

Resurrection Relevance – Week 4 – “Never Stop Seeking”

Introduction

Imagine being remembered as a doubter for two thousand years! Thomas gets a bad rap based on one moment of uncertainty. The Risen Lord gently chided him for his initial doubt but did not condemn him for it. To be fair to Thomas, he was not the only disciple with doubts; he was the only one who was willing to say them aloud. There are plenty of other examples of godly men and women in the Bible who sometimes struggled with doubt. John the Baptist began to doubt his initial assessment of Jesus while he languished in prison, and Jesus apparently did nothing to free him. The prophet Habakkuk questioned God’s timing and wondered why a good God would allow evil to thrive. This led to doubt about God’s good intentions for His people. Eve doubted God’s goodness when she took fruit from the forbidden tree because the serpent implied that God was not good if he placed restrictions on them. These are only a few examples.

Doubt can be good, so long as we use it to get to the right truth. In the story of Paul and Silas’ visit to Berea, the Jews who heard Paul speak “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11 NIV). They addressed their doubts by turning to Scripture, which is one of the best ways to deal with them. God is patient with us when we struggle with doubts. We must never allow our doubts to keep us from seeking God when we need Him most. This is beautifully expressed in the words of the father of a boy who was possessed after he doubted about Jesus’ ability to heal his son. Jesus told him, “Everything is possible for one who believes” to which the father desperately responded, “I do believe, help me overcome my belief” (Mark 9:23-24 (NIV)).

Jesus first gave the “Great Commission” to eleven men laying prostrate before them in worship, some of them with doubt in their hearts. He knew that all their doubts would be definitively answered when he sent the Holy Spirit to live in them. This is also true of us in the sense that when we surrender our doubts to God, the Holy Spirit. Our doubts can motivate us to seek the truth as we rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us through prayer, Scripture and the guidance of other godly believers. This journey carries us through the trials and storms of life to that glorious moment when all our questions will be answered.

Opening Discussion:

1. Share one thing that you found helpful from Sunday's message.
2. What are some doubts that non-believers frequently have about Jesus?

Study Time:

The story of Thomas' post-resurrection life is fascinating. According to tradition, he travelled east after Pentecost, eventually reaching India where he proclaimed the gospel and established the first Christian communities. He is believed to have been martyred there around A.D. 72. Thomas is remembered in India as a devoted disciples and the founder of the church there.

1. Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to his disciples in the place where they were staying. His doubts did not arise from hardness of heart but from a place of uncertainty about news that seemed too good to be true. To his credit, he stayed with the other disciples and waited for Jesus to appear to them again. We can be sure that they discussed the amazing things that they had heard and witnessed about Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
 - a. What are some preconceptions about death that led Thomas (and the other disciples) to doubts that Jesus had risen from the dead?
 - b. Thomas exchanged his doubts for faithfulness after Jesus told him to touch the wounds on his wrists and side. Thomas responded by declaring his faith in Jesus: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus replied, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). **What are some differences between belief based on what we can see, and belief based on the testimony of others?**

- c. Thomas was willing to voice his doubts, which is to his credit. Doubt can grow stronger when we refuse to acknowledge it and face it. Thomas shared his doubts with the other disciples, and they responded by telling him what they had seen and heard. **What benefits are there to sharing our doubts with other believers? What are some of the dangers?**

2. Habakkuk was active as a prophet about a century after the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom Israel in 722 B.C. His prophetic ministry began in 612 during the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah, and lasted until Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 586/7 B.C. Judah began its final period of moral and spiritual decline under Josiah's son Jehoahaz. Habakkuk's words are more prayer than prophecy, questioning God's apparent silence in response to the threat posed by the Babylonians.
 - a. Read **Habakkuk 1:1-4** and reflect on the challenges to our faith that come when we see evil and injustice prevail in the world while God's people suffer.
 - b. Habakkuk questioned God's timing, crying out "How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out "Violence!" but you do not save" (Habakkuk 1:2). **What are some ways that suffering can help us grow in our faith? What are some ways that it can challenge our faith?**
 - c. Jesus condemned hardness of heart – the deliberate refusal to believe in him and his message – not honest doubts. One way to deal with doubts is to submit them to God in faith. Sometimes the only way to address our doubt is by remembering that God works in ways that we do not always understand. Read **Isaiah 55:8-9** and reflect on how trusting God can help us live with and through our doubts.

3. The story of Eve's encounter with the serpent (Genesis 3:1-6) is not one that we typically associate with doubt, but it is there, nonetheless. Her doubts is

evident in her willingness to believe the serpent when he told her that God forbade her and Adam from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because he was withholding wisdom from them. Everything that God did in the story of creation was good (complete, beneficial) including the command he gave to Adam and Eve. She allowed what she could see and touch to cast doubts on the goodness of God's command and His intentions.

- a. Eve (and Adam) chose immediate gratification over lifelong obedience when they ate the forbidden fruit. They believed the serpent's lie that they would "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5) if they ate what God told them not to eat. God does not always act in ways that we expect, which can lead to doubt. **What are some of the doubts that can arise when God does not answer our prayers when and how we want Him to answer them?**

- b. The serpent God's reason for his command. Rather than taking time to recall and reflect on what God had told them, Adam and Eve chose to take the serpent at his word. They allowed their doubts to lead them away from the truth rather than to greater knowledge about God and their need to be wholly dependent on Him. **What are some ways that we can use Scripture to answer doubts about Jesus?**

- c. The serpent's definition of wisdom (knowing good and evil) is not God's definition of it. The serpent implied that wisdom came from knowledge, but true, godly wisdom comes from trusting that God knows what is best for us in every aspect of life. **What are some ways that trusting God even when we have doubts help us live with them and even grow beyond them?**