

# Doubt and the Resurrection

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. It's good to be with you here this morning. Like Tommy said, I do campus ministry down the road in College Park, and I love getting to work with college students.

And while I've been doing that, being here at Advent has been a great church home for me to be here. So I'm delighted to be here and to teach from the Word this morning.

So we're now in the season of Easter, and this season is a time where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. And we consider what it means that Jesus is alive, that He has rose from the dead, that He's defeated sin and death.

And we consider what that means not only for our hope for life after death and our hope in a renewed world, but we also consider what that means for us in our lives today.

And the reality that the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is available to us in our lives right now through the Holy Spirit by faith. And so it's interesting that in a season where we are thinking about resurrection and hope and life in a renewed world, that we come to a passage on doubt.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] This passage is after the resurrection, and you have the disciples who have seen Jesus alive and many others.

But there's one disciple who has yet to see Him alive. It's the disciple Thomas. And when he hears the report of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, he initially doesn't believe it.

He refuses to believe what his close friends have told him. And in one sense, this story is surprising. That one of the people who knew Jesus the best, who saw Him teach, who saw Him perform miracles, would end up being one of the people who would doubt Him the most, who would doubt His resurrection the most.

So on one hand, this story is surprising, but I think for me at least, this story is also a breath of fresh air. Because I think that many of us can resonate with Thomas.

I'm kind of a natural skeptic at heart. And whether we would say that we have been a Christian for a long time, or whether we would say we're trying to figure out if we believe in God at all, I think we can all resonate with Thomas to some degree, because we all experience doubt in some form or another.

[ 2 : 2 5 ] So I think some of us wrestle with maybe more intellectual and philosophical doubt. Maybe we doubt whether God is real, whether we can know He's real, whether the Word is true, whether it's a reliable historical account, whether Christianity is rational.

And so, you know, maybe we might consider ourselves a person of reason or science, and so we have trouble with Christianity intellectually. But for maybe some more of us, maybe our doubt is more kind of existential and emotional, that we would say we believe God's real, we believe Christianity is true, but oftentimes God feels absent from us.

And we wonder if He really loves us, if He really cares for us, if He's really involved in the mundane, ordinary circumstances of our life.

Maybe some of you are in a season of particular difficulty or suffering, and it's seasons like that that often cause us to doubt the goodness and the love of God.

There's a range of doubts that we can experience in this life, and I've experienced a range of doubts from intellectual to emotional to existential.

[ 3 : 3 8 ] And the question is, what do we do with them? What do we do with our doubts? What do we do when, for a variety of reasons, doubt enters our lives?

This passage, I think, is a good case study to help us learn and understand whether we have been a Christian for a long time or whether we would say we're not a Christian. It's a good case study to figure out what is it that we do with our doubt.

I want to look at, I think this passage teaches us three things about what to do with our doubt. I think it teaches us that we have to uncover our doubt, that we have to examine the evidence, and that we have to fuel our faith.

We have to uncover our doubt, we have to examine the evidence, we have to fuel our faith. So first, we have to uncover our doubt. So, the Gospel writer John tells us that eight days after the resurrection, all other disciples have seen Jesus except Thomas.

And, like we read in the passage earlier, that even though they tell him that they've seen him raised from the dead, he doesn't believe them. Verse 25 says, And even though he lived 2,000 years ago, I think Thomas is actually kind of a modern person.

[ 4 : 58 ] He has modern sensibilities. He approaches truth. He approaches knowledge. And Christianity, in the same way a lot of modern people in our culture do, that a lot of people say, you know, in order for me to believe something, particularly believe in something like God, there has to be real, solid, empirical evidence for it.

And so, if I don't see empirical evidence for something, I'm not going to believe it. I'm not going to trust it. And so, when it comes to Christianity, a lot of people doubt the Christian faith because of this kind of thinking. Maybe you would say that's a lot like you, that you have doubts about whether God or really, you know, the resurrection in particular, is true.

You say, I'm a person of science. I'm a person of reason. I don't believe anything. I can't prove empirically. But what happens when we uncover that doubt? What happens when we look underneath that doubt?

I think if we actually uncover that doubt, if we look underneath it, what we'll actually find is belief. So, for example, if you would say that, you know, science is the only way that we can know things in the world.

You know, what's interesting about that statement is that it's actually not a scientific statement. It's a philosophical one. It's not about the observable natural world that we can test and prove through science.

