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Dealing with Doubt **Pastor Ty Blackburn** **John 20:24-31** **June 19, 2016**

As I mentioned earlier, we come to the passage sometimes referred to, concerning Thomas, ‘Doubting Thomas’, and I think in some ways Thomas gets a bum rap. I think anybody in his situation would have struggled. Maybe he struggled more than the average person might have, but in the providence of God, that was his calling and commission.

And what we see, I want to remind you what I talked about in the last couple of messages, is we’ve been looking at the resurrection appearances of Jesus. What we’ve talked about is that, as we look at these four resurrection appearances that John presents to us in Chapters 20 and 21, one of the things that he wants us to see is the circumstances of the person before they meet the risen Christ, and the circumstances of that same person after they meet the risen Christ. So that in a sense, he is continuing to pile up the evidence of the glory of Christ, that He is truly the Son of God. Look at the difference it makes to meet Jesus. That is what he is saying.

You saw that with Mary Magdalene. She was in a time of great sorrow, overwhelming sorrow, weeping, wailing, mourning, and it is swallowed up by joy. And then we saw the disciples, last time, who were in a time of fear and retreat, hiding, and what Jesus comes to do is to replace their fear with faith, and to send them out on mission. And so here we have Thomas, who we will find in a period of really stubborn skepticism, pervasive doubt, and we find him at the end uttering what theologians and commentators refer to as the most exalted confession in all of the Gospels. This surpasses Peter’s, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Thomas goes from a time of deeper doubt to the time of higher clarity and conviction than any of the other apostles at this point. I mean, obviously they all come to this point as they go, but Thomas is an example of that kind of incredible swing that happens when someone encounters the risen Christ. So the title of the message this morning is ‘Dealing with Doubt’.

What we’re going to see is that, John MacArthur has this statement in a message I read of his this week:

Doubt is a good place to start, it is just a bad place to finish.

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It is a good place to start, it is not a good place to finish. Honest doubt, thoughtful skepticism, open-minded skepticism, is often the birthplace of deep and resounding faith. This is true of the unbeliever, but it is also true of the believer as they grow in Christ. The reality is that we often will find ourselves saying, “I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief,” because the Lord, to increase our faith, to strengthen us in our walk with Christ, will bring us to points of perplexity, doubt, skepticism even. We find ourselves asking questions of the Lord. “Lord, why is this so? Why are you not answering my prayers? Does prayer even make a difference? Lord, why do you allow evil to prevail like it does in this world? It seems to prevail.” Those are questions that, the good news is that the Bible shows us that God is a God who is so great, and so glorious, that He is able to handle our deepest doubts, and our most stubborn skepticism. This is encouraging as we share the Gospel with unbelievers because Jesus can handle their doubts, that what they really need is to come into the presence of Jesus and their doubts will be dealt with.

History is strewn with people who were great doubters, great skeptics, who became great believers. I was reading just recently about Lee Strobel, some of you have seen the book, The Case for Christ. He’s got a whole bunch of books, The Case for..., The Case for... He was a journalism major at the University of Missouri, an unbeliever, atheist, went to Yale Law School, studied law there, so he’d be a more effective journalist. When his wife got saved, it sort of ticked him off, and he set out to prove to her why she was believing a bunch of myths. And what he did was, he approached things from a skeptical point of view, from a negative doubting point of view, but he did with his journalism, and his legal training, you know trying to really prove things. He looked at it carefully, and what happened was he became a follower of Jesus Christ. He became convinced that the word of God is true, that Jesus is truly Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and risen from the dead to reign forever.

We could add person after person, Josh McDowell, another man with legal training, a lawyer, who set out to prove that Christianity was not true, and Jesus doesn’t have a problem with that if you come honestly. If you are an open skeptic, if you are an honest skeptic willing to look at the evidence, bring it on, because the reality is the word of God will stand the test of time. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God stands forever.

