

“NO MORE DOUBT - HE LIVES”
Acts 2:14a, 22-32, I Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31
April 22 & 23, 2023

“One day, a lady got on a train. Now there were a lot of trains at the station, but she had asked someone about which train was the correct train for her to get on to get where she wanted to go. They told her which train and she followed their direction. She got on the train but she was nervous. She still wasn’t completely sure that she was on the right train. She sat down with the train getting ready to pull off, wondering if she was on the right one. She didn’t want to go the wrong way. Wanting to be certain that she was where she needed to be, she turned to the lady sitting next to her and asked, ‘Excuse me, miss, is this the right train to St. Louis?’

“She said, ‘Yep! Your’ on the right train.’

“So the lady went and sat back, but then started thinking that maybe the woman whom she had asked was on the wrong train, too. She decided to check with somebody else. She turned to the man behind her. ‘Sir, is this the train to St. Louis?’

“Yes ma’am, this is the train to St. Louis.’

“She felt a little better but that man didn’t look too smart. So the lady again found herself feeling uncertain, and without question, she didn’t want to take a risk of being on the wrong train. At just that moment the conductor came through. The lady said, ‘Sir, I’m going to St. Louis; am I on the right train?’

“He said, ‘Yes ma’am, you’re on the right train to St. Louis. I will take you there as I’m running the engine.’ The lady lay back and went to sleep.

“Hearing from the person next to you is nice, but it isn’t enough. Hearing from the nice man behind you is nice, but it’s not enough. Hearing the pastor say ‘I think you’re a Christian’ is nice, but that’s not enough. But when the conductor comes through, the one who is driving the train, that’s enough! Sometimes you are going to check your feelings and you’ll feel saved, but that’s not enough. Some days you are going to be living right but when something wrong happens that’s not enough. But

when Jesus says, ‘I guarantee you eternal life because you have placed your total faith in My finished work,’ brothers and sisters, that’s enough because He’s driving the train.”¹

Folks, we live in a world that can often be very confusing. The hustle and bustle around us can make us question what we’ve been told, and cause us to wonder if it’s true. There are many around us who seem like they’re doing ok and making out alright, but sometimes it’s good to question the accuracy of what we see and hear. We are told about many things that seem good and right, based upon what we’ve been told, but are they true? No one wants to be misled. No one wants to end up at the wrong place, at the wrong time, suffering wrong consequences, because they believed something that was told to them. It’s good for us to question the things in life to see the accuracy of what we’re being told.

But there is a distinct difference between doubt and unbelief. To doubt is to seek for more information before putting one’s trust in it. Doubt is hoping beyond hope that what is being said or what has happened is really true, but desiring to have absolute confidence that it is really true before implementing it into our lives. Doubt is healthy, questioning something to make sure that we are not following something that is false. Doubt leads to answers of our questions.

Unbelief, on the other hand, is that willful determination to not explore that which is in question. Unbelief is trusting in a limited amount of information, but a confidence that what is said or experienced is really the truth, without wanting to dig deeper for the real truth. Unbelief relies on the self for all the information that is needed without exploring beyond what is presented.

“In 1887, Henry Drummond preached a sermon in Northfield, Massachusetts, entitled *Dealing with Doubt*. Here is one of his observations:

“Christ never failed to distinguish between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is can’t believe; unbelief is won’t believe. Doubt is honest; unbelief is obstinacy. Doubt is looking for light; unbelief is content with darkness. Loving darkness rather than light - that is what Christ attacked and attacked unsparingly. But for the intellectual questioning of Thomas, and Philip, and Nicodemus, and the many

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 259, #782)

others who came to Him to have their great problems solved, He was respectful and generous and tolerant.

“But how did He meet their doubts? The church, as I have said, says ‘Brand him!’ [Call him a doubter, an unbeliever.] Christ said, ‘Teach him.’ [Help him to find the truth.]

When Thomas came to Jesus, denied His very resurrection, and stood before Him waiting for the scathing words and lashing for his unbelief, they never came. They never came. Christ gave him fact - facts”² unto which he could put his complete confidence.

Let’s listen to the account. This is John 20:19-31. (READ John 20:19-31)

There was plenty of doubt going on throughout the disciples on the day of Jesus’ resurrection. The women had come back from the tomb saying Jesus was alive, and no one believed them. Peter and John had even run to the tomb to check it out for themselves, and even they doubted what had happened. Had Jesus really risen from the dead? Or had someone stolen the body of Jesus?

