

“KINGDOM CONSTITUTION” – Lessons in the Sermon on the Mount 6.25.17

“The Angst of Anxiety pt. 2–Increase Your Faith!” Matt. 6:30-32 Craig Crawshaw

Matthew 6:30-32 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying “What will we eat?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

INTRODUCTION

“You of little faith!” said Jesus to His audience – words that certainly stand out to me in this passage. I don’t want that said of me, do you? And this will be our focus of the day, as we embark on the second of three messages on “The Angst of Anxiety.” Today: “Increase Our Faith!” Let’s see how we are to increase our faith and get off the “You of little faith!” list.

First, let’s be sure we understand the context of this comment. Jesus is speaking to believers – His kingdom citizens, giving the “Kingdom Constitution” address we commonly call the Sermon on the Mount. So He is not speaking about lack of faith for salvation. They have “little faith” or weak faith. They have enough faith to believe Jesus for salvation, but not enough faith to keep themselves from worrying about daily provision.

In 6:56 He says “do not be worried about your life ...” In 6:28 He says “and why are you worried?” In 6:31 He repeats “Do not worry, then ...” And the last verse of the chapter concludes: “So do not worry ...” The context is clearly about our anxious worry over the daily provision of food, clothing and all the other stuff of life. And this anxiety betrays a “little” or weak faith.

Last week we noted that worry robs us of the joy of the moment, of growing in the Lord and of exercising trust in God. Worry breeds impatience and is the enemy of resting fully in God, for it causes us to try to fix it on our own. Therefore we conclude that worry, or anxiety, is sin and must be repented of and removed from our “go to” way of dealing with problems.

So let’s get to it. How are we to rid ourselves of worry? Just determining not to worry doesn’t work. We must replace worry with trust. So let’s survey the New Testament on teaching about “great faith” and “weak faith” and see what we can learn about growing the spiritual “muscle” of trust.

A SCRIPTURAL JOURNEY

1. Matthew 8:10 we find the Gentile centurion wanting Jesus to heal his servant and believing He will. This centurion says He understands the principle of Lordship because he is leader over 100 men who follow his every command. And he knows and believes Jesus is Lord over circumstance in the same way, so can command anything He wants to happen. In response to this Jesus says: *“Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.”*

This Gentile showed greater faith in Jesus’ Lordship than any Jew Jesus had met. And so we learn an important lesson about “greater faith.” There is no room for worry when Jesus is truly Lord of all in my life. “Little faith” comes from “little Lordship” of Jesus. Increased faith comes from an increased belief in Jesus’ Lordship over all my circumstances. Lord, increase my faith in your Lordship!

2. Matthew 8:26 / Matthew 14:31 In 8:26 the disciples and Jesus are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and a great storm comes up. Disciples: *“Save us Lord, we are perishing!”* Jesus: *“Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?”* In 14:31 the situation is similar. The disciples are again in a boat on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and this time Peter walks out to Jesus who is coming to them on the water. Peter becomes frightened, taking his eyes off Jesus, and as he begins to sink says: *“Lord, save me!”* Jesus’ response: *“You of little faith, why do you doubt?”*

In both these accounts we again hear Jesus speak of “little faith” as He did in His Sermon on the Mount. The disciple’s “little faith” is their inability to believe that they are in the loving protection of Jesus, even when the storm rages around them. They should know better – and so should we. So we learn again that increased faith comes from an increased belief in Jesus’ Lordship over circumstance. I am safe in Him, even though a storm rages. Trust trumps worry.

3. Matthew 16:8 Jesus had just recently miraculously fed 5,000 Jews and then soon after fed 4,000 Gentiles, both crowds with just a few loaves and fishes. Now the disciples find themselves hungry and without food on them, yet they are in the presence of Jesus, the miracle provider. Jesus hears them worrying about their hunger and says those words again: ***“You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?”***

The irony is obvious. The disciples had just been witnesses of two miracles of feeding multitudes at the hand of Jesus and here they are complaining in His presence about being hungry. Does this not speak to us about our worry in the midst of Jesus having provided for us time and time again? Jesus wants me to so trust His loving provision and Lordship, that I will not be anxious about my circumstance.

