

“O You of Little Faith”

For the last several articles I have been placing before us the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-24. I’ve shown us from this passage that the cause of our anxiety is misplaced trust. We’ve looked at:

- contrasting treasures: What do we value most dearly, earthly or heavenly treasures?
- contrasting vision: A healthy versus an unhealthy “eye” illustrates those who have a single-minded devotion to Christ and his word versus those who do not.
- contrasting masters: No one has the power to serve as a slave to two masters.

Whether or not we store up “earthly treasures or heavenly treasures” and whether we have “healthy or diseased vision” will be controlled by the truth of who we trust and serve as master.

We’ve seen the cause of our anxiety. Today I want to begin, from this text, to look at the cure for our anxiety. This will take us to verses 25-34 of Matthew 6. To introduce this next section I want us to take a brief look at an event in the life of Peter that touches on our passage in Matthew 6. All four gospel writers record the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. After this miracle, three of the gospel writers—excluding Luke—tell us of an event that happened during a terrible storm at sea and yet, only Matthew, records an interesting aspect of the event connected to Peter (Matt. 14:22ff.). Just prior to Jesus going alone up on the mountain to pray, he asked the disciples to go on ahead of him across the Sea of Galilee. John records that, “the sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.” Sometime between 3 and 6 a.m. Jesus came to the disciples walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him, initially, they were terrified thinking that they were seeing a ghost. “But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, ‘Take heart....don’t be afraid.’”

At this point in the narrative Peter calls out to Jesus saying, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus said, “Come.” Now you have to picture this scene in your mind. There’s a great storm. The water is rough—likely as rough as any of these experienced fishermen have ever seen. The boat is being tossed around. At the Lord’s bidding, Peter steps out of the boat and actually walks on the water! But notice what happens next: Instead of keeping his eyes on Jesus, Peter becomes increasingly aware of the violent wind swirling round him to the point of becoming distracted. It’s at this time that he begins to sink. As the Lord reaches out and takes Peter by the hand he says these provocative words, “O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?”

Now this phrase, “O you of little faith,” is very instructive for us. This exact Greek phrase is used, almost exclusively, by Matthew in the gospels, the only exception being Luke 12:28 which is the parallel passage to our text in Matthew 6. Each time Jesus uses this phrase he speaks of those who fail to fully trust in him (or God the Father) in time of need. This phrase is at the heart of our passage in Matthew 6:25-34. This points us to exactly what I’ve been saying. The cause of our anxiety is our failure to keep our faith fully in Jesus as the priority of our lives. Like Peter, when difficult things happen in our lives, we often take our eyes off of Jesus. If, then,

the cause of our anxiety is misplaced trust, the cure for our anxiety is found in fully trusting our Master and Father, and we'll see this as we go through these next verses. Let's look briefly at verse 25:

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life....” This phrase, “do not be anxious,” is a foundational command in this passage. The rest of the verses in this section teach us why we're commanded not to be anxious. The command is in the present tense which alerts us to the fact that this command is instructive for us throughout our lives. Jesus is saying in effect, “In all the situations that come into your life; in all the times that the storms of life swirl around you; I command you, do not be anxious.” In my next article we'll begin to look at how God has provided for us in such amazing ways that we really don't have to live our lives in patterns of unhealthy fear and anxiety.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.