It is such a joy in my life to have doubts as a Christian through the years, and to see so many of them go away. When I was in college, it was very, well it is still politically incorrect, but it was even more so in the 80s to be a sixth-day

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creationist, young earth creationist, and at our Baptist college even, none of the faculty members believed in a young earth. Most of them weren't really believers actually, ironically, sadly, but those who were didn't believe in a young earth. They were much too sophisticated to believe in that. They believed in the fact of evolution. So I remember, as a young believer, short of college, you know, struggling with the fact, and Patti and I worked through that. You know, the Bible is clear, and we are just going to have to trust the word of God. But then over time, the evidence continues to pile up for a young earth, in the last 30 years, it is amazing.

As people began to open their minds, that maybe evolution was just a theory, which is all it is, and as a theory, any good scientist knows, any good scientist worth his weight, and worth his salt, knows that you test theories. You don't treat them as sacred cows that can't be questioned. So it is one theory, and so over time, more and more scientists have come around to see that there must be a God who has created this complex, marvelous universe, intelligent design. Many of them haven't become Christians, but they become convinced in the reality of God. That was one thing that was encouraging to me.

Other things, you know, you hear people doubt the integrity of the Bible, and to study that more carefully, and to come to confidence in the fact that the Bible is truly the word of God, it is a perfect reproduction of what God originally gave and inspired His writers to write. Those are just a couple of examples, I could go on and on about doubts that have fallen by the wayside and there are still some things that perplex me. From time to time I find myself still wondering, "Why, Lord, do people who don't trust Christ suffer forever?" That is a hard one. What do you do with that? I think what we're going to see is the answer in every doubt is to take it directly to God. It is to take it to Him, and to take it to Him openly and honestly, but also with a measure of humility and teachability. When you come that way to the Lord, he will deal with you in His time, He will explain what He needs to explain, and He will not explain what He doesn't want to explain. You can ask Job about that, but He is good, and you will find your doubts melt away into more and more faith, and stronger and stronger love for the living God.

This idea that doubt is a good place to start, there is kind of a healthy skepticism that really we ought to have in life, and the Bible encourages that in a sense too. You think of Acts 17:11, when the Bereans were commended because they were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, than the Thessalonian Christians because why? They tested what Paul said to see if it was true. The apostle,

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speaking for God, they still checked him against the Old Testament Scriptures. There was kind of a skepticism, a healthy skepticism, about the way they received His teaching. They checked Him out, and then they gave complete trust.

I was watching the news the other night and saw, it is amazing how many scams there are, isn't it? They find ways to scam all kinds of things all the time. And the other day I was watching, and they were talking about this one guy had been scamming grandparents because he was convincing them that in Atlanta, he was a police officer, and they needed to send money from like Seattle, Washington, New York, to get their grandchildren out of jail. One woman sent him \$10,000 in cash. I know it seems kind of silly, doesn't it? But the guy obviously was very convincing. But she needed not to be gullible, but to be thoughtful, and careful with a hint of skepticism.

So anyway, the dealing with doubt is what we are going to talk about today, in this passage in John 20, Verses 24-29. We are going to read Verses 30-31 because I wanted you to see how it is instructive that John put those two verses right where he does. This is the purpose statement of the book, is Verses 30-31. Look where it comes.

John 20:24 ~ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

Remember Jesus appeared to the disciples, 10 of the 12, on the night after His resurrection, that we just read about previously. And so now, in Verse 24:

John 20:24-31 ~ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus *said to him,

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“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that You would now bless us with Your Holy Spirit. We pray that You would cause Your word to be illuminated in our minds and our hearts. That You would enlighten the eyes of our souls, and that You would cause Your word to accomplish Your purpose in each and every heart. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

‘Dealing with Doubt’. What I want us to do, as we consider this text, is basically I want to take some time to observe the action. We like to do this often when we're doing a study of a passage of Scripture that is a narrative. This is an account, a narration of an event. It is a story, the telling of a story of that which happened. So as you look at a story, you want to feel the force of the story. You don't want to too quickly get in to try to analyze and miss the impact of it. So I want to, first of all, we're going to spend some time, there are basically like two major points with sub-points under them. And the two major points, we're going to *Observe the Action*, and there are going to be three things we do there, with sub-points under those three things. I want you to get your money's worth. And then after we *Observe the Action*, we're going to *Consider the Implications*, and there are going to be three implications that we're going to look at. So *Observe the Action*, and then we're going to *Consider the Implications*.

