

Can Christians Doubt?

John 20:19-31

It would have been really amazing to have witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection. Let me ask you a personal question right up front- would your faith be altered in any way, had you eye-witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection? If you had seen it with your own eyes, would you be, perhaps bolder in sharing with others? Would you be more confident in applying the Bible to your daily life? Would you have a deeper peace? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, then the honest assessment we must conclude is that there could exist a bit of doubt in some areas of our spiritual journey. Now before you feel shamed or condemned, I want to let you know that it is okay to question, and wrestle with the truth of God's word. First of all, there is no way that God is up in Heaven saying, *"Oh no, Wes is doubting, what if his doubts lead him to the REAL truth and he finds out Jesus wasn't really who He said He was?"* No, of course not. God knows the Bible is true. His concern rather would be *"Oh no, Wes is doubting, and he might be tempted to trade reality for a convincing lie."*

Secondly, if you have doubts, you are not alone. Scripture mentions others who had doubts, and God wasn't somehow turned off by their doubts, rather time and time again we see God reaching out to mankind in our fears, pain, doubts- and meeting us where we are. God does not tire from working towards helping our minds see the truth- breaking us free from unbelief into belief. He's a big God who loves you, and wants you to grow in your understanding and relationship with Him.

Thirdly, following Jesus requires faith, but it is not a blind faith. There are false religions out there with large pieces of evidence missing for their faith, with huge gaps in logic and common sense, whose practitioners must make giant leaps of blind faith in order to function according to their religion's worldview. Following Jesus is not like that. There have been many who throughout time have sought to disprove the Bible, coming up with alternatives for the Biblical account of creation, for the worldwide flood, for the parting of the Red Sea, for the life/death/resurrection of Jesus- but all

alternative theories fall apart at some point. As more data and research is gathered, there's actually more and more evidence accumulating showing that history, science, and the Bible do not disagree. Rather, history and science are pointing to the reality that the Bible is indeed true and trustworthy, and so much can *only* be explained through accepting the truth of the Bible, the book that tells us of our Creator, miracle working God.

Now, I know that surely I'm not the only one here who has ever experienced doubt, that has needed God's help in sorting through fears, misunderstandings, and questions. If you can be honest with yourself and God, we probably all have some ways to grow in our belief and understanding of the truth of God's word. This morning, may you be encouraged! Know that God sees you right now- right now where you are in your journey- and know that He wants you to find answers to your questions. He wants you to be encouraged, emboldened, and strengthened in your faith. Let's look at the end of John chapter 20 together, starting in verse 19... ([verses 19-23](#))

Let's stop there for right now. As we've been walking through the gospels in chronological order, recently we've looked at Jesus appearing to Mary there at the tomb on the day of His resurrection. He met her there in her pain and misunderstanding, he consoled her- speaking to the very root of her problem, and then sent her on a new mission to spread the good news of His resurrection. Then, as we looked at last week, Jesus appeared to two other followers of Jesus that same Sunday, as they were walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, and in similar fashion, he met them there in their pain and misunderstanding, and opened their eyes to the truth of scripture concerning the Messiah. When he left them, they said to each other *"Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"* ([Luke 24:32](#)) That heart burn wasn't indigestion, I imagine their feeling to be more of *"I had a misconception, a false narrative (as Pastor Dave mentioned), and now I know what reality is, and I'm remorseful for my previous condition, but that remorse is overcome with the feeling of joy that knowing the truth brings."* Perhaps we could imagine the burning in their hearts as the sensation of

false narrative being burned up by the truth of God's word- the lies being dispelled by the very presence of Jesus.

As evening approached that Sunday, after disappearing from hanging with the two road-to -Emmaus-guys, Jesus then entered into the presence of His now 10, closest, or what had been, His closest followers. Judas is missing, and Thomas is missing. And more than likely, there were others amongst His followers gathered there as well. And [verse 19](#) makes specific mention that the doors were shut- why? Out of *fear* of the Jews. There in their fear, Jesus entered. He didn't burst in like a SWAT team raid- He was just simply there all of a sudden. And surely that was startling, so immediately He speaks "*Peace be with you.*" We be like "Yo, peace out"- and we leave the party. But Jesus enters the party and is like "Yo, peace in." And he wasn't a ghost, the next [verse 20](#) tells us that He showed them His hands and His side where He had been pierced with the nails and spear. *Real-life-Jesus* didn't knock, He didn't open the door, He was just there- despite the closed (and probably locked) doors.

