

Faith Or Doubt?

by Mark Jarvinen

The Gospel Lesson

¹⁹ *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

²⁰ *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

²⁴ *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*

²⁶ *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*

²⁸ *Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

³⁰ *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:19-31)*

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to ask you a pretty basic question. Where are you on the skepticism to believability scale? In other words how easy is it for

you to believe something to be true? Have you ever received an email from a person representing a Christian ministry you've never heard of explaining their unique circumstances and then requesting prayer, and of course, funds? It's happened to me. What do we do with such requests? I have a friend who won't believe any suspicious email content before checking with Snopes. The online world we live in conditions us toward this kind of skepticism. Over the past few months I've received phone calls enthusiastically inviting me on a five day and five night, all-expense paid cruise for two to the Bahamas, never mentioning a word about the travel expense required just to get to the cruise and the hard-sell time share presentations you're expected to attend once on board. Now when I hear that overly sweet voice on the line, making me an offer that only an idiot would ever refuse, I just hang up. Lots of people say lots of things – how much do you believe? How much do you doubt?

For almost two thousand years, Christians have been saying that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Do you believe it? A lot of people don't. Many are skeptical. "The church ultimately just wants my money," they say. Did the resurrection of Jesus really take place? Maybe you are sort of "playing along" with the notion that Jesus rose from the dead, but concede to yourself that you may be only an illness or a tragedy away from denying the whole thing to be true. This morning, we're going to look at a part of the Bible where Jesus talks to us about doubt. We're going to see what the only cure for doubt is, as the Bible describes it.

EASTER EVENING

Before we shift our attention to that first Easter evening, allow me to ask you what happens at your house on Easter evening? We had our whole family, along with Daniel and Lauren, at our house for Easter. Once everybody left and the leftovers were refrigerated, the dishes were done, and the toys and Easter chicks were put away, Martha and I plopped into our favorite chairs and simply relaxed. **For Jesus' disciples the atmosphere was different.** They were locked inside a house for fear of the Jews. Jesus had been arrested and crucified, would they, his followers be next? To add to the confusion, some were reporting that Jesus was alive. **Then, suddenly, Jesus stood among them.** The disciples were amazed and overjoyed, except for Thomas, who wasn't with the others at that time. When Thomas finally rejoined the group, Jesus had already left, but they told him that they had seen Jesus alive. Thomas, however, didn't share their obvious joy. He was skeptical. He needed physical proof. He said -

“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (v. 25)

WHY SO SKEPTICAL?

You might say that Thomas was a “**philosophical empiricist**,” without even understanding the term. An empiricist is one who holds that no knowledge can be trusted unless it is derived from one's own sense-based experience. Thomas had seen Jesus' miracles with his own eyes and heard with his own ears His teachings. There had been enough first-hand evidence to believe that Jesus was who He said He was. But then, near the end of Jesus' ministry, Thomas saw and heard things that didn't make sense. How could a man who was

all powerful, be arrested like any other man? How could Jesus, who loved others, be tortured and crucified even though He was powerful enough to raise people from the dead? None of this made sense to Thomas and seemed to contradict what he had come to believe about Jesus. Thomas couldn't let his hopes be raised by the testimony of his friends, only to be dashed again later. He wanted proof. Is Thomas really so much different than we are? What causes our doubts about Jesus being the only way to God? What seems fanciful to us about eternal life after death? Let's be honest and admit that we've entertained at least momentary doubts about these things.

WHAT CAUSES DOUBTS?

Thomas doubted because of the troubles and trials, the suffering and death, that a kind, good, loving, and spiritually powerful man like Jesus had encountered in His life on earth. When you think about it, isn't that still what causes most doubts today? We harbor the notion that life ought to be just and fair, and that troubles, difficulties, and hardships shouldn't be the by-product of believing in an all loving, all powerful man who claimed to be the Son of God. And so it's relatively easy to go along with what's proclaimed in church on Easter Sunday, but it's much harder to believe when you're in the ER watching your child struggle with a health problem. It's much easier to believe in Jesus when everyone around you is singing "Up From the Grave He Arose," than it is to take your stand in a college classroom where the professor ridicules faith and portrays people who believe as foolish and ignorant.

