

“Turning Question Marks into Exclamation Marks”

Text: John 20:24-31

This day commemorates the greatest miracle of the Christian faith, i.e. **the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. The apostle Paul summed it up **“(And) If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” Our meeting here is meaningless if Jesus did not rise. I Corinthians 15:14**

Have you ever been called a “Doubting Thomas?” This morning I want to show you where that idea originated. It comes from the book called John chapter 20:24-29. With respect to God’s Word will you stand as I read it to you?

Prayer: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Amen
You may be seated.

Thomas was one of the twelve men chosen by Jesus to be an apostle. Thomas seems to have become more famous for his doubts than for his outstanding ministry he began in Southern India. He is given the credit for starting the Marathoma church in South India. Joyce and I were privileged to minister there a number of years ago.

But Thomas was not the only one who has struggled with doubt. Other outstanding Bible characters have succumbed to doubt.

The 99 year old Abraham fell on his face laughing when the Lord told him that his 90 year old wife would give birth to a son. I think I would have laughed to. But in a year there was a bouncing baby boy named Isaac helping his dad celebrate his 100th birthday. Gen. 17:17

The noted song writer and choir director named Asaph fell into the pit of doubt and wrote about it in Psalm 73. His songs had turned into a minor key because he could not honestly sing about the goodness of God as he saw the evil non-believing crowd having more fun and more wealth than the Godly Sabbath keeping folks. He wrote in Psalm 73: ***“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”*** Asaph kept his doubts all bottled up in his heart because he did not want to harm his children’s faith.

The prophet Habakkuk suffered from the waves of doubt expressed

in his short three chapter book. His despair, in the language of today world would be somewhat like, “God don’t you read the newspaper? Every day that I hear the news about killings, adultery, stealing. Wake up God.” But God spoke to his doubts and in that conversation was born the verse that shook the world in Luther’s day. “The just shall live by faith.”

And wow! John the baptizer comes to mind. As he languished in Herod’s prison, he sent his followers to Jesus, “Are you truly the Messiah or do we wait for another?” Matthew 11:4-6

**SO IF YOU HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT GOD AND HIS WORD,
YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST TO BE CONFUSED AND
DISTURBED EITHER BY WHAT YOU SEE OR DON’T SEE.**

This morning I want to share three exercises that will help to convert your question marks into exclamation marks, **TURN YOUR DOUBTS INTO CONVICTONS.**

I. IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF YOUR DOUBTS.

1. **SATAN**—“The father of lies” is an expert in creating doubts. He tricked Eve, the first woman of human kind by planting the seed of doubt. He asked her, “Did he (God) really say that?” Genesis 2:2-6

I believe the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Corinthian church, that Satan masquerades his servants as “servants of righteousness.” Some of those servants occupy seats of learning, diplomas decorate their offices in many universities and even seminaries. There they plant seeds of doubt in the minds of trusting men and women with questions about God’s creative acts and even His existence and the resurrection of Jesus.

2. **UNFAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES**—Gideon was filled with doubt and questions when the angel of the Lord visited him and called him to be a mighty leader in Israel. Notice Gideon’s response in Judges 6:13. In essence he asked, “If He (God) is with us, why are we having such a tough time?”

3. **UNCONFESSED SIN** can muddle our minds. When a person is born again the Holy Spirit takes up residence in that person. But when that person begins to drift from the will of God and begins to follow the crowd the Holy Spirit is quenched. The believer is less sensitive to the voice of truth and faith. Discerning right and wrong, truth and error are more difficult causing doubts about the acts of God and the need to be submissive to the Holy Spirit.
4. **PRIDE** might be the culprit. This happens when we begin to think of ourselves as authorities in matters of faith and morals. We count ourselves as modern experts in a changing world. We choose to break away from the so-called old-fashioned commands of God. In the civil war times a friend of General Grant told him that General Sumner did not believe the Bible. Grant responded, "Of course not, Sumner did not write it."

CONTINUE TO TRACK DOWN THE SOURCE OF YOUR DOUBTS. **DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS AND START BELIEVING.** Jesus said "stop doubting and believe. v.27 Raymond Edman said "Don't doubt in the dark what God has revealed in the light." I like very much the thought of having faith that searches for the truth.