4. Matthew 17:20 Jesus here is coming down from the glorious Mount of Transfiguration and He finds his disciples unable to cast out a demon. The disciples ask: ***“Why could we not drive it out?”*** And Jesus responds: ***“Because of the littleness of your faith.”*** We hear again of “little faith.” Jesus goes on to say: ***“For truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”***

Me move mountains? Well, that’s undoubtedly not God’s will for me. But He wants me to move mountains of doubt, and mountainous obstacles to my growing closer to Him. And how much faith does He say that will take? Lots? – no, just faith the size of a teeny mustard seed. My “little faith” needs only grow to “mustard seed” proportions. That gives me hope to conquer anxiety.

5. Luke 17:3-6,10 This is a particularly helpful passage on our understanding of how to replace worry with trust. Here Jesus is teaching how we must be forgiving time and time again of an offending individual – even up to 7 times in a day! The disciple’s response: ***“Lord, increase our faith!”*** Yes, Lord, this is what we seek – to increase our faith from “little faith” to “mustard seed” faith.

Jesus concludes his response with v. 10: ***“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”*** Yes, it is difficult to truly forgive as Jesus has commanded. Obedience to God’s Word is challenging. Yet it is always ***“that which we ought to have done.”*** It is always the right thing to do. Obeying God is “mustard seed” faith. And when we faithfully obey Him as willing “slaves” of righteousness, our faith grows and anxiety diminishes. Trust and OBEY. (For there’s no other way)

So in search of “how to increase my faith” and “stop worrying” we have found

(1) Trust in the LORDSHIP of Jesus in all circumstances and

(2) OBEY his commands as loving slave-disciples.

And there is (at least) one more key ingredient.

6. Acts 16:5 We read this progress report: ***“So the churches were being strengthened in the faith ...”*** So how was this faith-growing happening? It was happening by the strong Biblical preaching and teaching of the missionary apostles. Everywhere Paul and the others went, they faithfully preached the gospel truth as taught to them by Jesus Himself. In Acts 15:32, for instance, we read that ***“Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.”*** And in 15:40-41 we read that Paul, along with Silas, ***“was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”*** And we know he did this by teaching God’s Word to them. Throughout the book of Acts is teaching in the public square, teaching in the synagogues and teaching in homes that built church after church and strengthened the faith of disciple after disciple until the world was “turned upside down” for Christ.

Would we characterize that early church as “worried” or “anxious” in the midst of persecution and opposition? No! Rather the Church was “**spreading**” (Acts 6:7), enjoying “*peace, being built up and going on in the fear of the Lord*” (Acts 6:31), “*the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied*” (Acts 12:24), and “*the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing*” (Acts 19:20). THE WORD OF THE LORD was causing faith to grow.

7. Romans 10:17 Nowhere is this connection between increased faith and the word of God more clearly expressed than in this conclusion from Paul: “***So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.***” Bottom line, hearing, reading and studying God’s Holy Word is the “fast track” to increasing faith and leaving “little faith” and worry behind.

SUMMARY: INCREASING FAITH

1. TRUST in the LORDSHIP of Jesus in all circumstances
2. OBEY His commands faithfully and fully
3. Hear and heed the WORD OF GOD as your constant guide

A guaranteed result: the **ANGST OF ANXIETY** and “little faith” will be history

A FINAL CONSIDERATION: The Testing of Faith

Another guaranteed result of following the three above-mentioned steps to increasing faith is that your faith will be tested! Satan, the sworn enemy of God and His children, will surely test it, determined to squelch that growing faith; and God will ALLOW IT – knowing that your victory in the testing will grow your faith even more.

James 1:2-3 *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

1 Peter 1:6-7 ... Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.

As my faith in the Lordship of Christ wins those battles of temptation and overcomes the worry of trials with trust, I find that my faith grows by leaps and bounds – overcoming whatever problem or trial the world would throw at me. “**Victory is mine**” becomes reality, and not just hope. I am no longer a disciple of “little faith” becoming anxious at every turn, but I am a kingdom disciple exemplifying LORDSHIP, OBEDIENCE and reliance on the WORD.

I will not worry as I grow my faith.