

Trinity XV

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Preacher: Bishop Chad Jones

[0 : 00] O ye of little faith, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Please be seated. In the Sermon of the Mount, our Lord Jesus Christ, about two-thirds of the way through it, addresses his audience with the phrase, O ye of little faith.

Now, the crowd had not done anything particularly to offend our Lord. You will remember, of course, that the Lord Jesus has a long history in the Gospel of going toe-to-toe with his audiences.

Sometimes insults are thrown, particularly with the Pharisees. Now, in this case, our Lord is preaching the Sermon on the Mount to a docile and interested audience.

And yet he says to them, you have little faith. Why does he say that? He wants to draw attention to the fact that faith is the heart of who we are and what we are called to be.

[1 : 04] And if we measure our hearts by the true standard of faith, we all fall short. None of us possess the kind of faith that God would ultimately wish to see rise in our hearts completely.

So the Lord asks us to confront ourselves about our lack of faith and to see how we can obtain an increase of faith in our lives.

The premise of our Lord Jesus Christ is twofold. God is the creator of all things visible and invisible. He is the maker and fashioner of the universe, of birds, of plants, of trees and flowers, and human beings.

And secondly, God, his father, is our father. Because we have been incorporated into Christ by baptism and made members of his living body, the church.

Therefore, we can call the father of Jesus Christ our father who art in heaven. And the Lord wants to emphasize the necessity of faith.

[2 : 10] The measure of our faith is known by our reliance on God to the measure that we actually live, believing that God can provide for our needs.

This is the central theme of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord emphasizes to us, reinforces for us, that God provides for us.

But do we really believe it? If we really believe that God is, in fact, the creator of all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, and keeps everything going by his power.

And if we truly believe that God is our heavenly father, who provides for us as a loving human father does and would, then we would believe and not be doubting at all.

So the Lord challenges us to believe and to have greater faith. Our Lord puts it very squarely for us today, which is, what is most important in our lives?

[3 : 12] What is most important to you and to me? Because what is most important will take center stage and it will direct and control and govern all of our beliefs and our choices.

Ultimately, Jesus is saying to us, our father in heaven should be priority one. This is why he goes on to say, you cannot serve two masters.

You will love the one and hate the other, or you will reference the one and despise the other. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and man.

So our Lord uses the illustration of wealth, riches, money. Very important to point out, though, when the Lord is teaching this, he does not say that money is evil.

A lot of people actually sort of think our Lord is intuiting that, and that is not true. There's a great, often misquoted phrase from St. Paul. People will say that money is the root of all evil.

[4 : 18] St. Paul never wrote that. He wrote, the law of money is the root of all evil. And why is that? Because of reliance, dependence.

If people believe that money is the center of their lives and that God is not using it for his holy purposes, then amassing money as an end unto itself becomes the focus and money takes the place of God.

That's idolatry. Or, if we don't trust that God really is God, and really in control, and really loving us, and providing for us, we might be tempted to think that we make money and we take care of ourselves.

We accrue money so that we can use it for ourselves and other people, but we are the ones doing it. That temptation would make ourselves take the place of God, and that too is idolatry.

Money is not evil. In fact, when our Lord describes all the beautiful ways in which God provides for his creation, and in particular for you and me, we recognize that money itself is a good thing, if it is put to the usage for which God made it.

[5 : 30] Most of us provide for our families by earning enough money to buy what we need. And in that case, money is a good provided by God.

God actually provides it so that we can have what we need. That is a much healthier way of looking at finances from the divine point of view. It is God who provides, who enables us to work and earn the money that we have so that we can provide for ourselves and our families.

But at the heart of it, the Lord Jesus is asking us, who is God? What is enthroned in our hearts? What is the center of our life, of our being, of our purpose, of our focus?

And Jesus is challenging us to say that God must be at the center. Then he goes on to exaggerate, saying, look at the birds of the air.

