

Faith and Doubt

Seeing is not Believing

1. Thoughts

- a. I have preached several times on aspects of faith, and will likely do so repeatedly, since developing and growing in faith is essential to our walk with God. The bible says that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb 11). Because that is worded in the negative, I would like to rephrase it in the positive, “Faith pleases God.” I have even heard it said that faith attracts God’s attention.
- b. I have also known some folks whose faith seemed impervious, rock solid, and concrete. They seemed like nothing could shake their confidence. And I see them a few years later and find that they are a shadow of their former selves. They seem to doubt that God even exists, much less cares for them. What happened? Were they robbed of their faith? Or was their faith grounded in something too shallow?

2. Doubt Displayed

- a. One of the most famous encounters with doubt takes place in the post resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ.
- b. Luke 24:36-43 *“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do **doubts rise in your minds** (hearts)? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while **they still did not believe it** because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence”*
- c. The word for “doubt” Jesus uses means to “*dialogue within your own mind.*” And He says “why do these doubts (of internal dialogue) RISE UP in your hearts”
 - i. You probably have had this “reasoning” occur inside of you.
 - ii. *“Gee, He doesn’t look like Jesus but he sure sounds like Jesus, and He has the wounds in his feet and hands like Jesus, so maybe he is his ghost? But a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones and wow, he can actually eat food. Maybe it is him?”*
 - iii. We do this all the time, *“Gee, God says He will provide but maybe He only meant that for missionaries and not my needs.”*
 - iv. Do you see what that internal dialogue does? It actually talks us out of faith!
 - v. I have had it happen when I’ve been on a treasure hunt (which we are going to do tonight at 6pm). I have a couple clues, “blue shirt, brown shorts, gold chain, black hat” and a guy walks by with three of the clues and I will reason myself out of approaching him. **My own head gets in the way of my acting on faith!**
 - vi. That is the danger of doubt. *Doubt can cause us to reason our way out of acting in faith.*
 - vii. As with the disciples, and with us...**doubt is developed when we have an internal dialogue with ourselves**, when we get “stuck” on reasoning within ourselves.

3. Fast forward to a week later. Thomas, one of the 12 was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them.

- i. *Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe!”... (about a week passes) Then He (Jesus) 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 (negative faith), but believing.” 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” John 20: 24-29*

- ii. Thomas, who was absent from this meeting, hears the report of the disciples. He probably feels a bit left out, like the only person on the outside looking in. He digs into his position and goes even a step further by stating “unless I put my hands into his wounds, I will not believe.”
- iii. Thomas wasn’t uncommitted. It was Thomas who told the other Apostles when Jesus was about to go to Bethany because of Lazarus’, “Let us also go that we may die with him.”
- iv. Jesus says, “do not be unbelieving (negative faith), but believing “
- v. Jesus calls Thomas to stop feeding his life with negative faith (unbelief) and to fill his life with positive faith.
- vi. **We can be “unbelieving believers.”**
 - 1. Skepticism concerning something can dilute our faith. It is one thing to doubt someone’s report (like a reported healing or resurrection) and quite another to doubt what God says in His word.
 - 2. The Greek word for skeptic is skeptomai which means “to look about or to consider.”
 - 3. Thomas was looking for answers.
 - a. He was surrounded by a bunch of guys (and girls) who had been following Jesus together for 3 years and now they were all saying he is alive. Thomas’ grief is probably still got a hold of him.
 - b. **It would be like returning from a funeral and having a friend say, “Hey, I just saw Sally down at Giant Eagle and she looked pretty good for having been dead for 3 days.”**
 - c. How would YOU respond to that?
 - 4. But there is a difference between saying “it can’t be so” and “is it true?”
 - a. Thomas wanted to believe, but wanted to be sure that it was real and not just hype from his cohorts who were acting all sorts of weird. He wanted the real Jesus and not some hyped up story. You gotta remember, the post resurrection Jesus didn’t look 100% like Jesus, except that he did still have the wounds. He wasn’t recognized at the tomb (by Mary) or by those on the road to Emmaus.
- vii. I think this story is a testimony to the difficulty of faith – how hard it is to believe.
 - 1. Faith takes work, because it puts us in uncomfortable places and makes us ask tough questions.
 - 2. I also think this story validates our need for God’s touch.
 - a. It says that it is okay for us to ask questions of God and... to DESIRE a personal encounter.
 - 3. There is nothing cut-and-dried about the Christian faith.
 - a. t cannot be reduced to a set of rules, where everything fits, where everything makes sense, where all we have to do is to connect the dots.
 - b. That is the kind of thing the Pharisees tried to do. They tried to explain everything in a formula; to make all of life so that it could be answered by a set of rules. And if it didn’t fit within that set of rules they rejected it as heresy or blasphemy.
 - c. And consequently, their hearts were closed to the renewing of Christ simply because he didn’t meet the criteria.
 - d. Their unwillingness to look "outside the box" blinded them to the miracle of Jesus Christ who stood in their presence.
 - 4. **So the kind of doubt exemplified by Thomas wasn’t bad...it was if anything, a cry for an encounter with the Master Himself!**
 - 5. Does your heart cry out for more of Him?