[transition] Take time to know yourself. Do you have a disposition to tendency to question everything? To be negative, prone to veto any idea that's new.

11. **ANALYZE THE WAY YOU'RE WIRED.**

1. We have met Thomas on two other occasions. John 11:7-8, and 16 Thomas said, "Let us go and die with him." There was a man who loved Jesus and was loyal to Jesus, even to die with him, but he also gives a hint of his melancholic and pessimistic spirit. He was right about Jesus' death, but his own death would be quite a distant matter. He saw the worst in the situation. The next time we see Thomas is in John 14 where Jesus is describing the glory of His Father's house where Jesus would customize our future home.

Jesus said, *“You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

Verse 5. Thomas was not wowed by the glorious truth of heaven and shows again his plain spoken demand for clarity of thought. He was a realist. Imagination was not his long suit. “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way.” This moment of negativity gave Jesus the opportunity to speak the most wonderful verse, “I am the way (to God), the truth (about) God and life (from God).”

Faith did not come easily for Thomas: He could easily dismiss the report of Mary Magdalene that she had seen the resurrected Jesus. “Oh, she’s just having a flashback from her demon-possessed days!”

He could remind Peter’s report of Jesus appearing to him by reminding him that when Jesus was coming toward them on the Sea of Galilee he thought he was a ghost. So Peter was sometimes vulnerable to ghost appearances.

NO UNLESS I SEE AND TOUCH, I WILL NOT BELIEVE v.24.

I’ve met Thomas many times in my 50 plus years of preaching. Some people hear a new idea of church growth, a vision for the church or a plan to revitalize the congregation. And their first response is “Well, I just don’t know that.” And then there’s the Baptist almost inspired words, “We’ve never done it that way before”. “I can see a problem with that.”

While others would exclaim:

“That’s neat.”

“What a great idea!”

“Let’s try it.”

“It won’t hurt to experiment.”

[Now we come to the last beatitude that Jesus spoke while he visited earth, Thomas threw away his doubts when he saw the wounds of Jesus and worshipped Jesus as his personal God. Notice Jesus’ response which defines a higher level of faith, verse 29]

III. ASPIRE FOR NOBLE FAITH

1. Thomas doubt turned to one of the noblest phrases every spoken.” My Lord and my God.” HE WAS NOT NOW FAITHLESS, BUT FAITHFUL.

It must have put a smile on the face of Jesus I’m sure, but with it he announced a higher praise for future followers. **Read John 20:29** The apostle Peter never forgot that beatitude. In his old age he wrote “*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*” I Peter 1:8-9

The Word of God is very clear, “ Hebrews 11:1 “faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of what we do not see and “without faith it is impossible to please God .”

2. Be consistent in worship attendance. Remember my mention of Asaph. In Psalm 73: 16-17 “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me *till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny.*” Peter had missed church on the day of the resurrection. What a terrible day to miss church on Easter.

The Hebrew Christians were exhorted to assemble every Lord’s day and so much the more as they see the day approaching.

There is solid reason for the Bible to include the questioning spirit of Thomas. I would like to thank Thomas for his doubts. He doubted so that we do not have to doubt. James, like his step brother James said treated the doubter with mercy. Jesus in essence was saying, “Thomas, you wanted proof of my rising from the dead. “Look, Touch.” You are part of the convicting evidence that I am alive from the dead. You will be added to the appearance of Jesus to his half brother James, who before was not a believer but when he saw the resurrected Jesus he believed and became a leader in the Jerusalem church. You will be part of that crowd of more than 500 worshippers who will see me on Mt. Tabor. You

will be blessed to get to know Saul of Tarsus who will do his best to destroy the infant church, but will be converted when I appear to him. He will become the interpreter of the church to thousands.

Dear friend are you letting doubts about the Bible, about the church, about the Christian life hinder you in believing and acknowledging Him as your One and Only Savior? You can take doubts to far. Surely you don't need to have all the answers about the divine and the eternal. Rather, have faith that searches for truth.

[For the communicator find illustrations of people who have dealt successfully with doubt. My illustration is the crisis of faith that Dr. Billy Graham experienced at the age of 38. It is found in his book entitled, Just as I am.