

Title: O You of Little Faith Date: 11/16/08 Key verses: Matt 6:25-34; 14:22-23; 8:23-27

1. Introduction

Before I give my message, I would like to share a little story that I heard from one of my bosses at work a few weeks ago. The Vice Principal of my school went camping with his family. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate and it was rather stormy. The wind was blowing and his little girl, who happens to be one of my students, woke him up saying, "Daddy, I can't sleep. I'm afraid the tent is going to blow into the lake."

He just laughed and told his daughter, "Honey, I'm pretty big and heavy. This tent isn't going to go anywhere while I'm in it."

His daughter simply said, "Oh," and quickly fell asleep.

There's something about that child-like faith that makes us smile and feel all warm inside. But, I think most of us, as much as we don't like to admit it, deep inside pity the girl for the moment when that child-like faith will give way to doubt. Somehow through the years, we become cynical, skeptical.

Today's message is probably going to be like hearing a voice through a broken speaker system. I am not giving this message because I have got everything together in my life, but rather because, I, like you, am human and need to hear this message again and again.

My message is about combating doubt.

As I was reading through Matthew, I realized that many times in Matthew (not so much the other Gospels), Jesus says, "O you of little faith."

I would like to focus on three of those instances today, look at what characteristic of God was in doubt, and look at how we, as believers in God, can combat that doubt by remembering and reciting the promises and characteristics of God.

II. Let's look at the first of the three.

MATTHEW 6:25-30

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Many of you have heard this story several times, and I am sure one could preach an entire sermon on this section of verses alone, but instead I would like to look at the heart of the doubt that Jesus is addressing here. When he talks about our food, water, clothing, and our toil to acquire these things, he is not telling us to be lazy and not to work to meet our basic needs. That is a reality of living in this world and it is part of the curse that God laid on Adam in Genesis:

GENESIS 3:19

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Jesus is not advocating laziness. I believe that Jesus is speaking to a deeper issue, a doubt, that plagues

mankind. Doubt of God's **PROVISION**. This doubt creeps in subtly and is disguised very well in our society, but to give a better picture of the issue that I think Jesus is addressing, I will talk about something I learned in university.

In university, I studied Anthropology. One topic we discussed was the process of a civilization moving from nomad to subsistence farming to surplus farming to industrial to developed industrial civilizations. The nomads and subsistence farmers often have very animistic religions- superstitions about God or gods that provide good weather or a bountiful crop. In these cultures, deep theology is not usually developed, but very few people in those societies doubt the existence of a God of some sort, and they often seek God as a provider. Once cultures move to surplus farming, you begin to see the storing away of food into barns. This gives people some "cushion" room. If God doesn't provide well one year, they can fall back on their own resources of stored food. Perhaps many of you can see the dangerous slope we have started on. Surplus gives time for man to industrialize and develop other skills and arts. It also gives man time to think about the human condition and his relationship with God and sometimes you see deeper theology being developed at this stage, but the need to eat and clothe oneself is still present, so most often, to have more time to devote to these other skills and arts, man tries to develop new and better ways to provide food and clothing for himself (which means more industry and commerce) and man starts to move farther and farther away from that once close relationship with God and his trust in God as a Provider. Strangely enough, in Anthropology class, this is seen as "progress". I was the only one in Anthropology class who found this appalling. What Jesus is telling us is that this is not progress at all. Sure, we need to work to put food on the table and clothes on our backs, but when we hoard money, pursue more money, food, or more clothing than we need because we fear being in need of food or clothing, or we let that pursuit lure us away from our understanding of our dependence on God, we have lost sight of what really matters in life- which is, life itself- in relationship with God. We can see examples of this severed relationship all around us in Japan, in the US, and many other countries. People have so much food that they don't realize that only God can really isolate them from hunger. People living in massive houses with heating and cooling systems are so separated from nature and the rhythm of the seasons that they don't realize that God is our Protection. Often times, I think the biggest shock people face in natural disasters when they lose their house is the realization that their own efforts cannot separate them completely from the workings of nature- when our stock piles fail, when the stock markets drop, when our house is gone, when our "cushion" is gone, we despair! How are we supposed to provide food for our families? How are we going to live?

How do we combat this doubt? What promise can we remember or recite? Matthew tells us in the next few verses:

MATTHEW 6:31-34

" So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So, first, we need to repent. Then we need to remember that God, as Provider, is going to take care of us. Chase the Provider and you will get the provision. Chase the provision and you will get nothing but strife and grief and doubt.

III. The next instance I would like to look at is Matthew 14:22-33

MATTHEW 14:22-33

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’

‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’

‘Come,’ he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’

So, my question to you is what did Peter doubt about Jesus?