1) Observe the Action:

So first of all, let's *Observe the Action*, and let's look at three points in the flow of the action. What I want us to think about is first of all, Thomas, in observing the action, we want to look at the change in Thomas. So let's look at Thomas first of all, the first sub-point under *Observe the Action*, *Thomas Before His Encounter with the Risen Christ*. Then we are going to look at *Thomas' Encounter with the Risen Christ*. And thirdly, *Thomas After His Encounter with the Risen Christ*.

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A) Thomas Before His Encounter with the Risen Christ:

So *Thomas Before His Encounter with the Risen Christ*. I want to put this in context a little bit. When you read the other Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Thomas doesn't get any extra airtime, so to speak. The only times you'll see Thomas referred to are in the lists of the apostles in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But in John, Thomas gets some airtime. I want you to look first of all at John 14 and Verse 5. This is in the, "Do not let your heart be troubled," passage. Jesus has told them He is going away. This is the night before He is crucified. He says in Verse 3:

John 14:3-4 ~ If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4And you know the way where I am going."

Jesus tells him, "You know the where I'm going." And look what Thomas does.

John 14:5 ~ Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know..."

Jesus says, "You know." Thomas says, "We do not know." I don't think he said it quite that forcefully as maybe I just did. But he said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, so how do we know the way?" Turn over to Chapter 11, Verse 16. This is the other time he appears in the spotlight for a moment. This is after they have learned of Lazarus' death. Remember Jesus is delayed going back, when they called for Him to come, "Lazarus is sick," Mary and Martha send word, wanting Jesus to come. He stays where He is for several days. Then He hears he is dead, and now he says, "Now it's time to go," basically. The disciples aren't following what is going on. Jesus tells them in Verse 14:

John 11:14 ~ ... "Lazarus is dead, 14and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him."

Now that should have been a perplexing statement. "Why are You glad that he is dead? And how is that going to help us believe?" But Thomas, what I'm going to say about Thomas, I think he is basically, one thing that characterized him ahead of time, Thomas before his encounter with Christ, was pessimism. He was just basically a pessimistic guy. Jesus says, "You know the way," "No, we don't know the way." And Jesus says, "Let's go to Lazarus," now look what Thomas does here in Verse 16.

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John 11:16 ~ Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”

Lazarus is dead, that is sad news, but it takes a certain kind of personality to say, “Let us all go die with Him.” So he seems to be more of a glass is half empty kind of person, than a glass is half full. Now back to John, realizing that, he seems to come at things with kind of a negative slant. Jesus says, “You know the way,” and he is like, looking at the facts that he sees, “No, we don’t know the way. Lazarus is dead, let us die with him.” So in John 20, the Lord chooses to appear to the 10 when Thomas isn’t there. So it is not the 11, it is the 10 of the 12. Why is that?

I mean, now, after that appearance in Verses 19-23, where Jesus shows him His hands and His side, the disciples rejoice, He says, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” and He tells them the authority that they are going to have with the Holy Spirit. That they are going to go and be able to see sins truly forgiven as they proclaim the Gospel. They tell Thomas all about this and you get the sense of the excitement in Verse 25.

John 20:25 ~ So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!”

In fact, the new NAS translates that well, ‘*were saying*’, it is the imperfect tense. The idea is ongoing action in past time. They were continuing to say to him, they didn’t just say it one time, “We’ve seen the Lord.” They were all saying, “We saw the Lord. We have seen the Lord. Thomas, we’ve seen the Lord. Can you believe it? We’ve seen the Lord,” and Thomas says, “No, I don’t believe it.” He wasn’t just characterized by pessimism; I think he was also characterized by a hint of irrationality.