[ 6 : 11 ] It's actually a statement of epistemology. It's a statement of how we know what we know. And so, one of the problems with that statement is it can't live up to its own standard.

You'd say the only way we can know stuff is through science, but yet you can't prove that statement scientifically. And so, if that's something that you hold, the question is, why do you believe that? How do you know? How would you prove it? How would you show it? How would you show that science is the only way that you can know truth in the world? See, underneath your doubt, if you uncover your doubt, what you would find is belief.

What you find is faith. And so, what is faith? You know, I think oftentimes in our culture, this word faith gets thrown around, and what we mean when we say it is it's belief without evidence.

It's belief in something even if you don't have evidence for it. But that's not at all what faith is. That's not at all how the Bible talks about faith. How the Bible talks about faith is trust, is committed trust.

[ 7 : 13 ] It's committed trust to, you know, the evidence that we see, to the knowledge that we have available to us. But really, we don't have, we can't know everything.

We can't have all the evidence because we're finite. We're limited as human beings and what we can know about the world. And so, that's why faith always coexists with doubt. Underneath our doubt is belief.

It's faith. All of our doubts, no matter what they are, are all based on faith. The first time that I really kind of started to doubt my faith was in college. And it was just a particularly difficult season of my life.

I was dating a girl that I was in love with and I thought that I was going to marry. And we were dating for quite a while. And at the end of our relationship, she broke up with me.

And I was devastated. And it was really painful. And it was one of the most painful times in my life. It's one of the most painful things to have someone that you love reject you.

[ 8 : 17 ] And so, what I was going through was so painful at the time that I began to doubt. And I thought, how could God be loving and good and allow me to go through this?

And I began to question God's goodness and his love and his character. But what, as I thought through, as I thought through my doubts, what I began to discover was that my doubt was based on a belief.

And that belief went something like this, that if I live a good life, if I follow Jesus, if I obey him, things should go well for me. Everything should work out. And now, I might not have been able to tell you that explicitly, but in my heart, that's what I believed.

Live a good life, and God will reward you. And so, when the storms of life came, I started to doubt. But that doubt was based on a belief. But the belief wasn't strong.

It was fragile. It was a fragile belief. It had no capacity to endure hardship. There was no capacity to endure suffering. Whatever your doubts are, they're based on faith.

[ 9 : 22 ] Because really, our doubts are alternate beliefs. That's what they are. And so, what we have to do is we have to uncover our doubts. We have to figure out, is the faith that our doubts are based on, is it strong enough?

Is it rational enough? Does it make sense? Does it make sense of the world? Does it make sense of God? And of the Bible and what he says? See, for Thomas, he had a really strong faith in his empirical knowledge, but that faith wasn't strong enough.

When he was confronted with stronger evidence, he had to change his core assumptions. He had to change his core beliefs. And that's what we have to do as well. So secondly, we have to examine the evidence.

We have to examine the evidence. So Thomas says that, unless I see with my own eyes, I won't believe. And what happens? He sees Jesus with his own eyes.

Verse 26 says that, eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. And although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

[ 10 : 28 ] And then I think what is a very interesting exchange, in verse 27, Jesus turns right to Thomas and starts engaging his doubt. And notice the way that he engages with Thomas.

You know, he doesn't dismiss him. He doesn't scold him. He doesn't shame him. He doesn't say, you know, stop trying to think so critically. You know, stop trying to be so rational. Stop trying to be so empirical.

Right? He doesn't say that. He actually says the opposite. He says, verse 27, he says, put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Stop doubting and believe. Jesus invites Thomas to consider the truth for himself, to examine the evidence for himself. He's saying, look, you want empirical evidence?

Here I am. Reach out. Touch me. Feel my wounds in my side. Now, this is so important because it's important because we need to know that to be a Christian, is not to believe in blind faith.

[ 11 : 28 ] It's not to believe without evidence. Christianity doesn't dismiss rational inquiry. No, it invites it. It invites examination. It invites skepticism. It invites inquiry into the truth.

To be a Christian is to be someone who considers and who wrestles with the reasons for believing. Now, when it comes to the reasons for believing the resurrection, unfortunately, we don't have the resurrected body of Jesus here with us.

But here's what we do have. What we do have is a lot of good, solid, historical reasons for believing that the resurrection really happened. And I'm just going to fly through three quick reasons.

