

What's On Your Mind?

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Matthew 16

How many of us daily face the biggest battles of our lives in our minds? From our preconceived ideas, anxieties, our presumptuous conclusions and fears of the unknown – we battle in our minds more against what we do not know than against what we do know. It thus affects every part of who we are, what we say, do, and it robs us and steals from us the joy and peace Father has already secured for us.

Now, as a family of believers, are we not believers? Yet, we are faced with decisions of fear for our brother Jordan in light of what we think we know, and also what we know we do or cannot know. What do we do? Do we lose hope? Do we allow fear to steal from us this hour of life in Christ and in relationship with one another? Do we stop making plans for the future and regress to our caves of depression and anxiety? The real question is from whence does our help cometh and where does our hope come from. This is a key element of who we are as believers that distinguishes us from all other ideologies pertaining to life and death. Our hope is in Christ who conquered death and the grave, who took on our infirmities, who is the very source of life and hope.

Let us look not at what we don't know and be fearful, but instead look at what we do know about the heart of our Creator and Father. We know that He is a God of compassion to those who love and obey Him. I believe that He is a loving Father who understands your fears and does not condemn you for your loving concern for those we love, in light of how fragile and precious we know life is to us. Faith is not the absence of fear but the courage to believe in spite of it. The faith counted unto Abraham was that in spite of what he saw or did not see in the natural, he obeyed and followed God's commands anyway; he worshipped regardless; he continued in the ways of God regardless; he did not let fear paralyze his heart and soul or captivate his mind as a preoccupation and distraction from his duties to God Almighty.

I must confess that I am one who often has trouble sleeping because of a mind I just cannot shut off. Are you one of those who are constantly looking for something else to worry about? Are you one who cannot help but allow your imagination to pursue the worst possible outcome? Tell me, over the years have your greatest fears been confirmed consistently? And, what have you gained from your fears in spite of the outcome being what you preconceived or not? I would dare to guess that, regardless of the outcome, your worry gained you nothing but stolen time, peace, and joy that you will never regain.

In Matthew 16 Jesus speaks to the Pharisees concerning their desire for a physical assurance of the moment to confirm their preconceived notions or deny them. He condemns them, not for their ability to discern or reason, but for their inability to discern and reason in the spiritual. Concerning the Pharisees, Matthew Henry states, "They desired a sign of their own choosing: they despised those signs which relieved the necessity of the sick and sorrowful, and called for something else which would gratify the curiosity of the proud. It is great hypocrisy, when we slight the signs of God's ordaining, to seek for signs of our own devising." Jesus tells them that the only sign they will receive is that of Jonah. Now, what do we know of Jonah?

He could hear and speak the Words of God. He refused to deliver a message to a people whom he disliked and thought God should punish instead of show grace and mercy to them. He was a prideful man. In **Jonah 1:17** we are told he was swallowed by a giant fish and remained there for three days and three nights until in Chapter **2:1-2** (*1Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 2And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of*

hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.) Here Jonah cries out to God with a broken and contrite spirit, and God hears his cry and delivers him back into the will of God. So what sign or affirmation would it be that Jesus speaks to the Pharisees of? When the proud are humbled and the weak are made strong in Christ; When Christ makes way for a rebellious people to be quickened alive in Him and thrust into the will of God; When there are a people who overcome the will of the flesh and are thrust to live in the complete and sovereign will of the Father trusting in the His love alone as a sign to all who believe.

In verse 6 Jesus warns the disciples to recognize and not partake of the leaven of the Pharisees. "Christ speaks of spiritual things under a similitude, and the disciples misunderstand him of carnal things. He took it ill that they should think him as thoughtful about bread as they were; that they should be so little acquainted with his way of preaching. Then understood they what he meant. Christ teaches by the Spirit of wisdom in the heart, opening the understanding to the Spirit of revelation in the word." (Matthew Henry) He is referring to something much more dangerous than what the disciples fear. Jesus was warning them concerning what was in the mind and heart of the Pharisees more than that which was on the fearful mind of His disciples. He was trying to teach them to be more concerned with how they think than what they fear. He is pointing out that the ideologies of wicked hearts are like yeast that causes the dough to rise up. He is pointing out that what is in their mind is more dangerous than what is on their mind. And what is in the mind will be reflected by what is on the mind.

Jesus tells them, "O ye of little faith, reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up?" He was not concerned with bread to fill their bellies or fulfill their religious rituals; he was concerned with what was going on in their hearts. He was appalled at their short term memory and inability to face any situation, their tendency to forget the greatness of their God, to forget the things He had already brought them through and the things they had already seen Him do for them and through them.

Folks, when what is on your mind contradicts the Word of God that is in your Christ-like mind, remind it that the God you serve is one who can part the Red Sea, send fire from heaven and consume false prophets. He can turn water into wine, can slay a giant of any size, can tear down walls and destroy entire cities in a moment, can defeat entire armies who oppose His people. It is He who can walk on water and defy nature itself; who flung the heavens and all creation into existence; who can raise the dead, cast out devils, and calm the raging storms; can conquer the grave; who can feed your family; who can deliver your children; who can touch the hardest heart; who can heal your marriage; who can heal your body, ease your fear, and give you peace. There is nothing out of proportion or too overwhelming for a God this size.

As the Psalmist assures us in **Psalms 121:1-3** (*1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. 3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.*)

When your flesh fears the things of the flesh, do not look at the bread but look at the bread Giver, He who gives life, and remember from whence your hope and your help comes.