

# Matthew

A Careful Study of Matthew

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## I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 17:14-21**, When [Jesus, Peter, James, and John] came [down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they came] to the crowd. A man came up to Jesus, and falling on his knees before Him said, [15] “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. [16] I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.” [17] And Jesus answered and said (*to the father and the crowd*), “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” [18] And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. [19] Then the disciples (*other nine*) came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out?” [20] And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; 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. [21] But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”
- B. Last week we looked at a number of examples from God’s word concerning faith for healing, for obtaining miracles from God, for casting out demons, and for moving mountains (*doing the impossible*). We ended with a list of questions about faith that I said we would deal with this week. The reason for the questions was to show you that we can draw a number of conclusions about faith from God’s word, but we cannot find a formula to follow, or a step-by-step set of instructions that will consistently result in our faith obtaining what we seek.
- C. Pray

## II. Faith for healing, miracles, casting out demons, doing the impossible

- A. Though everyone lives by faith, there is a clear difference between the faith by which everyone lives and Christian faith. All faith, whether it is the general faith by which everyone lives or Christian faith, begins in the mind and is verified by our choices and behavior.
  - 1. Therefore, Christian faith is the agreement of the mind to the reality of God, the supremacy of God, the authority of God, the involvement of God in this world from creation onward, the presence of God within believers, the activity of God in a believer’s daily life, the holiness of

God, the justice of God, the goodness of God, the love of God, the grace and mercy of God, the transforming power and work of God in His children, the help of God for godly living, the truth of what God has revealed about Himself and about how we are to live, and the word of God as presented in the Bible.

- a. Christian faith also holds that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, that He came to earth, lived among us, was crucified, and was raised from the dead – in order to save us from the penalty, power, and practice of sin.
  - b. And Christian faith holds that God is infinite (*having no beginning and no end*), self-sufficient (*needs nothing, no one*), unchangeable, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise, everywhere present, and perfectly holy.
2. **Hebrews 11:1,6**, gives us a specific description of faith in God and the reason for the necessity of such faith. [1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. [6] And without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that [God] is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
- a. According to the context, **vs 1** is talking about a confident trust in the yet unseen things of God – that is, the return of Christ, the judgment seat of Christ, and the eternal kingdom with its new heavens and new earth. And the point is, Christian faith in the future kingdom of God ought to drive obedience to the will and word of God.
  - b. Though he doesn't use the word faith, John makes a similar statement in **1 John 3:1-3**, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. [2] Beloved, **now** we are children of God, and it has **not appeared as yet** what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."
  - c. The point of **Hebrews 11:6**, is that we will not live a life that is pleasing to God without Christian faith, that is, without confident trust in God, His goodness, His will, His word, the final judgment, and the yet unseen future kingdom of God.
  - d. But why won't we live a life pleasing to God without Christian faith? Because our thoughts, words, and deeds are driven by what

we believe. In other words, the way we live, day in and day out, is observable, living verification of what we believe.

- (1) If our faith is in someone or something other than God, then our beliefs – along with our values, fears, hopes, choices and behavior will mostly be contrary to the will and word of God, and therefore, not be pleasing to God.
  - (2) It is only as we believe in God, trust that His will and word are both true and the only sensible way to live, confidently believe that we are safe in His hands, and depend on Him as our primary source of security, provision, and protection that we will live the kind of life that pleases God. It is because of this that **faith** in God is inseparably tied to **obedience** to God.
3. The Bible uses several different words for Christian faith, with each having their own subtle differences in meaning. For example, the most commonly used words for faith are believe and trust. Then there are the lesser used words or synonyms such as faithfulness, confidence, and conviction. To that list we add words like depend on, rely on, rest in, and obey.

B. However, though Christian faith begins in the mind and is verified by how we live, we are not the originators of faith – either in its general form or its Christian form, God is.

1. I believe the concept of faith, the ability to believe, and the ability to choose to believe are given to us by God. And I believe God created faith as part of creating us to need Him – not just for salvation from the penalty and ravages of sin, but for all that daily living entails and requires of us – including entering into mutually intimate, mutually trusting, and mutually satisfying relationships with Himself and the people around us.
2. In my opinion, faith and love are vital antidotes to selfishness and sin. It is my experience that we will not make ourselves vulnerable enough to love and obey God, and love those around us without Christian faith, that is, without a faith in God that convinces us it is safe for us to love and obey in accordance with God's will and word.
3. And because God is perfectly good, believing in Him, trusting Him to provide, protect, and care for us, and obeying Him is the most rational, intelligent use of our mind and our life.