I mean, think about this, he has the eyewitness account of ten apostles who were telling him, “We have seen the Lord.” Peter, and James, and John, and all of the other guys have seen the Lord. Thomas says, “I’m not going to believe it.” He has the two guys on the road to Emmaus that were there when Jesus shows up, according to Luke 24, the same event that John described in John 20:19-23. He has Mary Magdalene, undoubtedly he has heard from her, and the other women. In fact, they are probably all gathered in the upper room, this room here. So he has all that eyewitness testimony, but he says, “That is not good enough.” There is a sense of irrationality about his pessimism.

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And thirdly, *Thomas Before His Encounter with Christ*, is characterized by pessimism, and irrationality, but also by audacity. A certain measure of appalling audacity here. I mean, he is making demands. He says, in fact, the language is quite emphatic.

John 20:25 ~ ...But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

In the Greek it is a double negative. It has the force of, “I will, by no means, believe unless all of my conditions, and all of my demands are met.” William Hendrickson says this about Thomas’ demands. He says:

Thomas is willing to believe, that is on certain conditions, and he himself will lay down these conditions. The mysterious person, about whom the others have been saying so much, must measure up to certain standards which Thomas will establish. He must submit to certain tests which Thomas will apply. Hearing about Him, even from those who have both seen and heard Him, is not enough. Thomas has heard too much already. Thomas wants to see. He also wants to feel. He wants to see the mark of the nails; he wants to put his finger into the place of the nails.

In the original, there is an interesting alliteration here, the words for mark and place are almost identical, ‘*typos*’, and ‘*topas*’. Somewhat like our imprint and impress.

Thomas will not be satisfied if he merely sees the marks which the nails have left on the surface of the hands of the one who has been crucified. No, he must actually run his finger into the nail holes, and even that will not be sufficient. Thomas must be permitted to put his hand into the horrible gash left by the spear. Now, if the mysterious character about whom Thomas has heard so much, will satisfy all these demands, then and not until then, Thomas will believe. But if not, he will definitely not believe.

That is the force of what is going on here. Thomas is emphatic in his skepticism. Thomas before the encounter—pessimism, irrationality, and audacity.

B) Thomas’ Encounter with the Risen Christ:

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Thomas' Encounter with the Risen Christ, now the second sub-point as we *Observe the Action*. After eight days, His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Eight days, Jesus comes in His time. He didn't come immediately to Thomas after that kind of demand. He comes in eight days. In fact, commentators all note that in the Jewish rendering, this is the inclusive eight days, it means it is the second Sunday. Easter is the first day, and the eighth day is the next Sunday. Interesting that Jesus appears to His disciples apparently on that Sunday, and from what we can tell, not in between until the next Sunday. Then later, they would begin to refer to this as 'The Lord's Day', that Sunday is 'The Lord's Day'. It appears that John, in including these details, is kind of explaining to his, remember Jewish and Jewish proselyte audience, he is trying to convince Jews that are still unbelieving about the Roman world, he is trying to convince them that Jesus is truly the Messiah. And he seems to be explaining why it is that Christians now meet on Sunday, because it is 'The Lord's Day'. It is the day in which He rose, it was the day in which He appears the second time. Jesus seemed to want to make that emphasis. In fact, Revelation 1:5, when did Jesus appear to John on the Isle of Patmos? He was in the Spirit on 'The Lord's Day'. So Sunday, this is why we worship on Sunday.

In fact, there is an interesting note about that, 'The Lord's Day', the phrase. Apparently, they used it in the 1st Century to speak in a very culturally relevant way. Because they often, in other cultures at that time, in Egypt for instance, they referred to a certain day of the month as 'The King's Day'. The 25th of every month was 'The King's Day'. And in various parts of the Roman world, particularly Asia Minor, they would have in various places celebrations, and sometimes it would be different days, but they would refer to it as the Emperor's Day in which they were honoring the Roman emperor.

