

**Doubt: Dark Side of Faith**  
*Living Beyond a Doubt*  
July 8, 2012

**PRELUDE – The Stand**

**Worship Songs – Our God’s Alive / Jesus Saves  
/ Finding Who We Are / T&G**

- Fireworks video

**Feature video “Doubt Consolidation”**

Good morning everyone.

I sure hope you won’t take that route to dealing with your doubts ... although, today, we actually *are* going to attempt to do something similar: we’re going to try and consolidate our doubts. But it won’t cost you a thing and you don’t need to call Larry. You’ll see clearly what I mean by that a little later but, first, let’s begin with a prayer.

God, last week, many of us wrote out a list of things that we doubt when it comes to You – to your character, your actions, and your presence and activity in our lives. I'm thankful that you have given us a church where it's OK to do that; where it's OK to be honest about where we are; knowing that there is no condemnation for our questions.

But God, I am just as thankful this morning that there are answers to our questions – maybe not the answers we want to hear; maybe not answers that make us comfortable – but there are answers. You do not leave us in the dark if we're willing to seek You. So, God today, help us to open our hearts to a truth that can change everything not only for us but for the people around us.

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.  
Amen.

I want to begin this morning with a quick review of last week's message.

**We started out by defining “doubt” as “a nagging uncertainty.”**

This is important to understand because we're not talking about “unbelief” (which is a willful refusal to embrace what we know to be true). Instead, we're talking about a nagging uncertainty concerning the things we've already come to believe about the nature of God, and about how He interacts not only with the world at large but with us on an individual and personal basis. Doubt is that question that pops into our head (and heart!) when things don't add up between what we've experienced and what we know and what we've learned.

And, as I mentioned in the prayer, last week I invited everyone who was here to write down their “personal doubt list” – things about God and the Christian faith that sometimes don’t add up for us on an intellectual or spiritual or circumstantial level. We had almost 130 responses between both services, and I have to tell you it was a moving experience for me personally to read every one of those cards. Some of you – from what you wrote about what you’ve experienced in your life – not only am I amazed that you are still trying to trust God, I’m amazed that you’re still standing. Some of you have really been through it. And my heart goes out to you and I hold you in high regard for continuing to pursue God.

Now, when I analyzed the doubt lists I felt like they broke down into three larger categories.

The first category, probably the most overwhelming:

1. *Doubts about God* because of suffering and pain; because of injustice in this world (“the evil prosper while the righteous do not”); because science says everything is a product of evolution; because of the Bible itself, oddly enough; because God isn't visible (He requires faith instead of sight); and some of us doubt God because of unanswered prayer.

2. *The second category I called “self doubt”* – but I’m not talking about self-esteem issues. I’m talking about the doubts we have about our own spiritual condition and our own spiritual experience ... Am I really saved/forgiven/going to Heaven? Will I ever become who God wants me to be

(overcome the sin in my life)? Am I truly hearing from God (or is this just my imagination)? Can I fully trust God in this situation in my life? Is there a purpose for my life? Self-doubts.

3. *The third category I called "faith doubts"* – these are nagging uncertainties or doubts specific to the Christian faith's more challenging and controversial teachings such as ... Jesus is the "only way" (how can that be true when there are so many other religions); homosexuality is immoral (how can that be true because there are so many wonderful people in this world who happen to be gay and it seems like more and more of them are "coming out"); the idea that non-Christians are condemned to Hell and, finally, the idea that somehow Jesus really did rise from the dead. Faith

doubts.

All of these issues appeared repeatedly through all of these cards, and honestly, I'm still trying to figure out exactly what to do with them because there are like 18 separate issues in all of that! I don't know that we should take 18 Sundays to do that. But, what I do know is that next Sunday we're going to be talking about the very first one on my list: *doubts about God because of all the suffering and pain we see in this world*. Why does God not intervene more often? Why does God not step in and put a stop to it?

Anyway, where was I? I was in the middle of reviewing what we talked about last week. I attempted to make three points.

