

Easter Sunday 2011

Title: “Resurrected Faith”

April 24, 2011

John 20:19-31

OBJECTIVE: That those who have avoided church or had doubts about Christ will have faith as their doubts and concerns are answered through Thomas’ crisis of faith.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards.
- Check bulletin for ministry details

Opening prayer

Have you ever been fearful that someone will find you? I attended high school in a Chicago suburb, and there were over 2,000 students in my high school. Now my name is not a common name...but in my high school, there was another student with the same name. He was a junior, and I was a freshman. Now I was a pretty small kid in high school...when I graduated, I was about 140-145 pounds. One day, while walking up one of the remote stairwells, I was confronted by a very big, strong, and angry kid. I don’t remember his name, but he was known as someone who liked to fight...and apparently was pretty good at it. Halfway up the stairs, he grabbed me by the front of my shirt – pushed me up against the wall, and started to threaten me. I didn’t have any idea of the things he was talking about...and it became clear that his problem wasn’t with me, but with the other Steve Van Kley. Someone had pointed me out as Steve Van Kley, and he made a ‘bee-line’ for me, not realizing there were two of us! I don’t know what happened after that – if the issue

was 'resolved' or not...I was content knowing that my nose was safe for the moment. However, I did walk the hallways the next few days with a bit of fear, wondering if someone else would find me and falsely accuse me!

As we enter into the historical account of Jesus' crucifixion, the Disciples are in shock...and in fear. We can only imagine what they talked about and what they were thinking on Friday night and throughout the day on Saturday. Jesus, whom they believed was the Messiah, was just killed by the most gruesome and degrading forms of capital punishment ever known to man. On Thursday night, as they gathered and prepared for what we call "*The Last Supper*", they were probably dreaming of how Jesus would at last rise up in a public setting and begin to dismantle the Roman oppression over Israel. Instead, the Roman's raised up Jesus on the cross.

Now His disciples were not only in fear of the Romans, but they were also fearful that the Jewish leadership, who had opposed Jesus at every turn, would now hunt them down and try to have them killed also. After all, if you kill the leader of the group, why stop there...kill his followers also!

In the Gospel of John, chapter 20 is the beginning of the Apostle John's detailed account of Jesus' resurrection and His many appearances. In the first 18 verses of the chapter, the three women – Mary Magdalene (Joanna, Mary the mother of James – Luke 24:10) found Jesus' tomb empty. Jesus actually appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18), and Peter and John run to the tomb and find it empty except for the burial cloth and the strips of linen that were used to wrap the body.

In vs. 19, we find the disciples on Sunday night...the day of Jesus' resurrection. Mary Magdalene has told them about Jesus being

alive, but it seems they had their doubts about her story. We find them, together, in a locked room, fearful, and no doubt very confused about the events of the morning relating to the empty tomb.

Read vs. 19-23

Easter reverses fear to joy vs. 19-23

Notice the incredible reversal /change from vs. 19“...with doors locked for fear of the Jews...” to vs. 20b “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

The questions and doubts they had were gone. Before Jesus’ appearance, the biggest questions they had must have been:

“What happened to the body of Jesus?”

“Did somebody steal the body?”

“Was Mary Magdalene and the others right in saying the Jesus had raised from the dead?”

The answer was now clear...Jesus was alive! The tomb was empty because those who are alive don’t live among the dead! That first Easter Sunday reversed the outlook and attitude of the disciples.

When you realize that Jesus is alive...that Jesus has conquered death...when you realize that Jesus loves you and has died on the cross for your sins, then the problems of this life aren’t as daunting. You begin to realize that this life is temporary, and the life of Jesus is eternal!It’s in-line with what David wrote in Psalm 56:4:“...in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”

Easter is all about hope and the new life Jesus makes available to us. Easter is all about the defeat of death for the person who has faith. Easter indeed reverses our fear into joy!

Then there is Thomas.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on that first Easter Sunday, there were only ten of them there. Judas had committed suicide on Friday, and we're not told why, but Thomas wasn't with the other ten when Jesus appeared to them.

Many of you are familiar with Thomas...he's most often referred to as "Doubting Thomas", because he doubted what the other disciples told him about Jesus being alive and appearing to them.

Don't be too harsh on Thomas though. I like Thomas...and my guess is that we're more like Thomas than we think. Thomas wasn't going to believe something...he wasn't going to have faith in something that was a fantasy. He wanted to make sure his faith was based on the truth, not on wishful thinking.

Thomas had committed his life to following Jesus – to His teaching and leadership, and like the others, he was devastated by the sight of Jesus being crucified. Like the others, he was also very disappointed as he saw Jesus being crucified. He had believed that Jesus was the Messiah who would save them from Roman oppression. Most believed the Messiah would be a political savior, they had no concept of Him as a spiritual savior.

The reasonable doubt of Thomas vs. 24-25

Have you ever been disappointed in your faith?

Have you ever prayed for something that didn't materialize how you hoped? Have you ever believed something that ended up being false?