In fact, in one place every Thursday was the Emperor's Day, and so when the followers of Jesus, in seeing the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, they then speak to their culture in such a way to say, "You may think that it's the King's Day or it's the Emperor's Day, but I want to tell you about the Lord's Day, the One who truly is the King of kings and the Lord of lords." So it's eight days, his encounter with the risen Christ, eight days, the eighth day after the resurrection. Jesus speaks and stands in their midst again with the doors having been shut, and once again passing through the walls in His resurrected body that is more real than the matter around us. He stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." He comes in blessing, and that had to be a relief. And He said, "Peace be with all of

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you.” He didn’t say that directly to Thomas. That’s to all of them. They all need His peace, and He extends it to all of them.

But then He looks at Thomas, and it’s interesting, the first thing you note about this as you look at it carefully is He gives Thomas five commands. Thomas had laid down three demands, and Jesus comes eight days later and gives Thomas five commands. There’s a sense even in which though He comes in this amazing condescension and grace and kindness, yet it is the Lord who has come. Five imperatives—*Reach here with your finger* is number one. *See My hands* is number two. Number three is *Reach here your hand*. Number four is *Put it into My side*. Number five is *Don’t be unbelieving, but believing*. You see the Lordship of Jesus Christ even in that. He comes, and He comes to take charge as always. But He’s not just the Lord. He is a loving Lord. The tenderness and condescension of our great Savior.

Think about this, how specific. It’s almost word for word what Thomas had asked. Thomas had said, “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails...” Jesus says, “See My hands.” Thomas had said, “...and put my finger into the place of the nails...” Jesus says, “Bring here your finger.” Thomas had said, “...and put my hand into His side...” And Jesus says, “And bring your hand and put it into My side.” Thomas had said, “...I definitely will not believe.” Or, “...I will by no means believe.” Jesus says, “Be no longer unbelieving, but believing.” The amazing kindness of our great God, that He would show such tenderness to His disciple, the one that He had chosen. So we see Thomas before the encounter with the risen Christ, Thomas’ encounter with the risen Christ, and the third sub-point under *Observe the Action* is *Thomas After His Encounter with the Risen Christ*.

C) Thomas After His Encounter with the Risen Christ:

Thomas’ response:

John 20:28 ~ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

The stubborn skeptic has made the most exalted statement of faith of any disciple. He has in witnessing and seeing the physical body of Jesus—scholars debate whether he actually touched Jesus. The text doesn’t seem to focus on that, so it seems that he was almost so overwhelmed by seeing Him, that he said it. Some of the commentaries say, “Well, if Jesus commanded it, it had to be done, so I’m sure he did do it.” That’s what some commentators think. I kind of tend to think that’s probably true, but John didn’t want us to focus so much on that. He wants us to

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focus on the fact that Jesus came and that Thomas was overwhelmed by Jesus when He came, and his skepticism was swallowed up into wholehearted faith. There's a measure of conviction about Thomas. "My Lord and my God!" He sees that Jesus is not just Messiah, but He is Lord. He is Master. He is Yahweh. When you think about it, Jesus has demonstrated in this moment some very profound things. One is He's demonstrated His omniscience. Jesus was not present when Thomas came into the room and the disciples were telling Thomas about Jesus' appearance. And when Thomas had made those audacious demands, what we see here is Jesus heard every one of them. Jesus heard it at the moment. He knows all things. We also see the glory of His resurrected body. Thomas had made those demands. He wanted to see that the body that was now outside the tomb was consistent with the body that was inside the tomb. It's the same, and yet it's gloriously different. But the wounds are still there. He comes to understand what Jesus had been teaching the disciples that they had not yet understood. In John 5:23, Jesus said:

John 5:23 ~ so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father.

This is what Thomas does now. He honors the Son even as he honors the Father. He now sees that the Son is fully equal to the Father, and that's what he's saying. "My Lord and my God!" It's a climactic moment. It's not just, though, about His deity, His Lordship, but there's also the wonderful pronoun *my*. My Lord and my God!" What we see is conviction and surrender. Thomas is convinced now. He was a skeptic. Now he's the most convinced believer, and it's not something that's just intellectual. It involves the full surrender. Jesus is not just Lord and God. Jesus is his Lord and his God, the full personal surrender. Is Jesus Christ your Lord and your God? Now, that's essentially the flow of the narrative, observing the action. Now let's consider the implications.