Oh, there had been plenty of clues as to what had happened. The strips of linen that had been wrapped around Jesus for His burial were unwound and lying where Jesus’ body had been. And the cloth that had covered His head was there, folded up in its place. No one stealing the body would have taken the time to unwrap it and then leave the burial clothes in the tomb. But there they were!

Verse 9 of John 20 says it well, *“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”* It wasn’t because they didn’t want to believe - it was because no one had ever risen from the dead on their own. Yes, Jesus had raised folks from the dead, but to raise Himself? That was another question entirely.

But then, the accounts started coming in about people having experienced Jesus, arisen and alive again. Mary saw Jesus at the tomb. The two men going to Emmaus had walked and talked and eaten with Jesus. Then, Simon Peter had seen Jesus, too. The list of doubts about the resurrection of Jesus was growing shorter, while the list of assurances that Jesus had risen from the dead was growing longer.

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 243)

Could it really have happened? Could Jesus really have done what He said He would do and rise from the dead on the third day after His crucifixion?

So that all of the disciples and other followers of Jesus would know that He really rose from the dead, Jesus shows Himself to them all at once. And “*the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord*” (John 20:20).

But there was one problem: Thomas was not among them when Jesus came to them. Now, imagine being in the midst of a group of people, and they tell you the most outstanding news that is so hard to believe that you just can’t quite wrap your head around it. They are adamant that what they are telling you is true - they experienced it! But because you missed it, it’s too good to be true. What do you do? You question what they say, you seek answers for yourself, you probe others for information. But until you can experience that event on your own to get a first-hand understanding of what they’ve told you, it’s all too good to be true, and you can’t believe it. You want to know for sure before you put your trust in what’s being told to you. Your doubt drives you to find the truth.

But unbelief is so very different. It refuses to accept any other information. It stagnates in false materials presented as truth. It rejects anything that seems impossible. It declines to move toward the truth, even if it is outstanding truth. Unbelief denies the truth and depends upon other information to be truth. Unbelief makes a person unable to accept truth and keeps them captive in the darkness of lies. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

“In his book *The Magician's Nephew*, C. S. Lewis writes of the creation of fictitious Narnia through the song of Aslan (the lion who represents Jesus in the book). The Creation Song is clearly intended to reveal the majesty and glory of Aslan. As in Genesis 1, it is a grand call to worship.

“But there was one (Uncle Andrew) who **would not** hear it. The consequences were staggering: When the great moment came and the Beasts spoke, he missed the whole point, for a rather interesting reason. When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And Uncle Andrew had disliked the song very much. It made him think and

feel things he did not want to think and feel.

“Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a Lion (‘only a lion,’ as he said to himself) he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing - only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our own world. *Of course it can't really have been singing*, he thought. *I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?*

“And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to.

“And when at last the Lion spoke and said, ‘Narnia awake,’ Uncle Andrew didn't hear any words: he heard only a snarl. And when the beasts spoke in answer, he heard only barkings, growlings, bayings, and howlings.”³

On the day of Jesus' resurrection, Thomas was seeking his own first-hand experience with Jesus. Though he was not with the others when Jesus visited that evening, he wanted the truth. He wanted to believe just like the others, but he didn't want to put his trust on the information of those around him. He wanted it from Jesus.

And so, a week later, when they were all together, Jesus came to that place, and addressed Thomas personally. *“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”* (John 20:27).

You see, Jesus did not want Thomas to keep on doubting and having that doubt turn into unbelief. Jesus wanted Thomas to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was really alive, risen from the dead just as He said He would do. Jesus gave Thomas the facts he needed to confirm his faith and believe that what the other disciples and followers of Jesus had said, “He is alive!”

³ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 295)

The problem is, however, if our questions that drive us to doubts are not answered quickly, that doubt often changes to unbelief, and the person starts down a dangerous road toward rejecting any truth from that point on in their life. If they start listening only to those around them who are trying to convince them of what they are telling them is true, that individual might have the truth “convinced out of them,” to the point that they will not listen to the real truth when it is told to them. And unless this person keeps an open mind and continues to pursue the answers to their questions from a variety of people, and then from the Conductor, Himself (as in the opening story), it will be very easy for them to become misled into rejecting the truth and content to believe in a lie.

Jesus told Thomas, *“Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29). There was no scolding for his doubt. There was no discrediting of Thomas before the others about the questions he was raising, and his need for absolute proof before his believing. Jesus patiently and purposefully pointed out Thomas so that he could believe. And from that point on, Thomas not only trusted Jesus as his Messiah, but spent the rest of his life telling others of the fact that Jesus IS the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the Savior of the world.

