

Series: **Power and Passion of Jesus** – week 5

CDOBC – beginning on 3/26/17

Today's Title: "**Believing in Jesus**"

April 23, 2017 - John 20:24-31

OBJECTIVE: To encourage people to look at the evidence of Jesus and believe in Him as their Savior - to help Christians to be gracious and helpful to those struggling with questions and doubts.

Opening Prayer

Our next sermon series - begins next week: "1=3" - The truth about God and His nature

Today we finish our series: "Power and Passion of Jesus" - as we look at one of the greatest passages which speak to the reality of Jesus' resurrection and His deity.

Turn to John 20.

Belief. Faith.

In our modern age where scientific reasoning is elevated to levels of deity, belief in the Bible is frowned upon by many.

'If a proclaimed scientist says it, it must be true.' - so our society believes.

However, scientific theory is not without doubts.

There are certainly areas of science which are proven beyond a shadow of a doubt (Law of gravity), but there are other areas which sound convincing but there are still many doubts and 'gaps' in the theory.

In our everyday life, there are some unbelievable things - which are actually true.

- At launch (2007), the iPhone had the same computing power as NASA in 1969 when it launched the historical manned mission to the moon.
- Elvis was a natural blond (unbelievable...but true!)
- Jousting is the official sport of Maryland.
- Saudi Arabia imports many of its camels from Australia.
- Kangaroos can't jump backwards
- Hippopotamus' milk is pink (unbelievable...but true!)
- The average life span of a Major League baseball is 5-7 pitches. (42-58 baseballs/game - <http://www.baseball-reference.com/blog/archives/7533.html>)
- Scotland's national animal is the unicorn!

Some of the things in our world are unbelievable...but true!

One of the more common criticisms leveled against Christians is they must check their brain at the door to believe the Bible.

Some of this criticism has been encouraged by Christians who don't think - don't read and study the bible and are unaware of issues in the culture, so they never learn how to explain the truth of Christ in a logical, sensible way which unbelievers in this culture will understand.

1 Peter 3:15

"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

As followers of Christ, we must grow in our knowledge of the Lord - and we must keep working at how to explain and give support for “the hope that is in” us.

Over the past several weeks, we have talked about *why people have rejected Jesus* throughout the last 2,000 years.

- I said many people reject Jesus because they want their own version of Jesus.
- They reject Jesus because His clear statement in **John 14:6** where He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” - this leaves no wiggle room. Jesus was too clear when He spoke about salvation.
- It’s not due to a lack of evidence that they reject Jesus. The testimony of the Roman Centurion at the foot of the cross - the testimony of history - the empty tomb - the miracles of Jesus - all of it ample evidence that Jesus was who He claimed to be.

Ultimately, it’s a heart that is hardened to the Gospel - and a rebellious spirit which refuses to submit to God and accept His Word. It’s a denial of Jesus, refusing the evidence and a refusal of His teaching and His example.

But doubt about Christ is not the same as unbelief and rejection of Christ.

Doubt - having questions - is a blessing - a sign of the Holy Spirit working in your life. Doubt and having questions

demonstrate you are thinking about the truth of Scripture - you are wrestling with it in your mind.

With that thought, look with me at **John 20**.

For the sake of context, look quickly at **vs. 19** where we read on that first Resurrection Sunday - the disciples were gathered together in a room where the door was locked “for fear of the Jews” - and Jesus suddenly appears in the room.

In the next few verses, Jesus shows them His hands and side - which bore the marks of His crucifixion - and He commissions them - sends them in the same way the Father had sent Him (a preview of the Great Commission - Matt. 28:19-20).

Amazing! When you compile the other Gospel accounts of that day, you read of 4 other appearances of the resurrected Jesus throughout the day: Mary Magdalene, the other women at the tomb, the two on the road to Emmaus, to Peter - and here - the 5th appearance - to the disciples.

Talk about something unbelievable...but true!

Then we read in **vs. 24**:

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.”

Fellowship supports belief vs. 24-25

I don't want to make a major point here...but I don't want to pass over this either.

For whatever the reason, Thomas was not with the other disciples.

We're not told why he wasn't there - John simply tells us he wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus shows up.

Different people handle painful experiences in different ways. Maybe Thomas was the type of person who needed to be alone as he grieved. No doubt they had heard Mary Magdalene speak of the empty tomb (vs. 18), and I think it's safe to assume they also heard from Peter, John and the other women who were at the tomb that morning.

