also take care of the lesser? Of course He will, see how logical that is?

Look at verse 26,

*"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them."*

Notice He says your heavenly Father. He wants them to think of God as their Father and they His children. Will not our Father provide for you, His child, if He provides for birds? Here Jesus' uses another argument of logic where you take the lesser and work to the greater. If God will take care of the inconsequential things of this world, like small birds, why won't your Father feed you also? It's quite logical. Jesus is provoking thought.

Verse 27,

*"Which of you could add a cubit to his stature?"*

Who can add one step to your life by worrying? If anything, worrying will cut your life shorter. It's rational thinking.

Verse twenty eight,

*“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I say to you that even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”*

Again, the lesser argument proves the greater. If God will take care of and create these beautiful flowers, why won't He clothe you, O you of little faith? He's arguing logical arguments trying to get their minds engaged to think Biblically and I'm telling you that's exactly what you need to do if you want to have great faith.

Some of you may have misunderstood my mysticism, my belief in the supernatural, and that God still speaks to men today. I don't apologize for that; I think it's one of the great needs of the reformed movement today. We believe the great doctrine of God but we need to believe God Himself. He speaks to us, He guides us according to His promises but as much as I believe that, your faith must be tied to sound reasoning and thinking about the truth of the Bible. Faith is not a leap into the dark of mysticism or feelings; faith is a leap into the light of God's revelation. Yet, so many today describe faith as some blind leap into the dark—you *don't need to understand it, just trust and take that leap*. That is so far from the truth of Scripture!

When Jesus saved you He did not expect you to believe upon Him without truth and facts. He presented you with facts one by one. Here is what you are—a sinner lost without God. Fact two, you can't do anything to change that. You can go to church, you can be good, you can change your ways, you can give money, you can pray, you can join churches, but that will not save you. You are a sinner by nature not just by actions; therefore there is nothing you can do to change your nature. Can the Ethiopian change the color of His skin or can a leper remove his spots?" No, and neither can you. The third fact is that Jesus Christ as God came into this world, born of a virgin, did miracles, preached the Gospel, and then He died as the Gospel on the cross on your behalf, in your place. He died for you, taking upon Himself the guilt and penalty of your sins and suffered the wrath of God for you. But three days later, according to the Scriptures that had foretold all of this, He rose again from the dead and eyewitnesses saw and touched Him. According to the Apostle Paul 500 eyewitnesses say Him at one time. These are irrefutable facts.

There are things He won't always tell us, things we will not know, but your faith is never based upon nothingness. Faith is tied to critical thinking and reasoning. Your faith, to be healthy, requires truth to be chosen over error. So here is how you can stop worry—by recovering your faith by taking the truth and thinking about it. I would like for you to start believing it, but I know you have to think about it before belief comes. And while reasoning through Scriptures and the promises of God something is happening to you unbeknown to you know, God is purifying and strengthening your faith.

What are you missing by believing God with little faith? What is it costing you to not believe God with pure, unadulterated faith? I'm not asking if you're displeased with Jesus, no Christian would say that, but are you altogether happy and satisfied with how your faith experiences God day



by day? When is the last time God answered a specific prayer? I tell you, it is more costly to not believe God than it is to try to live with little faith. The devil may try to argue otherwise but your own misery testifies against it. What are we losing by protecting, excusing, and justifying our weak faith? How much of my life is being ruined by anxiousness and worry when I could be resting in the Father's love? Here is the lie, I leave you with it: You can be saved and get to heaven, just the way you are with your weak, puny faith and that's all that matters.

It is true you can be saved and know Christ as Lord, but that is not all that matters. We need a faith that believes God for this present moment and experiences God's greatness. What is God trying to do in your life that you refuse because you are afraid? Go to God and say *whatever it takes that I might put my trust in you all the time for all things what ever You will*. You talk about revolutionizing a church—that will change this city! And I think God has no less purpose than that. Why did He leave us as aliens in this place? Just to wander? No, we are to impact others on our journey to heaven. That they too might know what a mighty God we serve. Do they know how mighty He is as they watch you? What is it costing you to not have great faith? Amen.