**Doubt is normal; doubt is necessary; but doubt is not to be taken lightly.**

We spent most of our time on the first point – *doubt is normal for people who believe*. And, if you read the Bible, there are so many examples of people we call “heros of the faith,” and we looked at several of them last week, and they had doubts.

The second point – *doubt is necessary* – is true because it’s only through struggle that we grow stronger. That’s how it works with our bodies, our physical muscles, and that’s also how it works with our intellectual and spiritual “muscles” as well.

C.S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian writers and theologians of modern times, wrote that doubts force us to examine our faith ...

**... which is a good thing, he says, because**

...

“If doubt is eventually justified then we



were believing that which was not worth believing (no one wants that). But if doubt is answered (if we're able to come to an acceptable level of certainty), then our faith has grown stronger, it knows God more certainly, and can enjoy God more deeply."<sup>i</sup>

Along the same lines, John Ortberg, a more modern author, writes that sometimes ...

**... doubt can do good in us because ...**

"It can motivate us to study and learn. It can purify false beliefs that have crept into our faith. It can humble our arrogance (some of us need that – starting with me). It can give us patience and compassion with other doubters. It can remind us of how much truth matters."<sup>ii</sup>

The third point from last week – *doubt is not to be taken lightly* – is why we're doing this series and, in particular, today's message; because our doubts, if they are not handled properly, can destroy us.

*See to it, brothers and sisters,  
that none of you has a sinful,  
unbelieving heart that turns  
away from the living God.*

*Hebrews 3:12 (NIV)*

Doubt has to be addressed in such a way that our nagging uncertainties don't take root and turn into hardness of heart and the sin of unbelief. That doesn't mean ignoring or pushing them under the surface. We have to acknowledge that our doubts exist but then, somehow, *live beyond those doubts*. We're called to walk in faith – to trust God and live in obedience to Him – in spite of the uncertainties.

And that's what we're going to look at this morning. How do you do that? How do you live beyond your doubts?

## **A House of Cards**

And I want to begin by asking you a question I've been thinking about all week long: *what are the elements that go into creating faith for the average Christian?* What are the elements, or things, that go into the pie, or the stew, which create faith in the average person who says they're a Christian? Think of it this way, if you could somehow imagine the average Christian's faith in God as a house, for example, what would be some of the building blocks that go into the construction?

**The first thing I think a lot of people would say is “*the Bible.*” *The Bible is part of what makes up our faith.***

(We just did a six-week series called *40 Days in the Word*, so I hope some of us would say, “hey, that’s really important!”) The Bible is the greatest single source of information about God’s purposes and plans for this world and for us as individuals. So, that would have to be on the list. In fact, for a lot of people, their entire faith rests on the Bible.

**I think a lot of people would say that “*doctrine*” or “*theology*” goes into their faith.**

Doctrine and theology are what you come up with when you try to synthesize what’s in the Bible. For instance, people study the Bible and come to a belief ...

- About baptism (“you have to be totally immersed” ... other people say, “no, not necessarily”; Some people say, “babies can be baptized” ... others say, “no, not necessarily”);

- Or, people will come to a belief about the way the Holy Spirit works today (“you have to speak in tongues to show that you have the Holy Spirit” ... others say, “no, not necessarily”);
- Or, people will come to a belief as they read what Jesus says about the end times, they’ll say, “well, you know, it looks like Jesus is going to rapture Christians before the 7 years of tribulation”; and some people say, “it looks like the tribulation will come after the great millennial.”
- Or, they’ll come to a belief that God is primarily love, while others believe God is primarily holiness.

You get the picture? If you’re a Christian, along the way you’ve heard pastors and teachers take the Bible and synthesize it, boil it down, into various shapes of doctrine and theology (which, by the way, is why we

have denominations). And, if you agree with how those are boiled down, if they make sense to you, you become a born-again Baptist or a socially-conscious Methodist or a holy-rolling charismatic or you become an independent non-denominationalist. Whatever the flavor, doctrine and theology are part of your personal faith structure.