Confusion must have been the operative description of their state of mind. John even says as much in vs. 9: “for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.”

Maybe Thomas needed to be alone to think - to try and figure out the riddle which was playing out in real time. It really doesn't matter the reason for his absence, for I want to focus on what happens when we're absent from the company of believers.

So many who consider themselves part of a church today - don't have a strong commitment to attending worship on a regular basis with God's people.

Neither do they get involved with other Christians in a small group (Connection Group) to build relationships, study the Bible and pray for one another. But here we see what can happen when you're not with other believers.

Your faith can suffer.

Doubts can grow larger in the absence of fellowship.

Questions go unanswered when you can't discuss them with other believers.

Frustrations over life's problems can gain intensity.

If you use your brain as you read Scripture and live your life, doubts and questions are inevitable. Harmonizing the two is not always an easy thing - or something which is easy to see.

This is where other believers who are maturing in their own faith are of such value.

When you have a question - a frustration - a doubt - share it with others. Share your struggle.

There might not be an answer readily available - but you can be lifted up in prayer.

Quite often there is an answer - or at least the beginnings of an answer - which someone in the group can share - and the entire group - like the Bereans in **Acts 17:11** can search the Scriptures for the truth.

Since Thomas was gone...he missed out on a glorious moment!

Here's the wonderful news...God doesn't forget about you - He knows your struggles - He knows your thoughts - and He reveals Himself to you - when you need it most.

Seeing Jesus erases your doubts vs. 26-29

Thomas was not easily convinced.

As we've noticed before - if he didn't understand something - if he didn't believe something - he wasn't going to go along with the group and ignore his own questions or doubt.

Can you imagine the conversations the other disciples must have had with Thomas after Jesus' initial appearance?

26 Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.

"Eight days later" - I bet it seemed like 8 weeks to Thomas! Everyone else in the room experienced something he didn't experience - and it has changed them from mourning to rejoicing and amazement - but he's still stuck in some sort of mourning - but mourning with all sorts of questions:

Was Jesus really risen from the dead?

Are these other guys completely crazy?

Why hasn't Jesus appeared to me - if He appeared to them?

This is so unbelievable...can it really be true?

Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

27 Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

28 Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John tells us the setting is the same as last time - doors locked - everyone together in the room - and Jesus appears.

"Peace be with you" - same greeting as before. Jesus is not saying, *'I hope you don't have conflict'* - He's saying *'I hope you are well'* - *'I hope you are healthy in mind and spirit.'* It's a greeting intended to speak to the whole of the individual - in line with the Hebrew *'shalom'* - which desires an all-encompassing wellness of life.

Then He turns to Thomas...can you imagine what Thomas must have been thinking...feeling?

Can you imagine what all the other disciples were thinking / feeling?

Notice what Jesus says to Thomas - He basically repeats to Thomas the same things Thomas told the other disciples the previous Sunday (vs. 25).

"Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe."

Then Jesus gives Thomas a command (end of vs. 27):

“Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

Jesus doesn't scold Thomas for his doubting and unbelief - He invites Thomas to investigate the truth - *‘Put your finger here in the nail holes - put your hand in My side where the spear was thrust.’*

Jesus doesn't criticize you for having doubts or questions - but He does expect you to examine the evidence and decide.

“Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

How long have you lingered with your questions?

How long have you allowed your doubts and questions to take you out of the fellowship of other Christians - and used your doubts and questions as an unmovable object standing between you and Christ?

Christian...have you looked down upon - have you been critical or criticized those who have doubts or questions?

If they have doubts or questions in areas where you have found solid ground and certainty - do you dismiss them - or do you help them and pray for them?

Are you patient with those working through questions and doubts?

“Some people need to doubt before they believe. If doubt leads to questions, questions lead to answers, and the answers are accepted, then doubt has done good work. It

is when doubt becomes stubbornness and stubbornness becomes a life-style that doubt harms faith. When you doubt, don't stop there. Let your doubt deepen your faith as you continue to search for the answer. ”

(Bruce B. Barton, Philip W. Comfort, David R. Veerman, and Neil Wilson, *John*, Life Application Bible Commentary Series [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993], p. 399 – as quoted in *Insight For Living Bible Study Guide, Exalting Christ... The Lamb of God*, by Charles R. Swindoll, p. 107)

Then we see Thomas' reply:

28 Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!”