And if you're interested in researching this more, exploring this more, I'm going to recommend a couple books at the end that would be helpful to help you explore more. One of the first reasons that we have of why we can believe historically the resurrection really happened was the widespread eyewitness evidence.

So the early church's testimony was based on the eyewitnesses of those who saw Jesus alive. So in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's talking about the resurrection and he says that Jesus appeared to the disciples and he appeared to more than 500 people.

[ 12 : 44 ] And so part of what Paul's doing is he's saying, look, I'm talking about the resurrection and how this matters for our hope and for our faith. But listen, don't take my word for it.

If you don't believe me, these people are still alive. They're still living in Jerusalem. If you really want to go and talk to them, you can go and talk to them. There was incredibly widespread eyewitness evidence.

The second thing is that the gospel records record that the first people that Jesus appears to alive were women. Now this is an interesting detail but it's fascinating because in the Greco-Roman culture, that society had a fairly low view of women which is sad but the reason why it's important is that a woman could not testify in court.

Her testimony was not valid in a legal court of law. And why that matters is because if you're trying to make something up, if you're trying to persuade people in the first century, that this person rose from the dead and if you're just trying to make up a legend, you wouldn't include women as a testimony.

You would include the most reliable men that you can find and so what you have to do is you have to ask, why include this detail? If they just were trying to fabricate it, if they just were trying to make it up, why include this detail?

[ 14 : 06 ] The most logical explanation, I think, is that the gospel writers were simply just recording what happened. They just were recording the events as they took place. And Jesus appears first to two women.

The third is the rapid growth of Christianity. So in the ancient world, you know, the Roman Empire was vast and so you had a lot of revolutionaries, you had a lot of groups of people who would try to rebel against the Roman Empire, who would try to overthrow the authorities.

But as the great military power, Rome knew, all you have to do to crush the rebellion, all you have to do to crush the revolution is to kill the leader or to imprison the leader.

And if you do, the revolution dies. The rebellion dies. And that's what Rome did throughout the Mediterranean area. But it's interesting, when they kill Jesus, when they execute Jesus, the revolution doesn't die.

the revolution explodes. And it explodes and it explodes and it explodes some more. And it explodes through suffering and death and persecution until a few centuries later.

[ 15 : 20 ] It has exploded so much that it's the official religion of the Roman Empire. And so the question that you have to ask is why? Why when they killed this group, this leader, this revolutionary, how did it explode?

And so what you have to do is you have to ask yourself, you have to consider the evidence for the resurrection. And if you would say that this is something that you want to look into, that this is something you're considering, the truth of the Christian faith, two books that treat this topic from a historical perspective are *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Balkan and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* by N.T. Wright.

And these books, I think, would be great resources for you to look at if you're interested in looking at this more. But here's the point. Listen, if you doubt the resurrection, if you doubt if this could possibly be true historical event, you can't just say it just couldn't have happened.

You can't just dismiss it. You've got to come up with a better explanation. You've got to come up with a better reason why all these things happened in the first century. Because unless you do, your doubt isn't based on a solid belief.

Your doubt is actually based on blind faith. And so if you're a skeptic like Thomas, you've got to examine the evidence for the resurrection. But for others of us, our main form of doubt isn't intellectual or philosophical.

[ 16 : 46 ] It's more personal and existential. It has to do with the realities of our lives. Many of us would say that we believe Christianity is true. We believe the resurrection. But my doubts are about doubting things that I know to be true.

I'm having a hard time really believing and experiencing what I believe in my mind is true. Maybe like me, like you've experienced doubt in your life that I did when I was in college.

That when the storms of life come, you've doubted, you know, does God really love me? Does He really care? Is He really involved in the circumstances of my life?

And so for those of us who are there, what we need is not more evidence. What we need is confidence to believe in our hearts what we already know. And so for that, we have to fuel our faith. We have to fuel our faith. In verse 28, Thomas sees Jesus and he sees the scars on his hands and on his side. And he says, he recognizes Him as Lord and as God.

[ 17 : 51 ] And in a moment, he has moved from committed skepticism to confident faith. He no longer has a reason to hold his prior beliefs.

Jesus is there standing right before him. He can reach out and touch him and see him and talk to him. And it's easy maybe for Thomas to move towards faith in that moment.

