

“Little Faith”
Mark 4:35-41
(Preached at Trinity, July 28, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time we focused on Mark’s account of the terrible storm that arose as Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. The story is told in all three of what we call the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
2. There arose a severe storm – In the Mark and Luke account the word *λαῖλαψ* is used – it describes a whirlwind such as a tornado or a hurricane – It was a powerful storm. Mark further describes it as “fierce” which is from a word that means “great” The disciples truly thought they were in great danger of losing their lives.
3. Meanwhile, Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat. He was sleeping soundly even as the little boat tossed violently in the stormy seas.
4. In desperation the disciples shake Jesus awake and exclaimed, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"
5. Jesus rises up and rebukes the storm and suddenly they are sitting on glassy smooth seas and absolute silence. Then He turned to the astonished disciples and spoke these cutting words:
Mark 4:40 - "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"
6. His words are described slightly differently in the three accounts:
Matthew 8:26 – “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?”
Luke 8:25 – “And He said to them, "Where is your faith?"
7. We find here the reality of our faith. There are times that we demonstrate great faith. There are times when we have great boldness and confidence before God. There are other times, however, when our faith is small. We are overcome with doubts, worries, and fears.
This has been the testimony of all of God’s people.
10. Jesus often rebuked His disciples for their weak faith.
Matthew 6:28-30 – “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?”
Matthew 14:28-31 – “And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. ²⁹ And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. ³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”
11. Tonight I want to spend a few minutes talking to you about your faith.

- I. First, we need to understand that even the greatest of saints may sometimes be disquieted
- A. The Bible gives us many examples of righteous men falling into spiritual unrest
1. As with every believer, although David possessed an inward peace and rest of soul, there were times when his peace was interrupted
NASB **Psalm 42:11** – “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?”
 2. Job was a man described by God as being righteous yet he became weary
NASB **Job 10:1** - "I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”
 3. Elijah the prophet became discouraged as Jezebel sought his life
1 Kings 19:4 – “But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers.”
- B. Saving faith can still be a weak faith
1. We can possess a trust in Christ. We can have an absolute confidence in His redeeming sacrifice. We can have assurance in our knowledge of Him and find great comfort in our soul.
 2. We can have this comfort and see the evidence of Divine grace in our lives and still have times when our faith is quite weak.
 3. Saving faith can start off quite small. In fact this is the norm. New born babies are frail and weak. It takes time to grow to maturity.
Thomas Watson - “True faith is at first nothing but an embryo, it is minute and small; it is full of doubts, temptations, fears; it begins in weakness. It is like the smoking flax, Matt. 12:20. It smokes with desires, but does not flame with comfort; it is at first so small, that it is scarce discernible. They who, at the first dash have a strong persuasion that Christ is theirs, who leap out of sin into assurance, have a false and spurious faith. The faith which comes to its full stature on its birth-day is a monster. The seed that sprung up suddenly withered, Matt. 13:5.”
 4. Charles Bridge – “Oh, what a mighty deep of discouragements may the saints and people of God fall into, and yet be godly and gracious.”

What are some of the causes of these times of discouragement when our faith fails us?

- II. The first cause of discouragement when our faith fails us is
- A negative outlook** – the tendency to always look for the worst
- A. Notice how easily Jacob believed an evil report
1. Jacob at the thought of meeting Esau
Genesis 32:6-8 – “The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." ⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."
 - a. The truth is Esau had long since forgiven Jacob
 - b. Jacob just naturally assumed the worst

2. When Jacob was shown Joseph's bloody coat he readily believed that Joseph was dead.

Genesis 37:31-33 – “So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; ³² and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine *it* to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." ³³ Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!"

- a. Jacob had no doubt about it, and yet it wasn't true
- b. Even when told that Joseph was alive Jacob found it hard to believe – It was too good to be true. It is easier to believe the negative.
- c. Jacob's heart sank further into unbelief. Nothing causes the heart to faint more than unbelief
Spurgeon – “Faith makes our spirits revive, but unbelief seems to strike us dead.”

