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Series Resources

How Real Is My Faith If I Still Have Doubts?
4.7.2024 | Jonathan Schaeffer

Message Summary

In the message, Pastor Jonathan addressed the topic of faith and doubt, particularly focusing on how one can have a genuine and vibrant faith even in the presence of doubts. He emphasizes that Jesus responds to our doubts with patience and understanding, rather than condemnation.

We began by assuring the congregation that it is possible to have a strong faith while still experiencing doubts. He references the resurrection of Jesus as one of the most doubted events in history and encourages the congregation to examine the evidence supporting its truth. He then outlined the difference between faith and unbelief, explaining that doubt is not the opposite of faith; rather, unbelief is. Doubt refers to wavering between two opinions, while unbelief is a willful choice not to believe.

We also discussed the historical method versus the scientific method, explaining that many historical events, including the resurrection of Jesus, cannot be proven by science but are accepted as true based on historical evidence. Pastor Jonathan presented four practices used by historians to determine the accuracy of historical events: examining the intervals between the event and the manuscript, comparing the number of manuscripts, and weighing the motives of the authors. He applied these practices to the resurrection of Jesus, showing that the evidence is strong and credible.

Finally, Pastor Jonathan invited the congregation to get to know Jesus personally, beyond intellectual understanding. He suggested that experiencing Jesus personally can help overcome doubts and lead to a deeper faith.

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Key Takeaways

Faith is not a blind leap into the dark but a reasoned trust based on evidence. It involves the whole person—heart, soul, mind, and strength—and is not inherited from family or friends but must be personally embraced.

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; unbelief is. Doubt can coexist with a vibrant faith, and Jesus' own disciples experienced doubt even in His physical presence. This should encourage us to be patient with ourselves and others who doubt.

The historical method, as opposed to the scientific method, is a valid way to investigate the claims of Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus is a historical claim that stands up to rigorous scrutiny when examined using the principles of historical investigation.

The evidence for the resurrection is compelling when considering the short interval between the events and the writing of the New Testament, the abundance of manuscript evidence, and the willingness of the early disciples to die for their testimony.

A personal relationship with Jesus is the ultimate way to address doubts. It is through knowing Him intimately that we can experience His goodness and find assurance in our faith journey.

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Key Scripture

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

John 20:24-29

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jude 1:22

Be merciful to those who doubt.

Psalms 34:8

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

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Quotes

"Jesus said, love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. He's basically saying, I want you to commit everything that you are to me. In other words, you can't rely on the faith of grandma. You can't rely on the faith of a friend or a spouse. You have to determine for yourself what this records. Do I really believe this? Is this intellectually credible? And if it is, it demands my life and my allegiance, right?"

"How do we deal with doubts that may come our way? More important than that, how does Jesus respond to our doubt? I want to do two things today. I want to show, first of all, that you can absolutely have a genuine faith, a vibrant spiritual life, even if you have doubts."

"Some doubted, which means this. When you doubt, you're in some pretty good company, right? Like the other 11 disciples, closest followers of Jesus, some doubted. So the question then remains, what do you do with the doubts? Well, for starters, from the example of how Jesus responded to his first followers, we can say this, it's okay to have doubts."

"The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is unbelief. Unbelief. Those are two very different things. Unbelief refers to our will. It refers to, like, I choose not to believe the evidence, or I don't even want to look at the evidence, because even before you show me, I've already made a decision. I'm not going to believe that."

"These are issues far too important to just let them go. But even when we have doubts, here's what we can know. Jesus himself is patient with our doubts, right? He's humble, and he's gentle. So acknowledge your doubts, pinpoint them, and do your research. But they're issues too important to ignore."

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Prayer Prompts

Begin with a prayer of gratitude for the gift of faith and the evidence that supports the truth of Christianity. Thank God for the ways He has shown Himself to be real and trustworthy in your life and in the world around you.

Pray for the courage to embrace faith as a reasoned trust, asking God to help you engage your heart, soul, mind, and strength in your relationship with Him. Reflect on any areas of your life where you may be holding back from fully committing to God and ask for His guidance in surrendering these areas.

Ask God to reveal any doubts you may be harboring and to provide you with the wisdom and resources to seek answers. Pray for a spirit of humility and patience as you explore these doubts, and for the discernment to distinguish between healthy questioning and willful unbelief.

Pray for those in your life who may be struggling with doubt, whether they are believers or non-believers. Ask God to use you as a source of encouragement and a witness to the evidence of His presence. Pray for opportunities to have open and honest conversations about faith and doubt.