4. Unhealthy doubt

- a. *“He (Jesus) was there (on the shore) alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” 28 Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” 29 And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you **doubt**?”*
Matthew 14:22-31
- b. “Doubt is often seen as the opposite of faith and the same thing as unbelief.
- i. But this view of doubt is a major misconception and presents a view of faith that is unrealistic and view of doubt that is unfair.
 1. Doubt is not the opposite of faith.
 2. **Doubt is a state of mind in which we sit suspended between faith and unbelief**
(http://www.edgeoffaith.com/sermons/not_without_a_doubt.html)
 - ii. Doubt: Distazo – to waver or doubt, comes from the root “Dis” which means to have two of something. I think of doubt as a paralyzing enemy that suspends our faith.
 1. Doubt would have kept at least one of Peter’s feet in the boat.
 2. Doubt didn’t hold Peter back, because faith propelled him.
 3. Peter’s faith BEGAN with an encounter with Jesus! And Jesus telling him to come. His faith wavered (began to sink...not like a rock) when he considered the other stuff around him. He must have started having a conversation in his head, “Oh boy, those waves are pretty big...I’m going to get wet”
 - iii. When he began to sink, Jesus reached out and grabbed him and then said, “why did you doubt?”
 1. We find out from the writer what the source of doubt was.
 2. These doubts were different than Thomas’s.
 3. In fact, it was what these doubts were based upon that caused his faith to falter.
 4. **Peter’s doubt was fed by him placing faith in what he SAW** (the wind and waves) instead of WHO he had been looking at (Jesus).
 5. I believe that **doubt arises when we put our faith in something false.**
 - a. Or when we permit something to suspend our faith.
 - b. Fear is a notorious source of doubt.
 6. This is the problem with us.
 - a. We are trained to make judgments based upon what we see and hear.
 - b. We look at the balance in the checkbook and the bills on the table and say, “oh no!”
 - c. And our fear which is based in what we see, overwhelms us.
 - d. God calls us to walk by faith, with our attention fixed on the unseen but sure promises of God.
 - iv. Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*
 1. **When Peter saw the wind and waves, Peter put his faith in what he knew.**
(Remember, he was a fisherman and knew what “bad” waves and “bad” wind was!).
 - v. We too often accept the “testimony” of our physical senses instead of accepting the testimony of God’s word.
 - a. Which do you think is the most reliable?
 2. Is your thinking right or wrong? Your beliefs affect your thoughts which affect your actions. When your thinking (paying attention) to your circumstances

instead of God's words, it produces doubt and not faith. We must feed our spirit and our mind upon God's promises so that our faith is fueled and not our doubt.