Thomas believed in Jesus because he saw Him, touched Him, spoke to Him and physically experienced Him. But what about the rest of us who have not had that kind of experience with Jesus. We, too, could demand that same kind of proof, *“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”* (John 20:25). And many in our world are saying that very thing - Jesus is a fake, a liar, a charlatan. It’s because they are being told that by those who will not believe. And when we hear something told to us enough, we begin to believe it. What may have started out as doubts, could very easily come to unbelief if we only surround ourselves with those who work to convince us of what they want to be the truth.

So we have to be careful of who we listen to, of whom we surround ourselves with so that we are not led to unbelief and become so calloused that our hearts are incapable of hearing the truth or seeing the facts that are presented to.

“Rock and roll musician Paula Cole laments her loss of faith: ‘As a child, I felt what we call God - that spirit, that energy. Then you get schooled **by society**, and I rationalized that it didn't exist. It made me profoundly unhappy that there was no meaning, no logic, no unity of all life.’”⁴

Paula had let our world today convince her that there was nothing true about God, about Jesus, about faith in something that is beyond our understanding. If we cannot understand it, we often discard it in the trash heap of our minds and we stop trying to understand it. We live in a throw-away-society that tells us that if we can't understand it, if we can't use it, if we cannot fix it, then get rid of it - it's no use to us.

But when we do that, we only invite the darkness of the world to invade our lives, our hearts, our minds and our very souls, and we are then blinded to all truth, except that which we determine as truth for ourselves. And if we do that, then no joy is left within us, no hope for real life is possible, and no anticipation for anything outside of this world is available to us. And our hope then is fixed only upon the things of this world.

But Jesus does not want us to become lost in unbelief! Jesus wants us to know that He is alive, that He has beaten our last and final enemy - death. Jesus wants us to be able to rejoice that this world is not all there is to put our confidence and hope in. He wants us to be able to trust in Him so that as we claim Him as our Risen Savior, Conqueror over death, that we now have a purpose to live for, a reason for our being - to praise God for the work of Salvation accomplished by Jesus as He rose from the dead.

Jesus does not want us to be lost in our unbelief, but to fully trust in Him as our Savior so that we might live as witnesses to the rest of the world as to the hope we have in Christ. He has come to transform our lives from darkness to light, from hopelessness to life, from despair to courage, from death to life. He desires that **as we put** our trust in Him we become the living witness to the truth of the Gospel of God through Jesus, guiding others to the hope that we have in Him.

Thomas's response to Jesus' invitation for him to feel the holes in His hands and thrust his hand

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 287)

into His side where the spear pierced Him, comes to us in a marvelous proclamation of faith, **not doubt**. “*Thomas said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’*” (John 20:28). Nowhere else in the Scriptures does anyone proclaim Jesus as Lord AND God.

“What a thrill must have been his to see how His Lord had triumphed over death! At last, Thomas had reached the sunnier side of his cheerless cautiousness, and, after almost swearing that he would not accept the resurrection, he is already sure that he is standing before Jehovah Himself, giving a wonderful testimony that must have satisfied His own heart - ‘My Lord and my God!’ Truly, this is the grandest, strongest and shortest witness in the New Testament to what Jesus was, and is; and it is the more remarkable as coming from Thomas.”⁵

His doubt led him to the very answers that He desired so deeply, that not only was Jesus alive, but that He was truly the Messiah of the world, God Himself come to us to bring Salvation to all who would believe. And so great was his faith in Jesus that Thomas went to India, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the kings of India, even those who had come at Jesus’ birth offering their gifts and adoration. His life had become transformed, and his witness spread Christianity into Eastern countries.

So what might the Lord Jesus do with you as you let your own doubts lead you to faith in Him as Lord and Savior? May Jesus Himself transform your life to become a witness for Him wherever you go!

No more Doubt! Jesus IS Alive. Find Him and let Him lead you for His glory! Let’s pray.

Father, thank you so much for the searching of Thomas, who found Jesus as Lord and God having seen Him. May we have such faith, even without our seeing Jesus, so that we may truly be blessed by believing in Him as our Lord and Savior! Use our own doubts to lead us to full knowledge and assurance that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead to bring Salvation to us as we believe in Him. Then lead us to do Your great work wherever we go so that we may take this great Good News to those who have never heard. Draw us close to Yourself today, Lord Jesus, so that we may bring honor and glory to You. This we pray in Your precious and Holy Name, Jesus our Savior. AMEN.

⁵ (Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) pg. 182)