

## ***HAVE YOU BELIEVED?***

John 20:19-31 Text: vs. 29 *“Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

During the Revolutionary War, George Washington lost two-thirds of the battles he fought. But he won the war and became the first president of the United States. The “*father of our Nation*”. Babe Ruth’s career lasted 21 years as one of baseball’s best players. He hit 714 home runs. But struck out 1,330 times. That didn’t keep him out of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Thomas Edison began his career as an inventor in Newark, New Jersey starting with the automatic repeater which allows a message to be transferred from one wire to another without the aid of an operator. In 1864 he conceived the idea of sending two messages over the same wire, at the same time. That led to his experiments in duplex-telegraphy and other improved telegraphic devices. But the invention that gained him the most fame was the phonograph. It was so unexpected. It seemed to be almost magical. During his career Edison had 10,000 failures. But he had 1,000 successes and is remembered as the “*father of the lightbulb*”.

In our lesson this morning, there was a disciple of Jesus named Thomas remembered as *doubting Thomas*. Why? Because He didn’t believe Jesus was alive, even though he had been told Jesus *was* alive. But there’s more to this story than his failed faith. It’s best told in a story about an old preacher who felt he had failed miserably. He told his fellow pastors that he had only baptized one person in his entire ministry. A boy! But you know what? That boy went on to become a missionary in Africa who baptized hundreds that he had brought to Jesus! Grantland Rice, an American sportswriter put it this way: “*When Jesus comes to judge us, He will not be so concerned about whether we won or lost, but how we played the game!*” That’s what you need to understand this morning. This world measures you by your success. What you’ve done. What you’ve achieved.

But God measures you by your faithfulness! Listen again to what we just read in our lesson a moment ago. *“Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But Thomas 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.” A week later, Jesus’ 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!” 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. Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”*

Have you ever had doubts? You know, being uncertain about something. If you have, you know how it can come over you like a big, dark cloud. You get into a funk. Nagging questions begin to surface. Strange thoughts begin to bounce around in your mind. Pretty soon, your thoughts become one big doubt. You try praying about it. Reading books about it. You talk with friends about your doubts. You read the Bible. Yet, doubt remains. Some of your friends understand. Others are concerned. But to you it’s not your imagination. It’s real! You’re experiencing real doubt! And hopefully in the end, your doubt will cease. Your faith will be strengthened. Everything will come back together. Then you will have won, because you faced doubt and overcame it! Doubting Thomas did. When it was all over, Thomas said to Jesus, *“My Lord and my God!”*

However, no one’s immune to doubt. It happens to a lot of people. And when it comes your way, you’ve got to know how to handle it. Even the greatest men and women recorded in the Bible had to deal with doubt. They found the only sure way to overcome doubt was when they placed their faith in God. And you must come to that place in your life where God is more important to you than anything else. When you’re in doubt, look to the Word of God! The Bible.

There’s a story about an old wooden bucket. A man came upon one and thought it was useless. It had been sitting outside next to a barn, in the sun, unused for a long time. He held it up and could see daylight between the slats of the wooden bucket. He thought it would never hold water again. But an older man with him took the bucket, tied it to the well’s rope and dropped it deep down into the cool well water below. In a couple of days, they came back to the well. The older man turned the crank to draw the bucket back up from the well, and *voila!* It was full of clear, cool well water. It wasn’t leaking a drop! The wooden bucket’s slats had absorbed enough water until they fit together exactly as originally designed. The bucket was useful again!

And that’s the way life is with you and the Word of God – the Bible. If you’re dried-up spiritually, like that old wooden bucket, you need to plunge yourself into the Bible. Absorb it. It will help you fit your life together as God originally designed you. Then you will become a useful witness to God upon this Earth. Max Lucado, in his book *It’s Not About Me*, tells of a friend who had cancer. Some well-intentioned Christians had gone to visit the man in the hospital and told him, “*If you have faith, you will be healed*”. But no healing came. It caused a crisis of faith in that man’s life. When Max visited his friend in the hospital and learned about it, he suggested, “*It’s not about you. Your hospital room is a showcase for your Maker. It’s a place to show your faith. Suffering is not about you. It’s all about God. When you start to think that way, you can live an unburdened and happy life. All your doubts will fade away!*”

In the 1600's, Caravaggio, an Italian painter, created a famous painting he titled *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Or better, *The Amazement of Saint Thomas*. In the painting, he pictured Jesus holding the right side of His garment open. The side where a Roman soldier took a sword and thrust it into Him. Three men are in the painting. Two are standing to the side of Jesus. The third man is in front of Him, stooping, looking closely as he places his finger into the gaping wound in Jesus' side. Think about it. Thomas had to actually put his finger into the open wound of Jesus *before* he would believe Jesus was alive. Jesus understood that. He knew Thomas needed to see for himself.

And sometimes you need to see, hear, and touch something in order to believe it. Mary Magdalene had seen and heard Jesus, but didn't touch Him. She believed! Other disciples saw Jesus and believed. 500 saw Him and believed. And when Thomas touched Jesus' wounded side, it made the *Faith Fallout* of the Resurrection be changed from fear and doubt. Fear was transformed into joy. Doubt was transformed into belief. And when Jesus said to Thomas, "*Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!*" Thomas said, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:27-28)

You may have grown up in The Faith. You may believe in the Authority of Scripture as the Word of God. You may believe in Divine Creation. You've heard the stories of Noah's Ark, Jonah and the Whale, Samson and Delilah, The Virgin Birth, Jesus turning the Water into Wine, Jesus feeding 5,000 with two fish and a little bread, the Resurrection and Ascension. You've heard of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Second Coming, the Resurrection of the Dead, Eternal Life, Heaven and Hell. And you're not troubled by them. *Because you weren't there!* You didn't see any of that! But still, you believe it! You accepted it unseen! But you still have much to see, in spite of being puzzled by what seems a tough God in the Old Testament, yet who is a gracious and loving God in the New Testament. Then you remind yourself. God's ways are not your ways. God's thoughts are not your thoughts. And you accept the way God is. And the way you are.

At the heart of it all there is a God who never changes. God loved you so much that He sent His One and Only Son to die for you so that you might be made right with Him. He has always loved you. He has loved you so that you can be changed to receive His mercy and His love. But that change doesn't happen automatically! Are you totally happy with where you are in your relationship with God? When you gave your life to Christ, you heard all about this New Life. You heard how you are supposed to believe and trust in Jesus.

But the problem is, you may never have experienced the fullness of it. Too many people have had the salvation experience, and then just sit back and wait for change to happen. But the change they're waiting for never happened. Change requires personal involvement. It requires action on your part. If you don't put anything into it, nothing will ever come of it. God has a wonderful life planned for you.

But living that life requires change. The winds of change need to sweep through your life in order for you to have a healthy relationship with God. You were meant to have one! You need to let the convicting wind of the Holy Spirit sweep through you and bring you to that place in your life where God wants you to be. Then, you can experience the fullness of His blessings. You heard what Jesus said to His disciples. You heard what He said to Thomas. Now hear what Jesus says to you: "*Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. These things are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you will have life by the power of His name.*" (John 20:29-31) That's what this is all about. Jesus saying to you *believe!*

Yes, there was a *faith fallout* at Easter. But that Fallout of Faith was changed at Easter when Jesus said to Thomas, "*Stop doubting and believe*". And now, you have believed that He is Risen, and you are "*Blessed*" because you "*have not seen, and yet have believed*". To God be the Glory! AMEN