Have you ever been disappointed in a church? Maybe the pastor let you down in some way; maybe you were treated poorly by other believers who claimed to follow Christ, but didn't live out what they claimed.

I believe that doubt and discouragement is always in the shadows of those who want to follow Christ, but are hesitant to do so. I know that on Easter, many people attend church who normally don't attend. If that describes you, you probably like what the Bible says, and you would like to be here more, but like Thomas, you have some serious doubts and you don't want to be wrong again in what you believe.

D.A. Carson in his book "Scandalous" details different reasons for doubt that people have in regards to the Christian faith.

- He says that some doubt is due to *ignorance* of the issues. We don't believe something because we have never learned about it.
- Doubt can be a result of a hardened *philosophy* of life. Some doubt God – or don't believe in Christ because of the worldview they religiously hold onto.
- Some doubt is a result of *maturing*. This happens often in Christian homes. A teenager begins to question their faith and search for answers so that their faith can be their own, and not simply because they were raised in the church.

- Others doubt Christianity due to their accumulated moral choices(sinful)which over time lead them far away from the standards of Scripture.
- Sometimes, someone may doubt the claims of Christ due to a crisis in life...the loss of a loved one...the loss of a job...the loss of a marriage.

These are some of the common causes of doubt regarding the claims of Christ, but Thomas' doubt was rooted in another cause. His doubt was due to his great disappointment in what he thought Jesus would do – and his desire to not blind-sided again by incorrect beliefs. Maybe this describes your doubt. Do you struggle with doubt? It's OK to admit it...after all, Thomas clearly stated his doubt to the other disciples, and his doubt was not only embraced and erased by Jesus, but his doubt can help you - if you struggle in the same way! How? You can see how his doubt was overcome by the evidence of the resurrected Lord!

The resurrected faith of Thomas vs. 26-28

Take heart...Jesus doesn't reject you if you have doubts about Him...He answers your questions that are the foundation of your doubt.

Vs. 26 tells us that it is a week later. What do you think happened in the time between vs. 25 and vs. 26? A week goes by between those two verses, and the discussions between the disciples must have been fascinating! I wonder if they made a list of questions to ask Jesus. I wonder if they had any arguments about His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. I wonder how much they talked with Thomas trying to persuade

him of the veracity of their first encounter with Jesus on that first Easter Sunday evening. I wonder what Thomas wrestled with throughout the week, as he was the only one out of the remaining eleven who didn't see Jesus.

The doors were locked...but that didn't stop Jesus. His resurrected body was different from his pre-crucifixion body. It had many similarities...they recognized him as Jesus and the wounds from the crucifixion were still there...but He has the ability to enter locked rooms! He greets them with "Peace be with you!" and then turns His attention straight to Thomas. I love the directness of Jesus here. "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Notice that after Thomas' doubts are answered, Jesus commands him, after seeing and touching the evidence that it is truly Him, that Thomas needs to stop his unbelief and believe. Literally in the Greek it is '*stop being unbelieving and believe*'.

Thomas' response is significant. "My Lord and my God!"

Two things that are crucial for us here.

First, Thomas gives a strong confession of his devotion to Jesus, and his belief that Jesus is indeed God. "Lord" (*Kurios*) is a name / title for God, but it has the idea of 'master' ...it has the idea of submitting to the authority of Jesus. "God" (*Theos*) is the normal name / title for God. This is a crystal clear statement that Jesus is God (Jesus doesn't correct Thomas). I believe Thomas' confession of Jesus' deity is on par with Peter's great confession that Jesus is "...the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:13-16; Mk 8:27-29; Luke 9:18-20)

Second, his confession is personal. He doesn't say "The Lord and the God", nor does he say "A Lord and a God". Upon seeing the evidence, Thomas makes a personal statement of faith in Jesus.

Our response to the eyewitness testimony vs. 29-31

Thomas believed because of what he was able to see, hear, and touch. Every believer since then, who was not able to have the same eyewitness experience as Thomas, is fully capable of belief...but our belief is founded not on seeing the risen Christ with our own eyes, but our faith is founded on the truth of the written record...the truth of the Bible. We are blessed in the same way. Our faith is the same faith as Thomas had. Our faith results in the same forgiveness and the same eternal life, but our faith is made possible by his encounter with the risen Christ.

Vs. 30-31 are similar to what John says in 1 John 1:1 – the evidence of Jesus' work and life is recorded in the witnesses that knew Him and saw Him. Jesus' life and ministry are recorded for us like any other event in ancient times. We know about them from the written record. The evidence is here for all to see...evidence from eyewitnesses to Jesus and the events that surrounded His life, death, and resurrection. Thomas' doubt ended in great faith – because he saw and touched the evidence.

We can't see and touch the evidence, but we can believe what the Apostle John wrote about Thomas' dramatic repentance – his conversion from unbelief to belief.

Application

Acts 26:8

“Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”

Admit your sin

Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins

Commit to living each day for Christ

Close in prayer