What else goes into a person's faith structure?

**I think without a doubt *our personal experience* goes into it.**

For instance ...

- We pray and God appears to answer. That shapes our faith.
- We spend time reading the Bible and listening, and "gosh, I think I'm hearing God tell me something."
- We follow the scriptural injunction to

“forgive as we have been forgiven” and, surprisingly, we discover healing and peace taking place in our own lives.

- We decide to trust what God says in the Bible about giving and so we give and then it miraculously comes back to us and then some.
- We obey God, we put him first in our life, and things – even the bad things – somehow seem to work themselves out.

Those kinds of experiences shape our faith structure.

So, for most people, we have the Bible, we have theology/doctrine and we have personal experience.

**And to those, I think we would certainly have to add *the influence of other Christians. Specifically ...***

- Our parents (assuming they are

Christians)

- The people we work with or play with who are Christians
- The people in our small group or Bible study (assuming we're part of one)
- Pastors and other Christian leaders
- Christian musicians (assuming we listen to K-Love or go to Christian concerts)

All these people, individually and collectively, provide a picture for us of what Christianity looks like lived out in daily life and that, too, goes into shaping our personal faith structure – how we think about and interact with God.

I think you see how this works, right? We could probably think of a bunch more elements if we had time, but I think you see what I'm getting at. These kinds of things are what goes into most people's faith.



**Now, let me ask you another question:  
*what happens when one or more of these  
building blocks is damaged or fails?***

For instance, you go to school and there you discover an alternate explanation of how things came to be that contradicts the biblical account in Genesis. Science tells us that God didn't create the world in seven days; instead, the world evolved over billions of years, and there is some very convincing evidence thought up by some very, very intelligent powerful minds. What happens to most people's faith at that point? It's tested. I know mine was and still is sometimes. For some people, their faith is more than tested – it's abandoned as nothing more than a nice or not-so-nice fairy tale.

What happens when a person begins reading the Bible for themselves? Maybe for the first time in their life they're digging in and they discover that, even though they've

been taught the doctrine of “free will” all their life (i.e. we’re free moral beings and we have the right to choose whether we’re going to believe in God, follow God, or reject God), but then they start reading the scriptures and they find out there are a whole bunch of scriptures that make it sound like God actually predestines who will be saved and who will be damned? Or what happens to the person who has been taught that doctrine of absolute sovereignty – that it’s all planned out in advance, that God knows who’s in, God has selected, God is unmovable and unchangeable – and then they read the Bible and discover that God changes his mind just because a guy prays. A guy prays and God says, “okay, I’m changing my mind. I’m changing my plan.” Or, that God actually repents of some action of judgment he had previously taken.

For a lot of people, when their doctrine or

theology is severely challenged, it shakes their faith. For some, though, it destroys their faith. They say, "There's no way to figure this out. It's just a bunch of craziness written by crazy people. I give up. I'm done with this."

What happens, for instance, when our personal experience is the opposite of what we hope and expect from God? We pray ... and there isn't an answer – or, at least, not the one we wanted. We spend time alone with God and the Bible ... and God doesn't seem to show up. We forgive ... and we get hurt again. We give sacrificially ... and the car breaks down or we lose our job. We put God first as best we can ... and things actually get worse in our lives instead of better. For a lot of people, when that kind of stuff happens, it shakes their faith. For some, it's the end of their faith.

Finally, what happens when those who have

influenced us turn out to be – perish the thought – just like we are: sinful, fallen human beings? Our good Christian parents can't figure out how to live together and they get divorced. The Christians we work with turn out to be as offensive and rude as anybody else we work with. The people in our small group don't want to know us or really care about us. Pastors and Christian leaders quit the ministry or are asked to leave. Christian artists turn out to be as shallow and status-seeking as any other artist. Or none of those people fail like that; instead they experience some kind of suffering or injustice that just doesn't seem deserved for someone of such high moral character.