Consider the lilies of the field. And using his beautiful hyperbolic rabbinical language, the Lord reminds us today that the birds of the air don't do anything.

[6 : 37] They don't have to work for their food, but God simply provides the seed that they need to eat. Or how about the lilies of the field? They just stand there beautifully and do nothing at all for themselves.

And yet God provides such beauty for them that they outstrip the richest king in Israel, Solomon, who was never arrayed like one of these. And then our Lord goes on to make the politically incorrect point that human beings are more important than birds and flowers.

And indeed we are. If God so cares for his creation in this way, will he not care for you, O ye of little faith? Faith is confidence in God.

Faith is confidence that God really will provide for us what is necessary for our life and our sustenance. Again, the measure of our faith is determined by how much we really believe God loves us and will provide for us.

Do we really believe in the providence and the goodness of Almighty God, who is our Heavenly Father? We are to grow in our faith. And the only way to grow in our faith is to trust God.

[7 : 54] To go ahead and trust Him and have confidence in Him. And to supply the backup for that, the strength, the support for that, with prayer and reading the Holy Scriptures, serving one another and serving Christ in our neighbor, and availing ourselves of Christ in the sacraments.

In these ways we deepen the faith that God has already instilled in us, but we must take the step of faith and trust in God. The Lord Jesus also instructs us that we are not to worry.

Worry is the opposite of faith. And the Lord says, if you worry, what gain is there in that? Can you extend the length of your life by worrying?

Worry? No. In fact, probably quite the opposite. But by worrying, what we do is add trouble upon trouble, and we concern our lives about things that may never happen.

Perhaps all of you have had that experience at one time or another in your life. You worry about something, and you work yourself up into a frenzy about it, and then you discover everything that you were worried about never happened.

[9 : 06] The Lord Jesus says that's exactly what we need to avoid. Rather, there should be a confidence, a solitude in our hearts towards God, a quiet trust that God provides all.

He says we do not need to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Or in other words, there's enough about which to have faith in God just for today, trusting in Him, and not worrying about what comes tomorrow.

At the end of it all, God calls us to have faith in Him, to love Him and to trust Him, to recognize that He is our Heavenly Father. Faith is about being able to say, Abba, Father, to our God.

Recognizing that God the Father brought all things into existence and maintains everything by the wisdom and the effect of His power. And all of His creation has fashioned you and me to be the crown of His heart.

We are the apex of His creation. Every human being is made in the image and likeness of our Heavenly Father. And He desires what is best for us.

[10 : 26] As a great mentor of mine used to say years ago, God is concerned with what we need, not with what we want. There's a very large difference between those two things.

God promises to provide what we need, not what we want. And the kind of faith that Christ instills in us in baptism is able, first of all, to recognize that God is our provider, and He will give to us what we need.

And also, most profoundly, authentic faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is able to say to God, I love you and I trust you, even in the face of adversity.

To have confidence in God means that even when we encounter situations, life circumstances, that are heartbreaking or unbearable, we know that God is going to bring good out of evil.

God is going to produce His perfect will in our lives because God is God. And God is good. He loves us.

[11 : 37] He tends to us. He cares for us. America is called the most religious nation in the world, and it's true. Most of our polls say that 95% of people, perhaps less today, as we approach the middle of the 21st century, believe in God.

How many Americans believe in God? Usually 95%, if it's said in polls. But that's not really the question. The question is not, does God exist?

For obviously, He does. That's just nature itself, showing us that God indeed exists. The question is, does God know what He's doing? Does God care about you?

Does God care about me? The answer is different. Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, came into the world to unveil His Father to us.

He who has seen me, has seen the Father. Only the Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, makes Him known. Christ has come into the world to show us that God is our Father, and that He does love us, He does care for us, He is our provider.

[12 : 51] O ye of little faith, let us ask God to increase His gift of faith in us, that we may trust Him more and more, and have confidence in Him more and more.

If we should slip, and our faith begins to wave, Jesus says simply this, Behold the birds, and consider the little birds of the being.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.