I mean, Jesus is right there with him. And so what about us? What does it look like for us to fuel our faith? What does it look like for us to have deep confidence in what we know, even though we can't reach out and touch Jesus with our hands?

We have to doubt our doubts and we have to remember his scars. In order to fuel our faith, we have to doubt our doubts and we have to remember his scars. We have to doubt our doubts. See, doubt happens in the Christian life when how we feel conflicts with what we know to be true about God. And this most happens when the storms of life come. When life is going well, I think it's easy to have confident faith and to trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God. But when the storms of life come, that's when it's easy to doubt, when it's easy to question the goodness and love of God. [19:09] But here's the thing about faith and here's how it works. Faith is not primarily a function of how we feel. It's not primarily a function of how we feel. It's a function of living out what we know to be true despite how we feel, despite our circumstances, despite the difficulty that we're going to.

It's humbling for me to admit that there was a time in my life when I ignored the advice of my parents when I should have followed it. I know that I'm probably the only person who's ever done this in their entire life.

So I'm just going to be lonely in this confession up here. But it was a time in my life when I was getting ready to go to grad school and I was going to move across the country to St. Louis. And, you know, if you've ever moved across the country, the biggest thing you've got to figure out is where you're going to live. And there's so many factors that go into where you're going to live and rent or, you know, share a room or all this stuff.

And so their advice was, you know, Jeff, live on campus. You know, it's more expensive but the community is going to be better. You're going to form better relationships. It's going to be, you know, close to where you go to class.

[20:21] And they were like, you know, it's more expensive but listen, the benefits outweigh the cost. And so they were urging me to live on campus. But I doubted their advice. I doubted the advice of my parents and I followed my own intuition and my own feelings.

And I felt pretty strongly that saving money was a better choice economically. And, you know, I wanted to live in the city and experience the cool hip parts of living downtown and living in the city. I didn't want to live on campus in the suburbs. And so I decided to live off campus. I doubted my parents' advice. I went against them. I went with my own feelings with my own intuition. And it was one of the worst decisions that I ever made because it was one of the most lonely seasons of my life.

I went and lived with a roommate I had never met and I was incredibly disconnected. I was incredibly lonely and it was one of the toughest times emotionally for me in my life. And I look back on that and I regret that decision.

I wish that I had lived on campus. I wish that I had engaged in that community, that friendships. And I look back on that decision and I think, why did I doubt? Why did I doubt the love of my parents, the trust in their relationship and the wisdom that they had?

[21:32] My parents know me. They love me. They have my best interest in mind. I wish I would have trusted that relationship more than I trusted my own intuition, my own feelings. And what I needed in that moment was the ability to rely on the relationship that I had.

What I needed in that moment was the ability to doubt my doubts. To doubt my doubts in the midst of feelings that told me otherwise. And the same is true in our relationship with Jesus. And the classic example of this is the story in the Gospels when Peter's on the Sea of Galilee and they're out on the boat and he sees Jesus walking towards him on the water and he gets out of the boat and he starts walking towards Jesus on the water and he's filled with, it's this faith that allows him to walk in the water.

But then he starts to doubt and he pays attention to the wind and the waves and to the storm around him and he starts to sink. And Jesus says, Jesus grabs him and saves him and he says, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

See for Peter, the reality of the storm was greater than the reality of Jesus. The belief in the power of the storm to sink him was greater than his belief in the power of Jesus to sustain him.

And that's us, isn't it? Isn't that us? I know that's me. When the storms of life come, we need to begin to doubt our doubts, to doubt our feelings, to doubt what we feel so we can live out what we know is true.

[23:01] And this is why, this is why community is so important. This is why good Christian friendships and relationships are so important because none of us, none of us can doubt our doubts by ourselves.

It's an incredibly hard thing to do by ourselves when we need others. You know, every Sunday we say the creed and we say, you know, I believe in the communion of saints. You know, and the communion of saints isn't just this thing where we have people that we can go out to eat with and talk about sports with.

No, the communion of saints is about having people in our life who when the storms of life come can help us doubt our doubts, can look us in the eye and remind us of the goodness and the love and the sovereignty of God who can help us doubt our doubts.

That's what the communion of saints is about. So, in order to fuel our faith we need to doubt our doubts but we also, we've got to remember his scars. We've got to remember his scars.