Jesus has the power and authority to go where no one else can go. To go where no doctor, or counselor, or pastor, or friend, or lover can go. There is no place of fear, doubt, struggle in which you can hide, where He is not willing and able to seek you out and meet you there in that place. And what is His objective? "*Peace be with you.*" He wants you to experience His peace. His joy, His satisfaction, His fulfillment. Many of you know the song "Reckless Love." While I wrestle with the appropriateness of using that specific word to describe what our immensely holy creator God has done for us in demonstrating to us His *perfect* love- I appreciate the song's message that conveys the idea that God is a God who pursues us with a powerful, non-stop love that continues despite our messed-up-ness. The bridge of that songs says "*There's no shadow You won't light up, Mountain You won't climb up, Coming after me. There's no wall You won't kick down, Lie You won't tear down, Coming after me.*" Those lyrics describe an overwhelming, pursuing love, but know that He doesn't even have to kick down walls to come after you- no, he just moves right through walls. He doesn't have to climb any mountains, He's just already there speaking: "*Hey, peace be with you.*" The

reality of the situation is that He is there, with you, inside those walls and wants to work with you to bring down those walls from the *inside*- to open up doors- *with you*, from the inside. The reality of the situation is you're probably not up on the mountain top and Jesus is climbing up to get you, rather you're in the valley, and you have to realize that He's already there, and He is present, willing, and able to walk with you on that tough hike to get you *up* to the top of the mountain.

In saying this, I must clarify that though Jesus is all present and ever pursuing the hearts of mankind- we each have the responsibility to reciprocate His loving pursuit. To respond to, to accept, to receive, His presence and peace. For someone who has yet to surrender their life and place their full trust, hope, and belief in Jesus- for you the knowledge that Jesus is all present and ever pursuing you should compel you to graciously receive His love, presence, and peace- with a repentant heart admitting your need for Him and desire to follow His ways. For those of you who *have* taken that first step, the knowledge that Jesus is all present and ever pursuing you should compel you to make sure there's not any rooms in your heart and mind in which you assume Jesus doesn't have access to. You can't hide anything from Him. He knows. He sees. And while He is present everywhere at every time, there are probably areas in each of lives in which He *wants* us to open the door for Him to enter. We close the door to this room, out of fear like the disciples, or out of hurt or pain or doubt, and He's saying- "*Hey, Wes- I technically already have access to that room. Just open up the door, let me work, together we can work through this.*" He's wanting us to open up every room, write it on every wall, sing it in every room- letting the good news of His work- His peace- permeate every single area of our lives.

And often His work of peace is a process. In [verse 21](#), Jesus obviously needed to say again "*Peace be with you.*" Imagine yourself in your dining room at night, with the doors shut, house locked, and just as you go to serve yourself a scoop of potatoes, your eyes meet my eyes right there, standing at the table. That's pretty creepy. I'm sure it would take a few minutes of me saying "*Hey everything is good, I come in peace, there's good reason for me being here.*" And again, as we saw with Jesus' encounter with Mary, as He

engages with us in order to do a healing, recalibration work, His intent is not just that our hearts would experience peace, but His intent is that our hearts would receive peace *AND* we would then have purpose, intent, and mission in helping *others* to receive the same type of peace. May it be in our very DNA at One Church, the idea of us gathering together- as broken and messed up people, coming to admit our need of Jesus together, receiving encouragement and conviction together, changing our perspectives to mirror more the perspective of Jesus (together), and then being sent out together on His mission so that others might have the opportunity for the same experience.