2) Consider the Implications:

The first thing we see is the glory of Christ. We see an indescribable, unimaginable kindness about our Savior. Patience, tenderness, as we read it, think about this. Now, we're all asked to believe, as Jesus makes clear in Verse 29, we're asked to believe on the basis of eyewitness testimony. You and I will never see in this life the risen Christ unless He comes back before we die. He's not going to make an appearance to us. He has not done that since His ascension. The ministry to Paul is the only exception, and so He's not going to make an appearance for you and me, and we're going to have to believe, because though we don't see, we have to

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believe, and we have to believe people we don't know. We have to believe the writers of Scripture that we've never met. Thomas had his own dear friends telling him, and he wouldn't believe. If anybody deserved to be jerked up by the scruff of the neck, it was Thomas in that sense, and yet in another sense, there's something really wonderful about Thomas that I think the Lord is rewarding. God loves the honest heart that comes to Him with transparency.

Now, there's this sense in which at time He rebukes. That's I think what happens with Job. Job comes with an honest heart, and Job goes a little far, and that's why the Lord sets him straight. But the overall evaluation of Job by God is good. Basically, remember how Job comes with real doubts, with real questions, perplexing questions, "Why has God not been fair to me? Why is this happening to me?" and his friends are the ones who want to sort of paper over the difficulties. And the Lord in the end says, "Job is the one you guys need to ask to pray for you, otherwise I'm going to judge you." Job is the one who's done well, even though at the time the Lord also dealt with Job and humbled him. And I'm sure when Thomas saw the risen Lord, there was a sense in which he was broken and humbled in an unimaginable way. But what we see in the character of Jesus is His amazing kindness, His compassion. We see our Father revealed in the Son. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. He remembers our frame. He knows Thomas. He knows he's a *glass is half empty* guy. He's like the Eeyore of the disciples. Remember Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh? "Good day, Eeyore." "Good morning, Eeyore." "If it is a good morning, which I doubt." That's how he'd always reply.

Thomas apparently has something of that disposition. Probably not quite that bad, but he has that disposition. The Lord knows him. The Lord knows his need, and the Lord reveals His glory to him in a personal way that overcomes his doubt, and then as we behold it, it's a witness and testimony to every other skeptic. Look at the greatness of our Savior. When you think about how God deals with doubt, the goodness of God in the Old Testament, three implications. We're still looking at the goodness of God. In Genesis 17 when God told Abraham he was going to have a child through Sarah, remember Abraham is now 99 years old, and 24 years before, God had told him, "I'm going to make you a great nation. Ishmael was now 13 years old, and the Lord appears to Abraham and tells him, "Sarah is going to conceive and bear a son, and she's going to become a mother of nations." And Abraham falls on his face and laughs within his heart, and says, "How can Sarah bear a child, and me too?" basically." And then he doesn't say that to the Lord, though, but the Lord hears it in his heart, of course, but he says, "Oh that Israel

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may live before You.” He was doubting, but that didn’t drive God away. God just then reiterates His promise. “No, next year at this time you will have a son through Sarah.”

Moses in Exodus 4, when God tells Moses, “Go and deliver My people,” Moses says, “Wait a minute. I mean, who am I?” “I’ll be with you.” Moses continued. God says, “I’ll be with you.” Moses continues to argue with Him and says, “Listen, I don’t speak well. I’ve had a problem speaking all my life.” The Lord says to him, “Who made the deaf, the dumb, and the blind? Did not I, the Lord? Do you not know that I know about your speaking problem?” And Moses then even after that still doubting, says, “Send whoever You will.” He’s basically saying, “Send anyone else You want but me.” The Bible says the Lord’s anger burned against Moses, but He still even then doesn’t reject Moses. He says, I’m paraphrasing here, “I’ve already called Aaron your brother to come, because I knew that you were such a doubter.” But the Lord still uses him.