This is the clearest - most direct statement in the Gospel of John to Jesus' deity and His equality with the Father. Thomas didn't need to investigate the crucifixion wounds. Seeing Jesus standing in front of him - looking at the wounds - hearing His voice was enough.

“My Lord and my God” is a statement not only of identity - but of worship - and Jesus accepts Thomas' affirmation and worship.

What is your response to “seeing” Jesus?

You ‘see’ Jesus in the truth of Scripture - in the lives of His followers - in the working of your own heart and mind - you ‘see’ Jesus working and living.

29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Notice Jesus doesn't say, “Have you believed because you have touched my hand and my side”. On the front end, Thomas wanted the extent of proof only gained by inspecting the wounds from the nails and the spear. But

when Jesus appeared - seeing Him was enough - no other evidence needed.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” - includes us.

It also included those who were never blessed in those days to see the resurrected Christ - but it extends to all believers throughout the history of the Church.

You are blessed if you believe - because you have believed not by the evidence seen with your physical eyes - but by the evidence revealed to you through the Holy Spirit, the truth of God’s Word, and the believers you have seen and heard.

Unbelievable...but it’s true!

Jesus may ask you to believe the unbelievable – but He doesn’t ask you to believe what isn’t real!

Evidence presented so you can believe vs. 30-31

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

This is why we have the Bible - so we can know about God...know about Jesus and the plan of redemption.

God has revealed Himself to us through nature - through the wonder, creativity, intricate design, power and

vastness of the universe, He has given us clues about His existence and His character.

The Apostle Paul in **Romans 1:19-20** says:

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

20 For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

This is what theologians refer to as *General Revelation*. God has revealed some general truths about Himself through His creation.

But God has also given us what theologians refer to as His *Special Revelation*.

This includes a handful of things - but the primary form of Special Revelation is the person of Christ and the Bible. The 66 books contained in your Bible are the authoritative, inspired, infallible Word of God. They not only tell about God, but they tell of His love for us - and His plan of salvation to redeem us from sin.

John tells us the specific purpose of writing his Gospel was:

“...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

The Gospel writers didn't try and write down everything about Jesus' life - there was way too much information

to write all that down. It wasn't even biographical - it had a more specific intent.

At its heart - John's motive was evangelistic - to present the reader with the evidence of Jesus - what He did - who He was - so that you might come to the same logical conclusion as the Roman Centurion - and believe Jesus is the innocent Son of God - and as Thomas - and proclaim Jesus as your "Lord and *your* God".

Apply it...

Has your faith been blocked...or slowed down by your questions and doubts?

Modern men and women are not the only ones to have questions and doubts about Jesus.

Ever since Jesus' first sermon - since His first miracle - there have been those with questions and doubts - but you must move forward and discover the answers.

C. H. Spurgeon claimed that 98 percent of the people he met—including the criminals he visited in England's prisons—told him that they believed the Bible to be true. But the vast majority had never made a personal, life-changing commitment to Jesus Christ. For them, "believe" was not an active verb.

Source unknown

Acts 17:30-31 (HCSB)

"Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,

31 because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.”

It's truly unbelievable...but it's true!

Jesus is the Son of God - the tomb is empty - He is alive!

Do you believe?

Do you have questions and doubts about Jesus...about the Bible?

Don't be paralyzed by the things you don't know.

Don't use your questions and doubts as a road block to belief - use them as motivation to go deeper in your belief and understanding.

Look at the evidence before you - all around you - in your own life - and:

Admit your sins

Believe in Jesus as your Savior

Commit each day to Christ

Christian...

Learn...study...be ready to give a defense - and answer for your hope in Christ.

Be thirsty for truth - thirsty for wisdom in how to share the Gospel - overwhelmed with love for those who don't yet believe.

Christian...

Give grace to those who have doubts and questions. Give guidance to them and be patient as they search and as God reveals His truth to them in His timing. As Jesus was patient with Thomas...be patient with those who need more time - more consideration of the evidence.

Learn to see those who are thinking about spiritual things - learn to see those who are being pulled by the love of God - and love them - share with them through word and deed - the great liberating truth that Jesus is your Savior - your Lord and your God!

Close in prayer