

1. **Introduction:** At the end of last class, I was asked, do Jesus’ comments in the Sermon on the Mount, *“do not be anxious* (NIV – “worry” which is prolonged anxiety) *about your life”* and *“do not be anxious about tomorrow”* mean that believers should never be anxious? I think the answer is no. The statements in the Sermon on the Mount are, of course, true statements, but I don’t think they are intended in an absolute or command sense.
  - For example: In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before Jesus would be crucified, Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He knew what tomorrow would bring and was filled with dread in His human nature. He prayed that the cup of pain and death be taken away, but He didn’t stop with that.
2. **Matthew 26:36-39:** *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.”<sup>37</sup> And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.<sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*
  - Given the circumstances He faced, it was quite natural for Jesus, in His human nature, to be anxious about the coming day’s events. He said that His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. That’s strong anxiety! Jesus prayed that, if possible, Father make the events of the next day go away.
  - But He didn’t stop there. He prayed *“if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”* That is what the Father granted. Jesus’ commitment to obey the Father didn’t remove the great sorrow but made it bearable.
  - I think that to us Jesus’ prayer means when circumstances overwhelm us, and we become anxious, it is OK to pray for better circumstances, but we must not stop there. We must sincerely pray that if the bad circumstances are necessary for God’s plan, then let us experience the things that makes us so anxious. God’s will not our will be done.
  - The martyrs declared, if I must die, so be it, but let me die “in Christ,” faithful to the end. Live or die, either way, a believer is Ok in God’s hands.
  - We need to always remember that, for our own eternal good, God’s answer to heartfelt prayer may be “No!” Only He has knowledge of all the pieces of the puzzle and how they interact with one another.
  - Hebrews 11:32-40 records that many in mortal life did great things and overcame great duress, winning honor and glory, but others equally faithful faced and suffered every kind of horrible death that man could invent.
3. **Hebrews 11:36-40:** *“Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated -<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and*

*caves of the earth.* <sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”*

- No doubt these people were anxious about what was happening to them, and even more anxious about what might happen to their loved ones when they could no longer provide help, protection, or comfort.
  - God does not promise believers will not suffer affliction, but He does promise that He will be with us in all situations and that in the end we will be with Him in glory. Our life on earth is fleeting and short and may be painful, but that is not the extent of our life.
  - God sees our life as a whole – a few years of mortal life, then everlasting life with Him.
4. **Paul’s Anxiety:** He was given “a thorn in the flesh” that was of great concern to him.
5. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10:** *Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*
- Paul was anxious. Paul prayed for the cause of his anxiety be removed. But God’s answer was NO! There was purpose in Paul having the thorn. He was learning God’s power is made perfect in weakness. His grace is sufficient to sustain in the presence of “thorns.”
  - The meaning of the Sermon on the Mount passage seems to be, don’t be anxious about the necessities of mortal life but be very anxious to respond to God’s drawing you to Jesus (seek first the kingdom of heaven). God abides with His own in life and in death.
  - Pray about every concern recognizing that the answer may be “no.” Always pray with the attitude of “not my will but God’s will be done.”
6. **Today’s Introduction:** Our last lesson stimulated a lot of good questions and discussion. We covered only about half of the prepared slides, so we begin from the point we ended.
7. **Signs and Seals:** (1.) A sign is something used to point to a thing different from and greater than or more important than itself. The burning bush was a sign to Moses of God’s presence. A road sign that reads “Chattanooga 25 miles” points to the city.
- (2.) A “seal” is a physical device used to authentic validity. A seal applied to a document by someone with authority (like a notary) validates the document as authentic.
  - God commanded circumcision as a sign and seal No one is saved by being circumcised nor by being baptized nor by sharing in communion nor by any ritual or liturgy.
  - Circumcision was introduced as a sign of the covenant and a seal authenticating a male person as being one of God’s “chosen people.”
  - The sacraments have no importance as means of salvation but are vitally important as signs and seals of the grace of salvation that has happened spiritually and invisibly.