C. What is little faith? Is it insufficient faith? Or is it a mixture of faith and doubt?

1. With the one exception found here in **Matthew 17:16-21**, every other reference to little faith in Matthew is the direct result of fear. For example:
  - a. In **Matthew 6:28-33**, Jesus equates little faith with worry or fear that God will not adequately provide what you need to sustain life or carry on with life in a reasonable way.
    - (1) Jesus says it this way in **vs 25 & 30**, “Do not be **worried** about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. [30] 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!**”
    - (2) In other words, worry and fear motivate us to turn away from trusting God, and from contentment, and inward peace, and calm assurance, and turn toward some amount of distrust and the untrusting choices and behavior that become appealing to us because of our distrust of God.
  - b. **Matthew 8:23-26** talks about Jesus being asleep in a boat with His disciples when a great storm came up. **Fearing** for their lives, the disciples woke Jesus saying, “Save us, Lord, we are perishing!” Jesus said to them, “Why are you **afraid**, you men of **little faith?**” Then He calmed the winds and the sea.
  - c. **Matthew 14:28-31** tells the story of Peter walking on water. He was doing really well for a man who had never done such a thing when he allowed the force of the wind to prompt **fear**, which in turn drove **doubt** that he could continue without sinking. So he cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” Jesus did, and said to him, “You of **little faith**, why did you **doubt?**”
  - d. In **Matthew 16:6-11**, the disciples thought Jesus had criticized them for forgetting to bring bread to eat – but they were wrong, because that is not what Jesus was doing. So why did they misinterpret Jesus’ words? I suspect it was due to their **fear** of criticism which, like most of us, they interpreted as rejection for not being good enough in Jesus’ eyes. Because they misinterpreted His words, Jesus said, “You men of **little faith**,” inferring that if they had had sufficient faith, they would have understood what Jesus said, rather than misreading what He said.
  - e. This brings us to **Matthew 17:16-21**, where the disciples, after being unable to cast out a demon, were asking Jesus why. Jesus said, “Because of the **littleness of your faith.**” This time the issue

is not fear, but rather, spiritual immaturity. And I am saying their failure was due to spiritual immaturity because Jesus went on to say that casting out a demon in this kind of situation requires prayer and fasting.

- f. The link between prayer, fasting, and faith for miracles may not be clear to you right now, but I hope to explain it when we get to that part of this study on faith.
  - 2. Once again, of the five examples where Jesus identifies people as having little faith, four are the result of worry, fear, and doubt, and one is the result of spiritual immaturity.
    - a. What I hope you can see is the power of fear to drive doubt, or weaken your faith, or reduce the amount of trust you have in God given the present need and circumstances.
    - b. Therefore, I urge you to believe that fear is an influential enemy of Christian faith – an enemy that drives doubt, the projection of doom, the expectation of threatening vulnerability, and the compelling sense that we need to stop waiting on the Lord, take matters into our own hands, and look for a solution that is either less God and more self, or no longer God and all self.
    - c. Now you may be wondering, what drives this kind of fear? Your perception of the circumstance, and your imagining that trusting God and remaining faithful to His word will result in an undesirable, unwanted, and costly outcome – whether the outcome affects only you, or includes those you hold dear.
  - 3. If you want your faith to grow larger and stronger than the little faith talked about in the stories here in Matthew, you will have to fight fear, strongly challenge your perception of what is happening to you or going on around you, remind yourself that God is good and that you are safe in His hands, rest in Him, and wait patiently for Him to act on your behalf or on behalf of those you love.
- D. What about faith the size of a mustard seed? What does it look like? Why does Jesus compare Christian faith to the size of a mustard seed – which is very small?
- 1. For me, this illustration is very helpful in that it shows us what Christian faith can be and should be.
    - a. Think of a mustard seed as a living being. It is not an object that is already dead, but rather an object that is alive – but must die in order to produce the life it was created to produce. And the death it must die is not a pleasant death.

- b. The mustard seed must die a lonely, dark, dirty, damp, and painful death. It has to lie under the soil, endure being wet long enough to swell and burst open so the new life within can begin to grow. Then it is eaten alive by the new life that it was created to produce until that new life pops its head above the soil where it can gain what it needs to go on living from the sun, the air, and the soil.
    - c. The point is, a mustard seed, like you and me, must have sufficient faith in the Creator to give up its former life in order to become a new creature that is sustained by all that the Creator has created for sustaining such new lives.
  - 2. I believe that when Jesus uses the mustard seed as an example of the kind of faith we need to live the Christian life and do the impossible, He is saying that if you will trust God, His will and His word enough to die to your old selfish and sinful self, and press forward in becoming a new creation that is growing in Christ-likeness, you will have the kind of faith required to move mountains, cast out demons, and even shrivel fig trees.
- E. Christian faith has nothing to do with faith in self. It is solely and wholly faith in God and in all that He says and requires for living the life He created us, and then saved us to live.
  - 1. Wherever we knowingly and unrepentantly fall short of this kind of faith and obedience, we remain involved in things that limit the growth of Christian faith and keep us mired in being Christians with little faith.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Mustard seed faith is available to all of us. Do you want it? Follow the example of the mustard seed. Willingly and intentionally die to your old sinful self so the life God created you to live can come forth, grow, and bear fruit.
- B. And to do that, you must fight fear, strongly challenge your perception of what is happening to you or going on around you. And you must remind yourself that God is good and that you are safe in His hands, rest in Him, and wait patiently for Him to act on your behalf or on behalf of those you love.
- C. This is not the end. The Lord willing, we will spend next Sunday on this topic of faith and on these verses in **Matthew 17:14-23**.