For a lot of people, when that happens, it shakes their faith. For some, they say, "If that guy or gal, who I thought so highly of, can't stick with following Christ, then how in the

world can I? I'm done." Or, "If that's how God treats that really wonderful person, then what in the world is going to happen to me?" And they're done.

Do you see what I'm getting at here? We tend to think of faith as a package deal. It's all or nothing. If any part of that faith is wrong, if any part of it is damaged or fails, then the whole faith is wrong and everything, for a lot of us, needs to be thrown out.

As I was preparing for this message I came across a brilliant analogy which I think helps to visualize what I'm talking about. It's from one of my favorite writers, Dr. Gregory Boyd. Not only is he the author of *Letters From a Skeptic* (a book which deals with many of the issues on our doubt lists and which we have in our library and bookstore), Boyd is also a pastor. And he did a message a while back in which he compared the way most

Christians build their faith to building a house of cards.<sup>iii</sup>

**You know what I'm talking about, right?**  
**<Picture of house of cards>**

Now, a house of cards is a really cool thing. It's quite amazing to see a person build one. But the problem with a house of cards is, if you remove one card, what happens?

**The whole thing falls down.**

And the same thing can happen when we think of our faith as a conglomeration of things like the Bible, doctrine and theology, personal experience and the influence of others, to say nothing of other positive factors like getting to live in a nation that was formed with a predominantly Christian worldview where we still enjoy freedom of speech and religion. As wonderful and helpful as those things can be, it is

dangerous when our faith is dependent on any combination of these kinds of things.

And I know by now some of you are thinking, “Rick, I think you might be getting close to heresy here. It sounds like you’re talking against the Bible, and against theology and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and things like that.” And I can see why someone might think that because what I’m telling you is a little radical, different from what we normally think.

But before you conclude that I’ve gone off the deep end, let me ask you another question – one that will lead to the point I want to drive as deeply as possible into your heart and mind (and mine, too, because I have the same struggles you do).

**Here’s the question: when the first Christian missionaries (the Apostles) went out to the world as Jesus told them to do,**

## **what was their basic proclamation? What was their message?**

Did they go to, let's say, the city of Corinth, a very pagan city, and say, "Hey, you people - you're a bunch of pagans! You need to get rid of *your* holy books and adopt *our* holy book. You just need to start believing what the Bible says (which at the time was the Old Testament). You need to start trusting it and we're here to help you."

No. That's not what they proclaimed.

Did they go around preaching, "Hey, listen everyone - we have figured out all the theological mysteries of the world. And if you'll just become Calvinists or Armenians, if you'll just adopt that theology, then everything in the world will make sense."

No. That's not what was at the heart of their message.



Did they say, "Our lives are so much better because of Jesus - Can I get a witness? Praise Jesus! Thank you! Our lives are so much better because of Jesus and yours can be, too. Just believe and you'll receive a better life in the here and now and in heaven when you die." No, they didn't. In fact, some of them said their lives were worse because of Jesus. For instance, the Apostle Paul wrote:

*I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been*

*constantly on the move.*

*I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.*

*I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (NIV)*

*“Wanna sign up for a better life?” That was not at the heart of the Christian faith proclaimed by the apostles.*

In fact, none of the things we consider to be so foundational and necessary to the Christian faith were even close to the center

of what they believed and held dear.

So many Christians in this country (and I'm probably going to get in trouble for saying this, but I'm going to say it), so many Christians in this country these days are just wringing their hands because "the government and those terrible godless liberals are taking away all of our religious freedoms and we need to vote them out. And we're going to get organized and we've got an election coming up and we're getting rid of that guy in the White House." Don't hear what I'm not saying. I understand *as citizens* the need to protect our freedoms. But as Christians ... in Paul's day, they could stone you or nail you to a cross or throw you to the lions for being a Christian. Political organization and influence wasn't even an option – nor was it even necessary to the growth and spread of the Christian faith.