Gideon we looked at earlier in the passage, God’s speaking to him directly, and he wants God to prove that it’s Him, and He causes the fire to come out of his staff, and then he’s scared to death and knows he’s going to die, and that’s why he starts crying out, “I know I’m about to die, because I saw the Lord.” He knows he saw God. Remember what God said to him? It’s the same thing Jesus said every time He came. “Peace be with you.” You would think that would have been enough. So then the Lord blesses his first efforts at revival in his town when he destroys the altar to Baal. We didn’t read that part. We skipped over that part. Then the Lord tells him that the enemy is coming and it’s time now to call the forces together, and Gideon is scared. God’s told him, “I’m going to deliver the nation through you. As one man, if it was only just you, I would deliver the whole nation through you,” and Gideon is doubting.

So he puts out his fleece, which is never a way to seek the will of God. Why do people do that? “I’m hanging out my fleece.” Don’t do it. Hanging out your fleece is a sign of unbelief and foolishness. It’s not the way to seek the Lord’s wisdom. It’s in His word. It’s through prayer. It’s through counsel. It’s through practical common sense. It’s not through hanging out a fleece, but God is so gracious that He allows Gideon to put out his fleece on the ground. And remember the first day? He asks just for the fleece to be wet and the ground to be dry, and God does exactly what he said. “Yes Gideon, I promised you and I’m promising again. Yes, I’m going to deliver you.” “Lord if I could just have one more test. Tomorrow do the reverse.” And God does it, and God still uses him.

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You think about the doubt that is exhibited in the Psalms. The Lord is apparently a God who is more interested in our honesty and transparency than in the perfection of our faith. He would rather have us come with our honest questions, and that's what you see in the Psalter and all the Psalms. They come to God with transparency. "Lord, I don't understand. Why are You doing this? Why do You stand afar off?" Often times I know I struggle with this myself. I think I have to not voice those things to God. I can't say what I'm really thinking, and so I stuff it, and I act like things are okay. I put some Bible verses together, and I know that God is good, and I remind myself. That's an important part of dealing with doubt, but one of the things we have to learn is we have to go directly to the Lord with our doubts.

That's what the Psalmists do. Psalm 73, remember where the Psalmist is doubting the goodness of God? He sees the wicked prosper? He sees the righteous afflicted. He sees himself afflicted and he wonders, "Why have I been faithful to God? Surely I've done all that I've done in vain. I should just go ahead and live a life of sin." But the Lord blesses that man who had that heart, because he went to God with his doubts. Remember he went into the sanctuary of the Lord and then he understood, and he ends up being so comforted that he says, "Whom have I in Heaven besides You? And besides You I desire nothing on earth."

One of the most amazing occurrences of doubt to me in the Bible is in Matthew 11 when John the Baptist is in prison and John the Baptist sends word through his disciples to ask Jesus, who is healing and teaching, "Are You the one or are we to expect another?" Think about that. You just like to have been there and to watch that happen, and say, "Wait a minute, John. Call those guys back. You don't want to send them with that. Didn't you know when you were in the womb?" Remember John the Baptist recognized Jesus in the womb when he was in the womb and Jesus was in the womb. When Mary said Elizabeth's name, like, "Hello, is anybody home?" she says that, and John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb leaps and then his mother, filled with the Holy Spirit, begins to proclaim what the baby, basically, is declaring. "There is the Christ! He is here!" He doesn't see Him again until many years later when he's baptizing at the Jordan, and Jesus comes down into the water, and John sees the Spirit descend upon Jesus and remain upon Him, and then John, early in John's Gospel, says, "Behold, the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the one that I've been telling you about. I declare to you He is the Christ." Things go bad for a little while, John finds himself in jail for a few months, and he's having a tough time. He's about to be beheaded. He doesn't know that yet, but he's been in jail for a long time, and he looks around

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him, and he doesn't understand what's happening. And so he begins to doubt and he sends that message to Jesus. It's astonishing.