And as we are sent out, we aren't sent out alone. [Verse 22](#) Jesus, not worried about the spread of any virus, breathes on the disciples and says "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" That's what He wants for you and I as well. To receive His spirit, then- to *listen* to His Spirit, to give more *attention* to His Spirit, to surrender more *fully* to His Spirit. And then He says something a little strange, [verse 23](#)...

What is Jesus saying here? From many other places in scripture, we know that only *God* can forgive sins. The religious leaders wrestled with Jesus saying *He* could forgive sins- even Jesus' own disciples surely wrestled with this. The conclusion for the disciples wasn't that they were wrong in thinking only God could forgive sins, the conclusion for the disciples was yes, only God can forgive sins, therefore Jesus must be God. The key to understanding this verse, is to look back at what Jesus had just said in [verse 21](#). "*as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*" Why did the Father send Jesus? To give forgiveness of sins. As the Father sent Jesus, he sends us- in what mission? To offer forgiveness of sins. Not that we have authority or power in judging what sins to forgive and what sins not to forgive, but rather we are now on mission as representatives of Jesus to declare on what terms (as prescribed by Jesus) that God offers forgiveness. I like what John Piper says concerning this verse, He equates it as saying "*When you tell people about what Jesus has done, speaking His word, about His work, in the power of His Spirit, He is the one speaking through you, so that if anyone believes your word, He forgives their sins. And if any does not believe your words, He doesn't forgive*

them. And since you are His voice and His truth, He speaks of you forgiving them, and you withholding forgiveness." I think that's right on; we are merely just a conduit through which Jesus speaks His message of forgiveness.

Now, this is about to get real- let's look at our man, Thomas, verse 24... **(verses 24-29)** Poor Thomas, we've given him the nickname "Doubting Thomas." Of all the people mentioned in the Bible that doubted, made mistakes, and needed help in their belief- for some reason we single out Thomas and give Him the title Doubting Thomas. I mean, we don't call Abraham, "Lying Abraham." We don't say "Depressed Elijah." "Adultering David." Even the other John, known as John the Baptist- Jesus said no one up until that time was greater than John- yet John doubted Jesus' messiahship. From prison he sent word to Jesus asking, "*Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?*" **(Luke 7:19)** There's the father of the boy tormented by a demon, who says to Jesus "*I do believe, help my unbelief.*" **(Mark 9:24)** One of the best of all time, occurs later when Jesus ascends into Heaven, and the scripture tells us "*When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful.*" **(Matt. 28:17)** Now how do you watch Jesus flying up into Heaven and think, "*Uh, I don't know, I did eat some mushrooms at Fujiyama's last night that seemed a little undercooked.*" Maybe if we had eye witnessed Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, maybe we'd still wrestle time to time with doubts. It seems to be a pretty common theme throughout scripture concerning human nature, no matter what God has revealed.

I imagine Thomas is hurt. He's disappointed, frustrated, disillusioned. Maybe he's given up on the relationships with the other disciples- maybe he's feeling like "*what's the point anyway?*" But perhaps there was a tiny ray of hope coming from his heart as the other disciples told Him they had seen Jesus. So, there he is, hanging out a week later, again behind closed doors (Even though the rest of the disciples had seen Jesus, His work of dispelling fear from them was still in process). And again, Jesus who is omnipresent (present everywhere at all times), reveals to them that he's there in their midst. "*Peace be with you.*" I'd be like, "*Jesus- you gotta stop doing that-*

you're freaking everyone out." But He was slowly weening His followers off of their physical dependence on Him, and ushering them into this idea that He is always present with them spiritually. And not only does He reveal Himself as omnipresent, He reveals Himself as omniscient (all-knowing). Knowing what Thomas had said in private to the other disciples, Jesus is like *"I know what you said you needed in order to believe. And I want you to believe- so go ahead- touch my hands and my side."* Jesus didn't judge, or make fun of, or demean Thomas- no, He gave Him a nudge towards the truth- so that his heart might also burn within him as did the hearts of the men walking from Jerusalem with Jesus.