And I point this out because I think the day is coming, friends, when the card of religious freedom - that's part of many of our faith structures - that card is going to be pulled out of our structure and, for a lot of people, that's going to be the demise of their faith.

## **Concentric Circles**

Now, I know at this point some of you are thinking, "So, Rick, if what most of us are doing is building a house of cards - which is obviously unwise - what should we be doing instead?"

Well, to answer that, we need to first go back and answer the question I just raised. What was the basic proclamation of the first Christians? Let me give you a few examples so you can see for yourself.

This first example happened right at the very

beginning of the Christian movement. Jesus had somehow, in a way I don't understand, entered the dimension we call Heaven and his disciples were about to follow his command to go let people know about him. It turns out that one day a great crowd gathered in Jerusalem – thousands of people were there – and the Apostle Peter stood up in front of them and explained what had just happened, weeks before, to Jesus.

**And this is the punch line to his sermon:**

*"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it." Acts 2:32 (NIV)*

**Then he adds for effect:**

*"Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." Acts 2:36 (NIV)*

“You killed Him. God raised Him. And in those two actions,” Peter is saying, “Jesus saves us – he’s the Messiah – and he becomes King over all – he is Lord.”

And this same message went out over and over again to the ends of the earth. Here’s an example of Paul’s preaching:

*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:*

So, heads up folks. Pay attention. Here’s the message; here’s the faith that we proclaim. This is it, the bottom line:

*If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the*

*dead, you will be saved.*

Jesus was dead, Jesus was raised. He is Savior. He is Lord.

And then Paul adds an interesting little postscript.

**He says ...**

*As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."*

*Romans 10:8-11 (NIV)*

In other words, put Jesus at the center – put his Lordship and Messiahship, his death and his resurrection, at the core of your faith – and you will not experience the collapse of your faith.

One more example – again from Paul, who was the greatest Christian missionary who

ever lived. In describing his ministry to a group of believers in the city of Corinth, he made a very interesting statement.

**He wrote:**

*Jews demand signs and  
Greeks look for wisdom, but  
we preach Christ crucified. 1  
Corinthians 1:23 (NIV)*

The Jewish people, Paul says, want to build their faith primarily on personal experience. "Show me something that wows me." The non-Jewish world, Paul says, wants to build their faith on reason and logic. "Prove it to me and I'll believe."

But, Paul says, God doesn't give them (or us) either of those. Instead, he gives a person: *Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified on a Roman cross and raised from the dead on the third day.*



That's the message, friends. That's the core. That's the basic proclamation of Christian faith; it's not "believe in the Bible"; it's not "believe in literal creation as described in Genesis"; it's not "you can live your best life now." It's not "you can hear from God on a daily basis and know exactly what to do in every situation" ... It's "Jesus gave his life on the cross and was raised from the dead ..."

**... and because of that ...**

*God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*

*Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV)*

That's the message.

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And now, I think, we can answer the question of "what should we build instead of a house of cards in which we have all these different elements that if they fail, it all falls down?"

What we need (and this is part of Greg Boyd's analogy and not original with me) is to think of our faith as being a series of concentric circles with Jesus at the middle.

**It would look something like this.**

Jesus – and specifically the message that was proclaimed about Him being Messiah and Lord thru his death and resurrection – is the innermost ring of this series of concentric circles.

**The next rings in our series are these other elements we've mentioned, arranged in order of importance. We're not getting rid of them, we're just going to put them where they belong.**

Scripture comes next to the ring about Jesus' Messiahship and Lordship. And then after that comes theology – our interpretation of how we look at the scripture and the doctrines we come up with as we examine the scripture. And then our personal experience as we try to live out what we learn in the Bible and what the theology and doctrine we hold teaches and how that works out in our every day life. And then the influence of others. I think you can see how this works. You could keep adding rings if you think of other elements.