Jesus deals with him a little differently, but still with tenderness. The guys come to Him and say, "Are You the one or are we to expect another?" If you had been Jesus, wouldn't you have just said, "What? Are you kidding me?" But He doesn't do that. He says, "Tell John, 'The lame walk, the blind see, the dead are raised, the prisoners are released, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not stumble on account of Me.'" He's saying, "I know it's perplexing, I know it's difficult, but clearly I am the Christ." Then they walk away, and then Jesus commends John. Isn't that astonishing? He says, "I tell you, among those born of women, there has never been a man greater than John the Baptist." Isn't that amazing that He would say that at that moment when he'd just exhibited incredible doubt? He knows our frame. He's mindful that we're dust. He knows how hard it is to live in this world where sin is in our hearts. The world is veiled in darkness. We look at the things that are unseen.

The first implication is the goodness of God. Secondly, in dealing with doubt, we need to think and do three things. First of all we need to face our doubts honestly. When we're feeling doubt, we need to honestly deal with our own hearts. "That really bothers me." Not just stuff it inside, not hide it, but deal with it honestly within ourselves. There are those times when we have to talk to ourselves, "I'm really struggling with this." In the counsel of our own hearts, "This really bothers me." Face that. Don't just stuff it. Face your doubts honestly, and secondly, take your concerns directly to the Lord. And then thirdly, express your doubts openly to Him. Not to everybody else, but to Him. And I think there's a place for us among ourselves to share that with mature believers, careful not to upset the potential faith of unbelievers or the young faith of believers, but those who are more mature or as mature as us, when we're struggling we can share some of these things, and then go to God with it. But especially express these things openly to the Lord. I mentioned how the Psalmist does that over, and over, and over again. They're always saying, "Lord, why? I don't understand. When? How long?" And that's what happened in Psalm 73. He took those things into the sanctuary of God, and then he understood. Job did the same thing. Job kept expressing his doubts to his close friends, and then in a sense calling upon God. "Lord, when are You going to answer me? When are You going to answer me?" Now, when God answered him, he had a whole new vision of God, and so did Thomas. When we express our doubts, and when the Lord shows up, and when He reveals Himself, be prepared. He will come humbling us, but He will come loving us and blessing us.

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Basically, God doesn't answer Job's question. Job basically said, "Why? Why have You allowed these bad things to happen to me?" and God didn't answer those questions. And God may do that. Just like He did with Thomas, Thomas had to wait eight days. Now, He gave Thomas an exact answer, and that's up to the Lord. He'll do what He wants to do, but Job said, "Why? Why? Why?" and God said, "The question you really need to ask is, 'Who? Who? Who?' Who am I and who are you?" But you see, it was his real questioning that led God to come to him. And he at the end of the book says, "Before I had heard about You with my ear. Now I've seen You with my eyes, and I repent before You. Now I really know You." And that's what Thomas experiences. Thomas experiences the blessing of coming to a new level of knowledge in Jesus Christ. And through even his skeptical questioning, we came to a fuller understanding of the glory of Christ. Had he not voiced those audacious claims, we don't need to be audacious, but we need to be open and honest in humility. Jesus says:

John 20:29 ~ "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

And that's what we're called to do. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. We walk by faith and not by sight. Peter says, "Though you see Him not yet believe Him, you are filled with joy inexpressible and full of glory." So we take our doubts to God, we wait for Him in His word, and we don't look for what we see, we look for what we hear. Faith comes by how? By hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Hearing of the word of God, eventually God will deal with all of our doubts, and the more we take them to Him, the more we will grow in faith, and the more we will grow in our amazement in His goodness.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

Father, we thank You for Your amazing kindness, compassion, and grace. We pray that You would help us to be more and more people who, going through life, continue to express our hearts to You with openness and honesty. As we go through our day, help us just to be continually talking to You as a child talks to his daddy. "Lord, why is this? What's going on here?" And then help us to listen, and help us to be in Your word, and help us in cultivating that relationship to be people who have more and more confidence in our loving Father and in our loving Savior.

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We pray, Father, for those that are here today who have not given their hearts to Christ, that You would overcome their unbelief by showing them the glory of Your Son, Your risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that in all these ways He might be exalted. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

“Dealing with Doubt”

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