THE CURE FOR THOMAS' DOUBTS

In our text, the cure was straight-forward – spend time with the Risen Christ. Jesus lingered for 40 incredibly important days on earth after His resurrection, appearing to individuals, small groups, and as many as 500 at one time. According to our text, 8 days after His first appearance to the disciples, minus Thomas, Jesus appeared to them again, this time with Thomas. Jesus forgave Thomas and said –

²⁶ ***“... Peace be with you.”*** ²⁷ ***Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (vv. 26-27)***

Upon seeing and touching Jesus and hearing His words to stop doubting and believe, Thomas responded saying, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** Notice that Thomas flat out calls Jesus, “my God!” No more doubting for Thomas. Thomas, as common Christian tradition has it, went on to become a strong disciple of Jesus, carrying the Gospel message into India, where he was martyred for the faith.

THE CURE FOR OUR DOUBTS

The takeaway for us is that Jesus wants us to believe without proof. That’s faith. The text says in v.29 –

Jesus said to him,(Thomas), “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus is talking about you and me in this verse, not seeing, yet believing. And so, for us, what is the cure for doubt? How can we believe without seeing?

I was encouraged in my preparation for this message by a quote from **Pastor Don Schultz** whose comments were influential in the formation of this message. He writes:

“Thomas touched the wounds of Christ. You and I can touch the wounds of Christ every time we take the Lord’s Supper. Thomas was able to look Jesus in the eye. Today, you and I can look Jesus in the eye every time we read the Bible or hear His Word preached and taught. And what do we see when we read the Bible, what do we experience when we take the Lord’s Supper? We see a Savior who looks at us with eyes of love. We see a Savior who knows all about our doubts and fears and unanswered questions, and he says to us, “Peace be with you.”

It’s so natural for us to be hard on ourselves and say, “I have so many problems and doubts, how can God love me?” Jesus says to us in **Romans 5:8 – “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”** In today’s text we see a Savior who forgave Thomas for his unbelief, and still today he keeps forgiving us for all the times we have also struggled to believe. Where do we go with our struggle to believe? The Gospel of John tells us right in today’s text in **vv. 30-31:**

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

CONCLUSION

I’ll conclude this message with a story about a boy who didn’t like the way his mom looked. His mom had some very severe, noticeable scars on one side of her face and neck. As the boy got older, he began to feel more and more ashamed of the way his mom looked. It got to the point where he didn’t want to be seen with her. The boy and his mom started not getting along and one day he told her, **“I don’t want you to pick me up from school anymore.”**

That's when this mother knew it was time for her to explain how she had gotten her scars. Many years earlier, when the boy was just an infant, this mom was awakened in the night by the smell of smoke. Instantly she knew the apartment was on fire. With no one else to help her, she sprang into action, running through the fire to her son's bedroom. She pulled him from his crib, wrapped him in a blanket, and protecting him against her body, she ran back through the wall of flame and out of the apartment. Both mother and baby had made it safely outside, but one whole side of her body had been burned in the fire. **"That's where these scars came from,"** she told her son.

From that moment on, the boy was never ashamed of his mom again. Every day, when he looked at her and saw those scars, he knew just how much she loved him.

There are times in your life and mine when we'll doubt that God really loves us. It'll be something we think, say, or do, that will make us feel unworthy of God's love. It may be some injustice or burden that makes us angry with God for our being mistreated or uncared for. Maybe this is one of those times in your life right now. When that happens, what do we do? Where do we turn? Turn to the Bible, hear the Gospel of Christ proclaimed, which reminds us of the scars Christ bore in His body for us. Hear His words of grace and forgiveness. Receive the Lord's Supper, and partake in the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you. Here is our cure for doubting. Stop doubting and believe what Christ, in His love, has sacrificed for you. **A-men.**