The key is to look at verses 27 and 28.

Jesus spoke to the disciples to let them know that He wasn’t a ghost or a figment of their imagination. Peter called out to double check that it really was Jesus. I believe, the desire to double-check whether it was his Master or not coupled with a desire to do or experience as much as possible the same things that Jesus experienced made Peter ask Jesus to call him out of the boat and onto the water.

However, a few steps out, Peter began to notice the wind and got scared.

“Would Jesus really call me out of the safe boat onto this stormy lake? Perhaps I did not hear my Master’s voice at all? Man cannot walk on water. Perhaps he lured me out here to have me sink.”

Perhaps it was self-doubt, the realization that man cannot walk on water alone. I think it is more likely that Peter doubted God’s voice. God’s calling for him to get out of the boat to walk in his footsteps.

Many of us here in our daily walks doubt that God would ask us to “step out of the boat” and do something difficult or dangerous for the Gospel. We start out convinced that God has called us to a ministry, we desire to experience what Jesus experienced, only to find ourselves a few steps away from where we started, sinking, and calling out, ‘Lord, save me! I must have been wrong to get out of the boat!’ But Jesus says, ‘You of little faith. Why did you doubt?’ Jesus isn’t going to call us out of the boat to have us sink. Jesus does not call us into a ministry just to have us fail.

The best way to combat this kind of doubt is to know God’s voice and character.

John 10:2 says:

“The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him

because they know his voice.”

When we hear Jesus’ voice, we can be sure that he is not only leading us out, but also going ahead of us. He is not going to abandon us. We can be sure that he is not going to lead us to something only to have us fail.

IV. This leads me to the last instance I want to look at in Matthew 8:23-27

MATTHEW 8:23-27

“Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’

He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!’”

This is the shortest of our three passages, but I really do love this one the best of all because it really makes me laugh at how weak our faith and how narrow our focus can become sometimes. The Sea of Galilee is frequently hit by sudden violent storms. In this passage, one happened to hit the little boat as they were crossing the lake, and Jesus happened to be sleeping. Some of you may be thinking that Jesus must have been really tired to have slept through wave after wave hitting the boat, but my picture of this is much more like the little girl who slept soundly believing that her Dad would keep the tent from blowing into the lake.

The disciples, in their fear, cried out, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

The contradiction in their own words is likely what prompted Jesus to say, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”

If you really believe that I am Lord, do you think this boat is going to sink with me in it?

If you really believe that I am Lord, do you think I would let you drown?

In this case, they were doubting not only Jesus’ power, but his Person, who He really is!

The disciples, if they really knew who Jesus was, would have known that the boat would not sink if Jesus was in it.

We, too, should find some reassurance in this section. God says in Deuteronomy 31:6

DEUTERONOMY 31:6

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God is with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

We should be like the little girl in the tent, assured that God is going to keep us from blowing into the lake during the sudden storms in our lives.

V. Conclusion

The thing about faith is not that our lives are going to be free from storms. It is knowing who is there with us in those storms. It is not about our ability to endure storms or walk on water, but it is about God’s power, God’s character of love and protection, God’s provision, God’s voice calling us to follow him, to look to him. Doubt happens when we take our eyes off of our Provider and onto our need, when we

take our eyes off of God's power and look at our weakness, and when we take our eyes off the purposes and plans of God and look instead at our circumstances.

God's not up in heaven wringing his hands, worried about what to do next. He has a plan. We can trust in His plan to be the best. I hope that you will take time to memorize God's promises and that you will recall these promises in times of doubt or remind your brothers and sisters who may be struggling. **Let's pray.**

I would like to share a song that I found by Bebo Norman called "I Will Lift My Eyes"
(played by Kami on guitar)

God, my God, I cry out.

Your beloved needs you now.

God, be near, calm my fear

And take my doubt

Your kindness is what pulls me up

Your love is all that draws me in

I will lift my eyes to the Maker
of the mountains I can't climb

I will lift my eyes to the Calmer
of the oceans raging wild

I will lift my eyes to the Healer
of the hurt I hold inside

I will lift my eyes, lift my eyes to You

God, my God, let Mercy sing

Her melody over me

God, right here, all I bring

is all of me

Your kindness is what pulls me up

Your love is all that draws me in

I will lift my eyes to the Maker
of the mountains I can't climb

I will lift my eyes to the Calmer
of the oceans raging wild

I will lift my eyes to the Healer
of the hurt I hold inside

I will lift my eyes, lift my eyes to You

'Cause you are and you were and you will be forever

The Lover I need to save me

'Cause you fashioned the earth and you hold it together, God
So hold me now