As a result, in [verse 28](#) Thomas answers Jesus saying *"My Lord and my God!"* Thomas wasn't cursing or taking the Lord's name in vain as a result of being startled by a thought-to-be-dead man suddenly appearing- no, he had just received the bit of information he lacked in order to see the whole picture, the proof that Jesus was alive- and seeing that proof, could only mean that Jesus was God in human form. This is in complete contrast to the story of Paul and Barnabas, recorded in Acts 14, when a man was healed from not being able to walk, causing people around Paul and Barnabas wanting to worship them with sacrifices, and they called out to the people saying *"...why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you..."* ([Acts 14:15](#)) They refused the worship, but here Thomas worships Jesus as God, and Jesus accepts and receives it- why? Because He is God.

And then look again at what Jesus says concerning us, today, in the second half of [verse 29](#) *"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."* You and I have an opportunity to be blessed- though we did not eye witness Jesus' life, death, and resurrection- we are blessed through our belief. And again, our belief is not blind- we have historical evidence, scientific evidence, and we have the testimony of others, of Jesus Himself, compiled into this amazingly intricate, yet beautifully simple book we call the Bible.

Thomas shouldn't be known as "Doubting Thomas." He should be known as the "one who overcame doubt," or the "one who allowed Jesus to conquer his doubt." More than likely, Thomas still had many questions, as I'm sure

the other disciples had as well. But Jesus didn't answer all of their questions there in that moment. His presence- His revelation to them was enough to get them started on their spiritual journey of seeking God for the answers. And John, the author of this account, used the story of Thomas as the crowning proof of the work of Jesus and the crowning proof of the work Jesus *wants to do* in the life of the reader. Look at what He says in the last two verses of the chapter... ([John 20:30-31](#))

The very purpose behind John writing his account is so that you and I as the reader, would believe in the reality of Jesus, and may have true life (eternal life) as a result of knowing the truth. The book of John is written for doubters! Find yourself questioning? Heart wandering from the Lord? Read the book of John and remind yourself who Jesus is, what He did for you, and what He wants to give you. You might be asking, how can I even trust that what John writes is true? Let me answer that question by asking, what would John have to gain by lying? Did he and the other writers make up claims to boost their own authority, power, or wealth? No, what we find is actually the opposite. Sticking to their claims made them outcasts, persecuted, and poor. Most were killed for their claims. Would you be willing to die for a lie? JD Greer, the Pastor of Summit Church based in Raleigh says this: *"Imagine Peter—he's out fishing after Jesus dies and he says, "I know! Let's tell everyone that He resurrected! And we'll get to be the leaders of this new religion. Except, let's teach everyone that Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world, and so we'll give away all of our money; and when other people try to kill us, we won't fight back. And maybe, just maybe, if we're lucky, we can all get martyred through painful, humiliating deaths." And all the disciples are like, "That's a GREAT idea. Yeah. ME FIRST!" That just doesn't seem that plausible to me."* I think he's right. We have solid reason to believe every word that John and the other writers have written.

We have solid reason, evidence, proof, to trust Jesus with our questions, fears, and doubts. He has wounds in His hands and sides to prove His love and trustworthiness. Maybe you've been hurt- even abused- by the church, another believer, a pastor, who has misrepresented Jesus. Maybe there are some dots that aren't connecting as you read His word. Maybe some of the

stories recorded sound outlandish. Maybe you haven't been able to answer a skeptic's questions. Maybe the diminishing popularity of Christianity has you questioning if you really believe the authority of God's word. I want to encourage you to consider that Jesus is in fact real and present. He is fully aware of and wants to walk with you through your questions, fears, and doubts. He wants you to find answers, so that you would be filled more fully with his Holy Spirit, so that you then would be better equipped to fulfil the unique mission and purpose He has for you, in bringing about His peace to others. There are answers out there- after all, He is the author of truth. I believe He wants to help you overcome your doubts and help you seek out answers concerning His truth.

My prayer for you today is that you would be completely honest with Jesus about your questions and doubts. And that you would choose to seek answers in Him- in His word- digging deeper, rather than pulling away, as we often do. Ask another believer to walk with you through the process of pressing into Jesus further, ask someone to walk with you through the process of seeing that His presence is manifested in every room of your heart.