

Not Seeing and Believing
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Being a people of faith, we don't like to talk about doubt. We don't like to face our doubts. We think that doubts are always an evidence of spiritual weakness. True. Doubt can lead to spiritual paralysis, but doubt is also a fact of life. We are finite creatures. We cannot know things with absolute certainty. We live all of life in the midst of faith and doubt.

When we think of doubt, its hard not to think about the apostle Thomas. The phrase doubting Thomas has become a part of our language. This connection between Thomas and doubting is found in John 20.

To set the scene, Jesus has appeared to his disciples. They were all gathered in one place and Jesus appeared to them for the first time. He had already appeared to the women and to Peter and to the two on the road to Emmaus and now he had appeared to them together. Except for the fact that not everyone was there.

John 20:24-25

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 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 it."

Perhaps you find it easy to identify with Thomas. He fits the pattern of our day. People say that "seeing is believing". That's what Thomas wanted. He wanted to see Jesus for himself. Thomas saw him die. He knew that dead people usually stayed dead. Before Thomas would believe that Jesus was alive, he had to see it for himself.

Have you ever asked for a miracle like Thomas did? I have heard many people question why if God is really up there is he always hiding. Why doesn't he do something spectacular to clear up any doubt. Why doesn't he write fire in the sky and speak in a loud booming voice to the whole world. Isn't God all powerful? Couldn't he clear up the matter once and for all. I'd

believe in Jesus if he was to appear in this room right now and show me his hands and side. Until then, I will not believe.

But God does not usually cater to these sort of demands. But then he did for Thomas.

Thomas got to see the miracle that he asked for.

John 20:26-28

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!" 27 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." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

I must admit that part of me wishes that I could witness a spectacular miracle just like Thomas did. I think that my faith would be so much stronger. I think that my witness would be more effective. No more doubts. If only I could see a miracle.

I used to indulge these thoughts when I would pray to God and ask him to heal my eyesight.

Story of praying in bed and then looking at the alarm clock to see if it was blurry or clear.

As you can all see I still wear glasses. I never got my miracle. Maybe I never will.

Before we draw the conclusion that Thomas sets the precedent and that we all should get the miracle we ask for, let me say that Thomas was a bit of an exception. Although he got the miracle he asked for, most people do not. Jesus did not appear to the whole world after his resurrection. I believe he appeared to the disciples and to Thomas, because Jesus was preparing them for special service. The fact remains that for most people, God remains physically hidden.

In fact Jesus scolds Thomas to some degree and the words he says to Thomas are words meant also for us.

John 20:29

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

I don't feel blessed because I believe in Jesus without having visible proof. In fact believing without seeing almost seems like a curse. Cursed to always have to wrestle with doubt.

Would it not be more blessed to eradicate doubt. Would it not be more blessed to see and then believe.

Not according to Jesus. He says “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”

In these words, Jesus says that the attitude of Thomas is in fact wrong. It is wrong to withhold belief until God meets you on your terms. While it may not be wrong to ask for a miracle within the context of faith, we ought not play the part of Thomas and withhold our belief until we receive the miracle. Although Jesus did in fact do what Thomas wanted, that does not take away from the fact that Thomas was wrong in asking.

“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”

But how can Jesus be possibly right. When Jesus says “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” isn't he basically saying blessed are those who have doubts and yet believe.” And what can be good about doubt? Why purpose could God possibly have with doubt.

Actually, when you think about it, God does in fact have a purpose for doubt. Doubt is necessary in order to create the kind of faith that God is looking for in us.

Let me explain by telling you a story.

Let me tell you the story of the king who fell in love with the poor maiden.

- He could dazzle her with riches
- He could compel her with authority
- But would she love him?

- His plan was to disguise himself and try to woo her

Pascal has an interesting saying that is quite profound. He says

“God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will.” (Penses 234)

If the king had come to that maiden in perfect clarity, leaving no doubt about his power and his riches, that maiden would have likely responded not in love, but rather in reluctant coercion. She may have become his wife, but always held a secret affection for the life she left behind. That king desired a willing heart not merely a compelled mind.

Just as the king was more interested in a loving wife than a wife who was forced to marry him, so God is more interested in our love and trust than merely in our convinced mind. If God were to dazzle us with his powers, it might force us submit to his will, but it would not help us love him or trust him. In fact miracles might even get in the way. If God were to dazzle us, we would have to believe whether we loved him or not.