It's interesting in this passage that Jesus not only invites Thomas to believe in him but to believe by touching his body, to believe by touching his scars. I think it's remarkable that Jesus in his resurrected body still bears the marks of his crucifixion.

[ 24 : 18 ] I don't know about you but this is not what I would have expected at all. I would have expected that if God had the power to defeat sin and death and rise from the dead that he would have certainly had the power to heal a couple scars.

I mean, this kind of seems inconsistent. Of course he would have had the power to heal the scars in his body but he didn't. He kept them. Why did he keep them?

Why did Jesus keep his scars in his resurrected body? I think there's a lot that we could unpack here. I think there's a really robust theology of suffering here for Christians that the resurrected Christ bears our wounds but I think one reason that's based on this passage here in John 20 has to specifically do with our doubts because I think that Jesus knew like Thomas that there is going to be that the people who knew him the most the people who loved him the most the people who were most faithful to him that it was those people who would experience the most doubt.

You know some of you have been following Jesus your entire life and you've been committed and you've been faithful and some of you still doubt whether God is with you in some of your most difficult moments.

Some of you would say that you would never doubt the truth of the gospel that you believe that you are saved by grace that you're justified in him that you're righteous that you are loved and approved by God and yet some of you doubt whether or not God isn't somehow just vaguely disappointed with you all the time.

[ 25 : 53 ] You know some of us I think are utterly convinced that our truth is intellectually solid. We could build a great philosophical and intellectual argument a rational argument for why Christianity is true and yet at the same time we doubt the fact that God loves us that really loves us in our being as much as his word says it does.

I don't know about the individual circumstances of your life I would imagine that that's some of where some of us are at this morning and if we're not there that we have been there or we're going to be there eventually.

You know I love the prayer of the man in Mark 9 who asked Jesus to heal his son and he says Lord I believe that you can heal my son I believe help my unbelief you know it's this incredibly honest confession for the grace the ability to live out our faith to live out what we know despite how we feel and I need that prayer about every five minutes I don't know about you but friends let me tell you something wonderful about Jesus is that even in his resurrected body he bears our scars this is the objective evidence that what we feel and what we experience isn't the thing that is most true about us and it's not the thing that's most true about God it's the objective evidence that the thing that is most true is that the one who was raised from the dead the one who conquered sin and death the one who is ascended at the right hand of the Father the one who reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords is not absent from our pain is not removed from our difficulty he's not aloof from our suffering he's intimately acquainted with it he knows and the objective evidence is that he bears our scars and so when the storms of life come

I think one of the ways that we doubt is we say why? why is this happening to me? and we can doubt the goodness and the love of God but the scars of Jesus are a reminder that even though we might not know what the answer is we may not ever be given an answer for why we're going through this particular thing we can be confident we can have faith in what the answer's not and what the answer's not it's not because God's displeased with us remember his scars remember the fact that all of God's wrath all of his judgment for sin was poured out on Jesus on the cross and if we have faith in Christ it's not because God's displeased with us it's not because God doesn't love

us remember his scars remember the fact remember what he went through for you on Good Friday remember what he went through for you on the cross that's the objective evidence of his great love of his great mercy of his great compassion for you and his love for you isn't past tense it's present tense that's how much he loves you right now it's not because

God has abandoned us remember his scars remember that Jesus was utterly forsaken by the Father so that you and I can know that he will never leave us he will never abandon us listen when we doubt the goodness and the mercy and the love of God the scars of Jesus are an invitation to fuel our faith and to the reminder that he is alive and he's risen and he knows our pain and he is aware of our difficulty and that's why this meal that we're about to eat is so important that's why it's so important that we eat it every week because I have to fuel my faith I have to doubt my doubts if not every week probably like once a day if not more than that the bread and the wine that we're about to eat is a great opportunity weekly to doubt our doubts to doubt how we feel and to trust in what we know to be true which is that God hasn't abandoned us that he's with us that he's good that he loves us and so as we prepare to come to the table

[ 30 : 06 ] I would invite you to consider what is it in your life today that is causing you to doubt the goodness and the love of God what is causing you to question whether God loves in you and delights in you and is for you as much as he says in his word and let this be a moment where you can begin to doubt your doubts let this be a moment where you can start to fuel your faith where you can stop doubting and believe and as John says that by believing that we might have life in his name let's pray and Ps 137 and the future of Israel and to the darkest and to darkest that were because today and the future have already recognized to undermine