Reflect on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, and pray for a deeper understanding of its significance. Ask God to strengthen your faith through this evidence and to use it as a foundation for sharing the gospel with others.

Pray for a personal encounter with Jesus that goes beyond intellectual knowledge. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in a way that is real and tangible, and to deepen your relationship with Him each day.

Finally, pray for the global church, that believers everywhere would be equipped to face their doubts with confidence in the evidence of their faith. Ask God to raise up leaders and teachers who can effectively communicate the historical and rational basis for belief in Jesus.

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Discussion & Application Questions

1. In Matthew 28:16-20, what was the disciples' initial reaction when they saw the resurrected Jesus, and how did Jesus respond to their reaction?

2. What commission did Jesus give to the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, and how does this relate to their experience of doubt and worship?

3. According to John 20:24-29, how did Thomas' doubt lead to a profound declaration of faith?

4. Reflecting on Psalm 34:8, what does it mean to "taste and see that the Lord is good," and how might this relate to experiencing doubt?

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Discussion & Application Questions

1. Reflect on a recent moment of doubt in your faith journey. How can you follow Jesus' example in Matthew 28:20 and seek His presence and assurance in the midst of doubt?

2. Identify a specific way you can participate in the Great Commission this week, even if you feel uncertain or doubtful about your ability to do so.

3. Think of a time when, like Thomas, you demanded evidence for belief. How can you adopt a posture of openness to belief without seeing, as Jesus commends in John 20:29?

4. Choose one area of your life where you have experienced doubt about God's goodness. What is one step you can take this week to "taste and see" His goodness in that area?

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Devotional

Day 1: Reasoned Trust Anchors Faith

Faith is often misconstrued as a blind leap into the unknown, yet it is more accurately described as a reasoned trust that is grounded in evidence. This trust is not solely an intellectual assent but a holistic commitment that engages the heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is a personal journey that one must undertake, not a legacy passed down from family or friends. Faith is built upon a foundation of experiences, historical evidence, and personal encounters that collectively point towards a reality greater than ourselves. It is in this reasoned trust that one finds the courage to step forward in faith, even amidst the uncertainties of life.

Hebrews 11:1-3 NIV

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Reflection

How does understanding faith as reasoned trust change your perspective on any doubts you may have?

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Day 2: Doubt as a Pathway to Deeper Faith

Doubt is not the nemesis of faith; rather, it is a companion that can lead to a more profound understanding and a stronger belief. The disciples themselves, even in the presence of Jesus, grappled with doubt, which serves as a reminder that faith is not a static state but a dynamic journey. Doubt invites believers to ask questions, to seek answers, and to grow in their knowledge of the divine. It is an opportunity to explore the depths of one's beliefs and to emerge with a faith that is not only affirmed but also resilient and vibrant.

Mark 9:23-24 NIV

“If you can’t?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Reflection

What doubt are you currently wrestling with, and how can you use it as an opportunity to deepen your faith?

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Devotional

Day 3: Historical Inquiry Validates Faith Claims

The historical method is a legitimate tool for examining the claims of Christianity, particularly the resurrection of Jesus. This approach applies the same rigorous standards used to verify other historical events, thereby affirming the credibility of the resurrection narrative. By understanding the principles of historical investigation, believers can confidently assert that the resurrection is not a myth or a legend but a well-substantiated event with profound implications for faith and life.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 NIV

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Reflection

How can the application of historical methods to the resurrection narrative strengthen your confidence in the truth of Christianity?

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Day 4: Resurrection Evidence Demands a Response

The evidence supporting Jesus' resurrection is compelling, considering the short time span between the events and the documentation in the New Testament, the extensive manuscript evidence, and the disciples' willingness to die for their testimony. This evidence invites a response from those who encounter it, challenging them to consider the implications of the resurrection for their own lives and beliefs. The historical veracity of the resurrection is a cornerstone of Christian faith, providing a solid foundation upon which to build a life of discipleship.

Acts 17:30-31 NIV

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

Reflection

What impact does the historical evidence for the resurrection have on your personal faith and the way you live out that faith?

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Day 5: Personal Encounter with Jesus Overcomes Doubt

A personal relationship with Jesus is the most effective way to confront and overcome doubts. It is through an intimate knowledge of Him that believers experience His goodness and find assurance in their faith journey. This relationship goes beyond intellectual understanding to a heartfelt connection that transforms lives. Knowing Jesus personally means experiencing His love, grace, and truth in a way that is real and life-changing.

Philippians 3:8-10 NIV

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Reflection

In what practical ways can you cultivate a deeper personal relationship with Jesus to address your doubts?