- a. V7 *"By faith Noah, when warned about **things not yet seen**, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*
- b. V8 *"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he **did not know where** he was going.*

5. Doubt Overcome by Faith

- a. I shared with you that doubt comes from the root "double" or "two." Doubt comes from focusing upon more than one perspective. We are to focus upon the spiritual, heavenly realm, where we are seated with Christ, and upon His promises. But when we focus upon the earthly, physical realm where the troubles are, we are filled with doubt.
- b. Let me share with you one more story of doubt:
 - i. Luke 5:1-7 *"Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. "*
 - ii. Jesus is teaching by the lake of Gennesaret, and by coincidence, needs to get into a boat in order to teach, so he gets in Simon Peter's boat. What a wonderful coincidence. Now he has got a captive audience. Anyway, he tells Simon to put out from shore a bit, and then teaches the crowd along the shore. Simon is hearing all of this teaching. Simon, like the other young men, washed out of rabbinical school, didn't make the cut to the next level, and therefore were learning their father's trade of fishing. So Jesus gives him a new lesson. He tells him to put out into deep water and let down his nets.
 - iii. It is at this point that Peter objects. *"We worked hard all night and caught nothing."* Meaning, *"we fished all night and are worn out, we just washed our nets which is a lot of tedious work that we have to do after fishing, and you, a non-fisherman, want us to not only go back out in the lake, but also to get our nets dirty again in a vain attempt to catch fish that aren't even in the area?"*
 - iv. That is Peter's doubt. He has experience with fishing.
 - v. But here is Peter's faith. *"but I will do as You say and let down the nets.*
 - vi. The NIV says it as *"**But because you say so, I will let down the nets.**"*
 1. Because YOU SAY SO. In other words, "I just heard you teaching about the Kingdom of God and it sounds so good, that I want to see it, and if obeying you will help me see it, so be it."
 2. You notice that there is no discussion here on exactly what Jesus taught the crowds, but we do know that he was teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God everywhere he went.
 - vii. Peter does so, he believes the "word" of Jesus and watches the Kingdom of God manifest itself. How so? Supernatural Abundance. And **that is how we access the resources of the Kingdom...by faith, not by sight.**

- viii. I never tire of hearing Cindy Fuger give testimonies of God's provision. Over and over again, she has story after story. Yes, she has troubles in her life (don't we all)...but she looks heavenward, and even while battling doubt, she still finds God faithful.
- ix. What about you?

6. Confessing your faith or your doubts?

- a. "God reveals Himself to us and we either respond with faith or with unbelief, creating conditions that affect the way God will relate to us. Unbelief blinds and deafens us to His voice, effectively blocking the most powerful Thing in the universe from being active in and through us." (Bill Johnson).
- b. Don't confess your fear, and certainly, don't confess your doubts.
 - i. If you are saved, you are not filled with doubt. There has to be faith in your heart or you wouldn't be capable of being saved. (Eph 2:8) "*For it is by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*"
 - ii. Our faith is a gift from God.
 - iii. Rev. F.F. Bosworth said, "*Doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs.*"
 - iv. **The problem with many of us is that we are doubting our beliefs and believing our doubts.**
- c. Take a stand. Look at the person next to you and declare the following: **Take a good look at me, cause I'm getting ready to do the impossible, I'm getting ready to go where they said It was impossible to go, and I'm getting ready to do what they said it was impossible to do.**
- d. Won't you take a stand on the invisible? What are you struggling with today. Is it health? Is it finances? Is it a need for a job? Step out of your seat by faith and come forward for it now.
 - i. How about a relationship with the invisible God? (share the gospel).

Series Scriptures:

Oligopistas (little faith)

Mt 6:30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Mt 8:26 - He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith ?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.

Mt 14:31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt ?"

Mt 16:8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?

Mt 17:20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there ,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.