

DEFEATING DOUBT

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

The resurrection of Jesus is a fact! If He had not risen, that would have been the end to His Mission. But everything possible in the way of proof has been examined. And the strongest proof Jesus was resurrected from the dead was when He appeared to more than five hundred at one time *after* His resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul wrote: *“He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep”* which suggests, there were hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus. Witnesses who experienced the truth of His victory over death. This remarkable event underlines the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection and the effect it had on the early Christian community. Their testimonies back up the basic beliefs of Christianity. Faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation through His sacrifice. And a commitment to love and follow His teachings. While we don’t have written records from those 500 witnesses, they were not mere spectators. They were active participants in the resurrection story. Their impressions helped shape the faith of generations to come.

Several wrote about the risen Jesus. Matthew, one of the twelve disciples wrote in his Gospel of Jesus’ resurrection appearances. John, another disciple, emphasized Jesus’ resurrection appearances in his Gospel. James, the brother of Jesus became a leader in the early Christian community and wrote a practical guide for living a true Christian faith. His book challenges you to put your beliefs together with your actions and seek wisdom from God. Jude, another apostle also known as Thaddeus, wrote about faith and false teachings in his short Book of Jude. These written testimonies, along with the early Christian community, confirm the truth of Jesus’ resurrection and His teachings. Those 500 witnesses together with the Apostles made an impact that echoes throughout the ages. They inspired faith and hope for generations to come.

And what adds weight to all of that? Their personal testimony! At first, they were all skeptical. They wouldn’t be satisfied until they had proof. They would not be convinced without evidence. Now, we have in our text this morning a man who was determined *not* to believe. Thomas, one of the disciples, doubted Jesus’ resurrection. He insisted on seeing the wounds in Jesus’ hands and side before believing. Thomas was a man of strong feelings. He had enthusiasm. Nothing would do for him but that he personally see Jesus. Even touch His body. He thought it possible that he might be deceived. And for that reason, he would not believe! *“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 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.”* Jesus responded to his doubt with compassion and understanding and invited Thomas to touch His wounds.

Now, that kind of thinking puts religion at a disadvantage. What room is there for faith when someone insists that everything must be explained? They must see. They must handle. They must have something demonstrated or else they will not believe! Where is that child-like trusting simplicity that was so like the disciples of Jesus? Is it wrong to believe without evidence? And if you’re going to prejudge, that’s an even greater wrong, because you are setting your own wisdom above the wisdom that comes from on High. Losing yourself in the confusion of reason makes no sense either, when the highest glory is to subject yourself to the Infinite Reason of the universe, who is God. Faith doesn’t depend on physical evidence. Faith is a gift from God. Faith goes beyond what your eyes can see. Still, doubt is a natural part of the human experience. Especially during challenging times.

Carl Rogers, a well-known psychologist was 22 years old when he entered Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1924. While there, he participated in a seminar organized to explore religious doubts. Rogers later said of the group, "The majority of members in thinking their way through questions *they* had raised, thought themselves right out of religious work. And I was one of them."

A fella’ once told about a wooden well bucket he came upon. He thought it was useless. It had been setting next to a barn in the sun, unused for a long time. He held it up. He saw daylight between the wooden slats of the bucket. Certainly, this thing would never hold water again. But an older man with him tied the bucket to the well rope and let it ease down into the water below. In a couple of days, they came back. Turned the crank handle. The bucket came up. It was full of clear, cool well water. It was not leaking a drop! The water had soaked into the wooden bucket slats until they fit together as originally designed. The bucket was useful again!

That’s the way it is with God! You need to be soaked by the Holy Spirit. That’s the heart of the Christian life. It’s a concept that involves being open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. When you allow the Holy Spirit to lead you, your life blossoms. It flourishes. But when you neglect, or refuse the Holy Spirit’s guidance, it can cause your spiritual life to weaken. In Galatians 5:16–25 the apostle Paul spoke about two problems faced by believers. Legalism, which overemphasized rules and regulations. And total disregard for moral guidelines. So, instead of taking a middle ground between the two, Paul built a superhighway right through both of those extremes and gave a clear command: *“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* (Galatians 5:16)

Flesh represents fallen human nature. Self-centered attitudes. Selfish desires. Bad behavior. The flesh and the Spirit are in constant disagreement. Every believer experiences this struggle. But when you follow the Holy Spirit, you overcome

the flesh's pull toward sin. Walking by the Spirit means living your life every day under the guidance and authority of the Holy Spirit. You walk by the Spirit. And you bear fruit: Love, joy, peace. Patience. Kindness and goodness. Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Those fruits are of the spirit and are qualities that will change your character and transform your relationships. So, Paul urges you to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24) Your daily choices should reject sinful feelings.

When you heed the Spirit's warnings and live in step with the Spirit, you experience freedom. (Galatians 5:18) You're no longer under the Law's condemnation because you are being guided by love and grace. You are being led by the Holy Spirit. That means surrendering to His guidance and allowing Him to transform you from *within*. It's a journey of growth, obedience, and living in Christ's image. In our lesson today, Thomas' doubt was overcome by the witness of others. The other disciples had seen the risen Christ. They testified to it. And believers are to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection in their own lives. Your transformed life can be a powerful testimony to those who haven't physically seen the risen Jesus who pronounced a blessing upon those who without ever having seen Him believe in Him. That includes all believers throughout history. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.*" That's YOU! Embrace His blessing with faith. Even when circumstances challenge you, you can trust in the unseen God.

Faith is like a journey. A winding path through valleys of doubt. Across bridges of hope. Up mountains of revelation. It works like this: In the beginning, faith is like a seed. Small and unassuming, you plant it in the soil of your heart hoping for growth. That's when your faith journey begins. During your first steps of faith you may stumble, unsure of the way. Your eyes may be seeking signs. Doubt whispers in your ears. But you press on. Faith is not a certainty. Faith is the courage to walk that path, despite uncertainty. Then comes the wilderness when the path narrows. Doubts enter your mind. You thirst for answers. Yet, in the wilderness you find blessings—small revelations that keep you going. Then come the crossroads. Choice's loom. Left, or right? Fear or trust? You check your inner compass. You want to take a detour. But wandering may lead you astray. Then, grace guides you back. . . . Storms come. Thunder roars. Waves crash. Faith becomes like a fragile sail. You cry out, "*Master, save me!*" Then He calms the storm *within you*. Fellow Travelers walk alongside you. The saints. The sinners of old who experienced the same. At last, you reach the summit. The air is thin. Things become clear. You see the eternal horizon. Faith? It's now a sturdy staff that supports your weary steps. The Unseen City is just ahead. You see Golden streets. Your heart aches for home. But faith whispers, "*Not yet. Keep walking.*" Then, you cross the threshold. The veil lifts. Faith becomes sight. You are standing before the One who walked beside you all along.

So, pilgrim, keep on traveling. Faith—imperfect as it is—fragile, yet unwavering—will lead you home. Doubts may arise. But you can always seek God's guidance by trusting in His promises. Share your testimony with someone today. Tell how faith has effected your life. Remember, faith is a gift. God honors those who seek Him with open hearts. So let these words, today, inspire you to embrace the blessing of believing without seeing. "*May you be blessed as you believe, even when you cannot see. May your faith lead you to obedience, and into the fullness of God's favor.*" Those words hold profound truth. There's a blessing for you to journey in faith. Even when you fail to understand, your heart can still trust. May your steps be guided by grace. May your faith bloom into obedience. May you defeat doubt. And may the fullness of God's love place His blessing on your life now, and forever. AMEN