Now, here's the beauty of this way of looking at things. *You can experience failure or damage in the outer rings because they don't matter as much.* That's not what it all

comes down to. For example, in my life it might be true that the best Christians I know let me down in some way. There's a collapse in that ring. But my faith isn't dependent on them. My faith is dependent on the middle ring. And if, in addition to them letting me down, my life doesn't go the way I think it should go – if it seems like *God* is letting me down (in my personal experiences and what I think they should be) – my faith is not dependent on that. The Christian faith is not dependent on that. I can go back to the core.

And if, in addition to people failing me and God failing me, I am confronted by parts of the Bible that don't seem to make sense – if, Heaven forbid, it turns out that the first two chapters of Genesis truly are an allegory designed to teach us the truth about human nature and why things in this world are so screwed up and the planet really is billions of years old – my faith isn't dependent on

that. That's not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about the core, and I can go back to that core: *Jesus is Messiah and Lord and, in the end, his will shall be done. His Kingdom will be established.*

And this, friends, is why we can actually face the doubts instead of pretending they aren't there.

**See, when doubts come to you for whatever reason, you face them. You ask the hard questions and you might come up with some answers that are not the answers you had before. And later you might come up with other answers that are not that set of answers, but always, always, always you go back to the core – to the inner ring.**

It's kind of like a "doubt consolidation strategy."

And as we go thru this series and look at some of these specific doubt issues, that's

what we're going to do. We're going to ask the hard questions about the things in these rings, the outer rings, and we're going to come to some unsettling thoughts at times. But we're always going to come back to the core.

## **The Resurrection**

Of course, I'm sure you realize that this strategy for dealing with doubt raises the question of "how reliable is that inner ring?" – that core message that "Jesus is Messiah and Lord because of his death and (more importantly for this discussion) because of his resurrection." In fact, that exact question came up several times in the doubt lists from last week.

And it's a great question because, as I've said many times thru the years, everything about Christianity rises and falls on the

literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus. Actually, I wasn't the first person to say this – it was Paul. Here's what he wrote to the Corinthians:

*Brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel (good news) I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*1 Corinthians 15:1-2  
(NIV)*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance [this is the inner ring, the core]: 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also. 1  
Corinthians 15:1-2 (NIV)*

And then Paul, instead of hop-scotching around any doubt there might be concerning the reality of Jesus' resurrection, just lays it out there.

**He writes, the truth about this claim is:**

*If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than*



*that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. 1*  
*Corinthians 15:14-15 (NIV)*

What Paul is saying is if Jesus wasn't raised, if we're wrong about the message of this inner circle, then you cannot trust anything we're telling you about the outer circles! You can't trust what we're telling you about God. You can't trust what we're telling you about how to live your life because we're wrong about the inner circle.

**Then Paul continues:**

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep (those Christians who have died) in Christ are lost.*

And then he makes what has to be one of the most forlorn statements in the whole Bible.

*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (NIV)*

“If the resurrection isn’t real, if it didn’t really happen, if this is just a fairytale, what losers we are for being Christians.”

It’s interesting – several of the cards turned in last week expressed a similar thought to what Paul wrote in that final sentence. One person wrote:

*What if this (all this Christian stuff) is all just a sales pitch and in the end, it's really the end?*

Another person wrote:

*Is this really true? Or do I just believe because it makes me feel better?*

Another person wrote:

*Is it possible we created God to comfort ourselves or explain what we don't know? To be able to face death?*

To all of these, Paul would give an emphatic "no."

**He writes ...**

*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:20 (NIV)*

See, Paul was convinced about the reality of the resurrection. It was the center of his faith, but not only for him, as I hope you can see, it was at the center of the entire movement of

Christians. In fact, no matter what happened to the first Christians, no matter what intellectual or spiritual or circumstantial doubts they faced, it always came back to this issue: *Jesus has been raised from the dead and He is Lord and Messiah.* He is ultimately in control of this world. We should obey him. We should listen to him. We should love him and we should follow him. And one day He is coming back to set things right.

That's what they believed. That's what gave them hope and strength.

