

“WITHOUT A DOUBT”**John 20:19-29**

Don't you just hate when you miss some fantastic moment? You can be stargazing with a friend, take your eyes off the sky for just a moment – then your friend says, “Did you see that shooting star? It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen!” And you missed it. Did it really happen or is your friend just messing with you? I know we had problems with this when my kids would play “Punch Buggy,” that's on all the VW commercials these days. It's a road game they played where if you see a Volkswagen Beetle before the other person, you yell, “Punch Buggy Red” (or whatever color it is) and punch the other player in the arm. Sometimes they swore they saw it when they punched, but the rest of us didn't see it. Most times we doubted it. They just wanted to get their punch in.

In John 20, it's Easter Sunday and the disciples are hiding behind locked doors from the authorities. Then Jesus just appears. They are all praising God – “He is alive. He is risen from the dead!” They spend time talking with Jesus – then suddenly – He's gone! Of course that's when Thomas walks in and says, “Hey, what's going on?” “You just missed Him!” “Him Who?” “Jesus!” “Get outta here!” “No, really, He's alive we saw Him – healed and whole – just with the nail holes and spear hole in His side. He just appeared out of no where.” “Sure, He did. Was Big Foot and E.T. with Him?” “Nooo! You mean you don't believe us?” “You've got to admit it's a little far fetched. I would have to put my finger in the nail holes and my hand in his side, if I'm going to believe a story like that.”

Poor Thomas got the worst nickname of all. Remember how other disciples had nicknames? Simon was “The Rock” or “Rocky,” James & John were “Sons of Thunder.” Thomas' nickname was “Didymus” which meant “Twin” as in twin minds or “Doubter.” We've known him as “Doubting Thomas.” To doubt means to have two minds, to be double minded, when you are just not sure, you have two minds on the subject and you can't decide which one is right. Doubters like Thomas are often skeptical and pessimistic. Like in John 11:16 when Jesus is heading back toward Jerusalem where His life is in danger, Thomas says, “Let's go too, so we'll all die with Him.” Doubting Thomas.

Can you doubt and still be a Christian? I believe you can. I don't know of any Christian with a deep faith who has never gone through some kind of doubt – look at Job, look at Peter, look at Jesus in Gethsemane. Still, the Bible doesn't seem to be very keen on doubt. James says in James 1:5-8

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

In other words don't be wishy-washy, going back & forth like the waves of the sea. Have faith that God will provide. But just saying, "Have faith" to a doubter means nothing. It's like the saying about someone from the state of Missouri. Missouri is called the "Show Me" state. Prove it. Show me. I'm from Missouri, you've got to "show me" before I believe it. Yet God doesn't always work that way. And so the doubter struggles between two minds.

Being in the ministry for many years, I have seen certain things that will trigger doubt in a believer: Doubt that God is good; Doubt that Jesus is with us and cares. I've seen this kind of doubt emerge due to: tragedy, disappointment, disillusionment, or new ideas that challenge and shake our belief system.

In the late 1940s, Charles Templeton was a close friend and preaching associate of Billy Graham. He effectively preached the gospel to large crowds in major arenas. However, intellectual doubts began to nag at him. He questioned the truth of Scripture and other core Christian beliefs. He finally abandoned his faith and made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Billy to do the same. He felt sorry for Billy and commented, "He committed intellectual suicide by closing his mind." Templeton resigned from the ministry and became a novelist and news commentator. He also wrote a critique of the Christian faith, Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. Journalist Lee Strobel interviewed him for his book, The Case for Faith. Templeton was 83 and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He revealed some of the reasons he left the faith:

"I started considering the plagues that sweep across parts of the planet and indiscriminately kill—more often than not, painfully—all kinds of people, the ordinary, the decent, and the rotten. And it just became crystal clear to me that it is not possible for an intelligent person to believe that there is a deity who loves."

Lee Strobel then asked him about Jesus and was surprised at the response. Templeton believed Jesus lived but never really considered himself to be God: He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. He's the most important thing in my life. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say I *adore* him! Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. He is the most important human being who has ever existed. And if I may put it this way, *I miss Him*. Templeton's eyes filled with tears and he wept freely. He refused to say more. Templeton died a skeptic, a doubter.

At times in her life, Mother Teresa felt abandoned by God. Archbishop of Calcutta Henry D'Souza said that in one letter, she wrote that she had been walking the streets of Calcutta searching for a house where she could start her work. At the end of the day, she wrote in her diary, "I wandered the streets the whole day. My feet are aching, and I have not been able to find a home. And I also get the Tempter telling me, 'Leave all this, go back to the convent from which you came.'" She found her home, and the rest is history. The Missionaries of Charity feeds

500,000 families a year in Calcutta alone, treats 90,000 leprosy patients annually, and educates 20,000 children every year. Mother Teresa faced her doubts and died in a joyous faith.

What is the difference between Templeton and Teresa? What happened to where one left his faith and lived his doubts and the other lived her faith and left her doubts?

Every Christian doubts at some time. At times it only lasts a moment – a fleeting thought, sometimes it can last for months or years. The Monday night after the first Easter Sunday, the disciples are sitting in the room, waiting or jumping at every noise. Jesus doesn't show up. Thomas was becoming more doubtful – "So, He just appeared here in the room behind locked doors, did He?" "Just wait. You'll see." Nothing. Tuesday - nothing, Wednesday - nothing, Thursday – no sign of Jesus. By then the rest of the disciples must have begun to doubt themselves. Sabbath – surely He'll show up on the Sabbath! No Jesus. Then Sunday night, a week after he first appeared, Jesus shows up again.

²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:27-29)

I don't know why Jesus waits to show up sometimes – I just know He does wait at times and He does show up - usually in an unexpected way.

You might have seen the movie, "Patch Adams" starring Robin Williams. Adams is a young man who goes through a personal crisis. After his recovery he decides to enter medicine so he can help people. But he believes people need more than just medicine – they need human compassion and caring. Outside of med school he starts a holistic medical clinic. One young lady, another medical student who Patch befriends, has been emotionally distant, but wants more in her medical practice, so she chooses to work in the clinic with him. One night one of the patients murders her and commits suicide. Patch is so overwhelmed with grief, he decides to drop out of medicine and give it all up. This scene is where he is standing on a cliff near his clinic, overlooking the beautiful, but dangerous scenery, as he talks to God of his grief and struggle. In his prayer, he accuses God of being uncaring. But as he turns away from the cliff, a butterfly lands on his medical bag and then on Patch's chest. It then flies into the sky. Patch gets the message. God has answered and shown that He does care.

I believe it is part of our nature to struggle with our faith. I like what Henry Drummond in Listening to the Giants said, "We are born questioners. Look at the wonderment of a little child in its eyes before it can speak. The child's great word when it begins to speak is "why." Every child is full of every kind of question, about every kind of thing that moves, and shines, and changes, in the little world in

which it lives. That is the incipient doubt in the nature of man. Respect doubt for its origin. It is an inevitable thing. It is not a thing to be crushed. It is a part of man as God made him. ... Doubt is the prelude of knowledge."

If you are struggling with doubts today, it's OK. Even some of the disciples doubted – even when they saw Him after the resurrection. Matthew 28:16-17 says:

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Sometimes it takes awhile – just don't give up. Faith in God is not intellectual suicide. The strongest faith emerges from the treacherous waters of doubt. Jesus will come to you. Faith comes when Jesus comes to us in surprising and unexpected ways and calms the rocking waters of doubt, just as He came walking on the water and calmed a raging sea. Then we stop doubting and believe, crying out to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."