Doubt helps us have the proper kind of faith, faith that includes affection.

Faith is not faith if it only is evidenced in intellectual belief. God wants our hearts as well as our minds. James 2:19 says “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” The demons have no doubt about God, but it does them little good. If God were to evidence himself to everyone in an unambiguous way, we would believe in our minds, but he might not have our heart. Doubt helps eradicate counterfeit faith, faith that has no affection. Those who have not seen and yet believe are more likely to believe with both mind and heart.

And doubt helps us have the proper kind of faith, faith that includes perseverance.

Faith is not faith if it only operates in the good times. Faith trust’s God even in the bad times. Faith hangs on to God even in the dark times. Doubt is a dark time. If we remain faithful to God in the midst of doubt, it is evidence that our faith is genuine. When doubts surface and we do not abandon God, our faith grows stronger.

1 Peter 1:6-9

.. though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.(and these trials I believe include doubt) 7 These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

When we believe without seeing, we believe in a way that blesses God. We believe with our heart and we show that our faith is refined. God wants us to love him and the best way to ensure that our love is a willing love is believe without seeing.

God does not want forced or finicky love. He wants a heart felt faith that holds on to God against all odds. This pleases God very much.

Some might wonder, however, if Jesus says that we are blessed when we believe without seeing, does this mean that God wants us to have blind faith? Does this mean that the greatest love for God is expressed in believing without any evidence?

No. Christian faith does exist alongside the possibility of doubt, but that does not mean that there is no evidence whatsoever.

One piece of evidence we have is the testimony of others. When I think about it, much of what I believe is based almost exclusively on the testimony of others. I believe in China. I believe that Napoleon conquered much of Europe. I believe in electrons. I believe that if I were to eat arsenic, I would die. All these things I believe, because I trust others.

It is similar for my faith in Jesus. I believe at least in part because of the testimony of those who wrote the Bible.

Notice John 20:30-31

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So we have the testimony of scripture. But that's not all. I have the testimony of countless millions alive today, who have experienced a relationship with Jesus. I know a lot of Christians and I find that most of them are not naïve. There is a reality to their experience.

But the lock down proof, is something you only receive once you believe. There is an understanding that comes from faith. Only after you jump in the water can you know what it is like to swim. Only after taking the training wheels off your bike can you learn to balance and ride. The proof is in the pudding. You only know how good it tastes when you try it.

When you take that step of faith, God proves himself to you. He sends his Holy Spirit to live in us and Romans 8:16 says that "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." God himself confirms himself to us. This is experienced in many ways. Often through a sense of peace, answered prayer, joy, a release of guilt, a sense of love, a sense of purpose. This confirmation by God's Spirit is part of what it means to be blessed when we believe amidst doubt.

So believing without seeing is not the same as blind faith. There are good reasons like the testimony of others and ultimately the testimony of God himself.

Doubt is not always good. It can be paralyzing. If doubt is producing indecision in your life, it may prove harmful. But doubt is also a reality. We have to learn to live with some doubt. For the most part, God will not give us miraculous proof. I don't believe that it is wrong to want to see miracles, and some of us may have experienced some spectacular miracles, I do believe however that if we do not witness a miracle this does not give us an excuse to withhold our faith.

God uses doubt. God uses doubt because it helps create a genuine faith, a faith that is from the heart and a faith that perseveres. I'm not saying that it is good to doubt. I am agreeing with Jesus that "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." God has confirmed himself to me, because

even though I doubt, I believe. If you are struggling with doubt. Don't let it paralyze you. Don't wait for absolute clarity. Take a risk follow the evidence, trust in Jesus. I guarantee that he will prove himself to you. You too will know what it means to be blessed to believe even in the face of doubt.

So as we go to communion may we celebrate it in this light. May it be for us an affirmation of believing without seeing, an affirmation of faith even though we do not understand everything.

Doubt is not the problem. The problem is choosing to believe your doubts. But that is not true for us. We are holding on to faith. We believe in Jesus. We believe the testimony of his word. We believe the testimony of others. We believe that the Spirit has testified to our spirit that we are children of God.

So if you have placed your faith in Christ. Eat and drink as a declaration of faith and love.

Agree with Peter as he writes

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.