- Salvation is by grace through belief in the perfect savior, Jesus Christ, and His perfect, finished salvation work. There is no other way to salvation.
8. **Romans 4:13-14:** *... the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.*
- *“the promise ... did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”*
  - The Law’s promise was, if you perfectly obey the Law all the time you will earn righteousness. No one could do that. Wrath due sin continued for those under the Law.
  - Is it possible to acquire righteousness apart from the Law? Jesus’ salvation work is God’s “yes answer.” Faith in Jesus’ salvation work in His life, death, and resurrection brings a declaration of justification and makes perfect obedience to the Law unnecessary.
9. **Romans 4:15-17:** *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*
- These verses demolish any possibility that salvation can be obtained by obeying the Law.
  - Paul’s point is that the Law is man-focused (requiring obedience by human ability) while faith is God-focused (pointing to God’s saving work on our behalf).
  - Why does the Law bring wrath? It reveals sin that is due punishment. Christ saves us from sin and justifies us before God! If those who live under the Law were heirs, faith ceases to be of value and God’s promise has no power. But it is not that way.
  - Salvation is through faith that God’s promise to Abraham is realized in Christ. All who believe in Christ share in Abraham’s faith. Abraham is the father of all who believe.
10. **Romans 4:18-22:** *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”*
- God gave Abraham faith that enabled him to confidently believe God’s promise of becoming the father of many nations. Fulfillment of the promise making it possible for Abraham to become the Father of many nations, was entirely dependent on God who was the object of Abraham’s faith. That fulfillment and would occur in God’s timing.
11. Abraham believed God’s promise despite that the truth of his and Sarah’s old age and long life of childlessness. Abraham’s faith was God-centered. He trusted that God was both capable and trustworthy to do what He promised. Abraham believed God!

12. **Faith:** If faith in God were something we were required to generate within ourselves, it would necessarily depend on our power, not God's. But God graciously gives faith enabling us to live in an uncertain world trusting His strength and goodness to carry us.

- Consider the nature of faith. Faith is always “in something or someone.”
- Faith has a purpose. It is directed toward realizing a goal. Faith is action-oriented.
- Faith is a special kind of confidence that enables doing something without knowing the outcome of that action. The convictions and trust we call faith may be strong or weak, but faith will be focused on an object by which it is believed the goal of faith will be realized.
- Faith is seldom “blind faith.” The reason for faith may be false and deceptive.
- There are always reasons (or perhaps assumptions) forming the basis for believing that the object toward which faith is directed can bring about the realization of faith's goal. Not the strength of faith but the object of faith is the most important factor.
- The strength of faith is important if the object of faith is trustworthy. Strong faith in a trustworthy object makes initiating action easier to do.
- In Christian faith, Christ is the object of faith. The reason(s) for choosing Christ as the object of faith may be as simple as hearing and believing the gospel, or it may follow many years of investigating the Scriptures and hearing the gospel.
- In the end, whatever the route or length of time involved, God the Father draws you to Christ (John 4:43-44, *Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*)
- The goal of Christian faith is right relationship with God. That includes receiving salvation and everlasting life. Why do we believe Jesus is the path to right relationship with God and all that means? Jesus Himself gave reasons and so did the authors of the NT. There is also an abundance of testimony from present and past believers.
- Jesus said you believe in God, believe also in Me. He also said to judge who He is from what Scripture (the OT) says about Him and compare what is said what He accomplished in His earthly life, death, and resurrection – the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dead come back to life.
- Faith in Jesus Christ is confidence that He is who He said He is, has done what He says He has done, and will do what He says He will do. There is much supporting evidence. Faith in Jesus Christ is far from being blind faith.

13. **Misplaced Faith:** Having strong convictions undergirding faith does not assure the validity of faith. It is possible to hold strong conviction based on false evidence.

- The belief that salvation can be earned by good works is an example of a false conviction that is often held with great certainty, yet completely in error.
- Likewise, the conviction that there is no God may be held with strong faith and perhaps supported by confidence in science and its findings. Strong faith does not assure truth.
- Only in a trustworthy object of faith is truth or falsehood found.
- Jesus Christ, the object of our faith, is the source of truth. There is no falseness in Him.