3. The disciples thought the worst – “We're going to die!”

B. We are quick to believe the bad

1. If others are being laid off we are certain we will be next
2. If we have a pain in our body we are certain it is a dreadful disease
3. Your husband is late coming home from work and you immediately picture a terrible car wreck
4. Matthew Henry – “Weak and tender spirits are influenced more by fear than hope, and are more apt to receive impressions that are discouraging than those that are encouraging.”

C. Faith brings us to see all things as good

1. Faith brings us to say, “Thy will be done”
2. Faith brings us to say, “Bless God for His good pleasure.”
Job 1:21 – “And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”
3. Faith brings us to trust God even in the midst of the evil report

II. The second cause of discouragement when our faith fails us is

Looking to the outward evidence as our source of confidence

A. Jesus was with them but it was not sufficient for them

1. All they could see was the storm
They heard the wind and saw the waves and concluded they would die
2. They thought Jesus needed to be awake and actively involved. They didn't realize He WAS involved.

B. We often do not believe unless we see

1. We want to see the results of the tests the doctor ordered
2. We don't want to believe our church will grow until we actually see the new members.
3. But the nature of faith is believing even before we see the evidence
Hebrews 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”

John 20:29 – “Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

- B. Faith often means trusting God when there is no evidence.
1. We trusted in Christ for our salvation based upon the testimony of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit in our hearts.
 - a. Based upon this we believed
 - b. You know these things to be true because God has confirmed them in your heart
 2. In like manner we know we can trust God in life because His testimony is true and He proves Himself faithful
 - a. The patriarchs believed the promise of God even while they were far off.
Hebrews 11:13 – “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”
 - b. This is the nature of faith – believing God because He is faithful
 3. Life is full of trials and uncertainties
 - a. We have no guarantee that we will not suffer loss
 Christians lose their homes in storms
 Christians have car wrecks
 Christians suffer from diseases of the body
 Christians lose loved ones
 - b. Christians can always trust in God’s protection and deliverance
Psalms 34:4 – “I sought the LORD, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears.”
Lamentations 3:22-26 – “The LORD’S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I have hope in Him.” ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that he waits silently For the salvation of the LORD.”
- C. A weak faith can lay hold on a strong Christ
Hebrews 11:34 – “from weakness were made strong,”
2 Corinthians 12:10 – “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”
1. Even a weak faith can hold onto the promises of God
 2. The promises of God are not made to those with strong faith but to those with a true faith
 Thomas Watson – “The promise does not say, he who has a giant faith, who can believe God’s love through a frown, who can rejoice in affliction, who can work wonders, remove mountains, stop the mouth of lions, shall be saved, but whosoever believes, be his faith ever so small.”

Conclusion:

1. God's desire is that your faith grow strong – that you trust Him. This provides a powerful testimony to those who are lost. It brings glory to God.
2. This requires that you trust not in what you see but in what you don't see. It means having a confidence in our great God who is working all things for His good pleasure. It means having a confidence in His love for you and a confidence that He is only working for your good.
3. Be not discouraged if your faith is weak.
 1. Christ is faithful to strengthen the weak sheep.
Matthew 12:20 – “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.”
 2. The church is to be patient with those with weak faith
Romans 14:1 – “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations”
 3. But pray that you might have a strong faith.
Mark 9:24 – “And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”
4. To the sinner struggling with sin. It doesn't take a strong faith. You have doubts, fears. You lack in confidence. Christ receives those with weak faith. He turns away those with no faith.
5. Even a small faith is powerful if it perseveres
 - a. A mustard seed begins small but over time becomes large
See **Mark 4:30-32**
 - b. Jesus told His disciples that their faith must be like this mustard seed. It must persevere, continue and grow
Matthew 17:20 – “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”
6. Jesus may look at you at times and scold you for your little faith, but you have faith. Pray that God might increase your trust in Him.