## **Conclusion**

The question is ... do we believe it? Do we draw our hope and strength from this? Or are we building a precarious house of cards that most likely, at some point, is going to fall because one of those cards is going to be

removed. Somebody is going to show you something in the Bible that won't add up and it's going to make you doubt it. Somebody you look up to is going to fail you. God is going to fail you in terms of your expectations at some point. You're going to suffer in this life. So, what are you going to do?

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Now, I have to tell you that I am very torn at this point because part of me, as I wrote this message, just wanted to jump into this explanation of why it is reasonable to have faith in the resurrection event as a literal, historical occurrence. But, obviously, it's late and that's really not the purpose of this message.

Plus, I *have* talked about that on many occasions – most recently this past Easter

Sunday. You can look up the message online or get a CD or DVD at the bookstore. We also have Greg Boyd's book that I mentioned as well as Lee Strobel's book "A Case for Faith," and Tim Keller's book "Reason for God." What I'm getting here is, there's a point, friends, where we have to dig into this for ourselves so we can own it for ourselves. We have to stop listening to other people explain it and we have to get into it ourselves.

Years ago, long before I became a pastor, back when I was a software engineer at Bell Labs in NJ, I read what Paul wrote in this passage about the resurrection. I read what he said about "if this is not true, if this hasn't happened, we're pitiful." And I started thinking, I don't want to be building my whole life on something that's crap, literally. So, I started studying. I began to research on my own (and I'll tell you, it was much

more difficult back then because Al Gore hadn't yet invented the internet). And as I studied, as hard as it was, I came to the conclusion that, in spite of some of the inconsistencies between the Gospel accounts concerning the resurrection (and there *are* inconsistencies) and in spite of the fact that people don't normally rise from the dead, *the single best possible explanation* for what happened in Jerusalem on that first Easter Sunday (and beyond in the formation of the early church) is the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. No other answer, no other hypothesis, no other solution to the problem fits the data as well as that one. That's the kind of searching I did.

Now, some of you don't need to go to that level of searching because it's not your nature to do that; you're not wired that way. And you are already convinced about the

reality of Jesus' resurrection. So, for you, all you need to do going forward is, "okay, I get the picture. I'm not building a house of cards. Jesus has got to be at the center. So, when doubts come along I go back to the center, again, and again and again." "My life isn't working like I think it should – yeah, but Jesus really did rise from the dead. That's what matters, and *this* will work itself out."

But for others who are here today, searching, investigating, and researching is exactly what you need to do. Some of you have doubts about your faith and there's no condemnation for that. But because of those doubts you have a wishy-washy commitment; your doubts keep you from fully opening your life to Christ and following him. What you need to do – and I'm just going to lay this out here - is to turn off the TV, stop reading Christian Grey novels, stop looking



at porn, maybe even stop playing golf for a while (that's a hard thing for me to say), you need to stop doing those things and wasting your time and devote your brain to this issue. You need to get this down, because, frankly, some of you are intellectually lazy and you're using that as an excuse. It's time to stop.

And, I'll make you a deal, if you say, "hey, I'm going to buy this book and read it," or "I'm going to watch these messages online." If you want to watch those or read those and take notes, then you can call me and say, "I've got questions about this book," or "I've got questions about what you said." And I'll sit down with you as long as it takes to walk through this if you will make the effort to investigate for yourself.

Now, the way we're going to end this service this morning is by singing a song together that I think expresses what we've been

talking about. And this is an opportunity for all of us to do one of two things - to either sing in the faith that we have already, or for some of us, this is an opportunity to sing this as a desire to have faith, "Jesus, this is what I want to be true about you. I believe. Help my unbelief." And so however it fits for you this morning, I invite you to participate.

So, let's stand together and sing "In Christ Alone."

## **Worship Song – "In Christ Alone"**

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted in a sermon by Adam Hamilton, "God? Conversations with an Atheist."

<sup>ii</sup> John Ortberg, "Faith & Doubt" Kindle edition, highlight location 1830-33

<sup>iii</sup> <http://whchurch.org/sermons-media/sermon/toppling-the-house-of-cards>