

John 20

Everybody has doubts. We all have a tendency to second guess ourselves and say, "Did I do the right thing? Did I make the right decision? Should I take it back to the store?" These kinds of things. There are many different kinds of doubt. When we doubt the future, we call it worry. When we doubt other people we call it suspicion. When we doubt ourselves we call it inferiority. When we doubt God we call it unbelief. When we doubt what we hear on television we call it intelligence! When we doubt everything we call it cynicism or skepticism. Men typically go through a period of doubt that we call the mid-life crisis. We doubt our virility, our ability and our senility. Mid-life crisis is the age of the 3 B's -- Bifocals, Baldness and Bulges.

We all had our moments of doubt. Maybe you've had one of those experiences where it's the middle of the night, you wake up and stare into the darkness and the fear sort of courses through you and you think for a moment, "What if Christianity isn't the truth? What if, after you die, that's it? There is nothing!" and this fear starts seizing you for a moment. Maybe you've been struggling with an issue in your life and you've been praying to God and asking for His help but you haven't had any answer and you feel like nobody's at home in heaven. Maybe you've questioned whether God has forgiven you and you know according to the Bible that Jesus has washed your sins away – past, present and future. But you have this residue of guilt and shame that you can't seem to get rid of. And you wonder, "Am I really significant?" Maybe you question whether the Bible can really be trusted these days by thinking, twenty-first century people. The truth is, there's a spiritual virus that has been going around Christian circles for centuries. It's the virus of doubt. And if you haven't caught it, you probably will. Today, we want to make sure that you win the day over your doubts. Therefore, "Don't let your doubts defeat you!"

Sunday evening. Ten of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ are gathered behind locked doors in Jerusalem. Peter and John are convinced that Jesus lives but the other disciples remain skeptical. All of the disciples are confused and filled with fear. After what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus, and with His body missing, the disciples were worried that the same Jews would turn against them. They didn't feel safe.

All of a sudden Jesus appears. He comes right through the walls. He greets them with the words, "Peace be with you!" No reason to be nervous. You have a restored relationship with the Father. My sacrifice on the cross was sufficient. My peace will sustain you through all earthly troubles. To calm the disciples down further, and to remove their last doubts, He shows them the marks of the nails and the spear at his crucifixion. At this, they are exuberant. Filled with joy. Jesus is alive. Jesus then commissions them to carry on his work.

But Thomas is not there. So when he hears about the event. He doubts. He demands physical proof that Jesus is really alive. That brings us to the question, what is the cause of our doubts? 1. **Circumstances.** This is the number one reason people doubt God. Circumstances can cause us to doubt God. When our prayers are seemingly unanswered, when a tragedy strikes, when we're faced with an impossible situation, we doubt.

Thomas had witnessed his Lord being taken captive. His Master was beaten and tortured. Then, his Lord was crucified on a cross. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about that, and many saw him actually die. He was confirmed dead by news reports. Joseph of Arimathea had placed him in a tomb. There was just too much evidence from present circumstances that pointed to the death of Christ. Thomas doubted the validity that Jesus had risen. Circumstances seemed to present the impossibility that Jesus was alive.

When a storm came up on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus was asleep below deck, the disciples awaken Jesus and say, "Don't You care if we drown?" That's a typical reaction when we get under pressure. We start doubting. Don't You care God? When tragedy strikes, when we are faced

with an impossible situation, when our prayers seem to go unanswered, we doubt. Circumstances cause us to doubt.

2. Critics can cause us to doubt God. Those people who challenge us, who ridicule our beliefs. The Bible talks a lot about scoffers. All of us have been in a classroom or at work where our faith was criticized and challenged. I heard about a young man in school. The teacher stood up and said, "The Bible doesn't make sense. It's hard to understand and nobody should even try to read the Bible. You can't understand it at all." The young man raised his hand and said, "Sir. The Bible is God's love letter to Christians. And that's what you get for reading somebody else's mail." Critics cause us to doubt God. David had to deal with critics. Psalm 73 *"They scoff at God. How proudly they speak so God's people are dismayed and confused and they drink it all in. Does God realize what's going on, they ask."* Critics can cause us doubt. We drink it all in. We're affected by critics. I've heard people say, "I accept only what I can understand." Then you're going to doubt a lot. If God could be completely understood then He wouldn't be God.

How does a Christian handle his or her doubts? First, **1. ADMIT YOUR DOUBTS** Be honest. "I've got some doubts." You cannot overcome them unless you recognize them. So many people I know who are Christians are intimidated by their doubts. A doubt comes up, starts to creep into their mind, and they begin thinking "Oh, no! I may not be a Christian. Maybe God won't love me if I've got these doubts." They can't even face the fact that they have some legitimate, honest questions.

Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest man who ever lived and even John the Baptist had doubts. One time John the Baptist was in prison, everything was going wrong, he was at a low ebb in his ministry and he sent some people to Jesus to say, "Was I wrong? Did I make a mistake? Are you really the Messiah?" He had doubts. Jesus sent the people back to John to reassure him. He didn't condemn or criticize him. Then Jesus turned around and said to the crowd, "John the Baptist is the greatest man who's ever been born." Right after John had expressed doubts about Jesus.

Remember our story for today about Thomas. He missed the first reappearance of Jesus and when He came to be with the other eleven, he said, "I won't believe it till I see it for myself," regarding Jesus' resurrection. When Jesus did reappear again to see Thomas what did He do? Did He criticize him? Did He put him down? Did He yell at him? Did He scold him? No! He opened His arms in love to Thomas and Thomas as a result firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. The point is that not even your doubts can stop God from loving you. Even if you doubt Him, He still loves you. That's what the story of Thomas is all about.

2. DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS It's ironic. We do the exact opposite. We doubt our beliefs and we believe our doubts. That doesn't make sense. What we need to do is believe our beliefs and doubt our doubts. Doubt your doubts. Solomon said in Proverbs 3:5 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."* Doubt your doubts. What do you listen to the most? Do you listen to God's word or do you listen to your feelings? "I don't feel loved... I don't feel God in my life... I don't feel like God has a plan for me... I don't feel like I'm good enough..." Do you listen to God's word or do you listen to your feelings? Do you listen to circumstances or what the Bible says? *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."* Doubt your doubts.

3. DIGEST THE WORDS OF JESUS. Doubt can effect us if we don't know what we believe. Often we have a misunderstanding about who God is and you have to review who God is. You may know a lot about the love and the forgiveness and the mercy of God. But if you don't know anything about the righteousness and the holiness and the justice of God then you're going to wonder why He doesn't do certain things that you think He ought to do and why He does do things that you think He ought not to do. And doubts begin to come in because you

don't have a fully formed picture of who God is. The problem isn't with God; it's with our understanding of who He is. In the same way, we may think that God has promised to answer all of our prayers the way we want them to be answered. And when we pray and our prayers aren't answered the way we expect them to be, we begin to doubt that He's there at all. Some people think that God promises health and wealth to everybody who follows Jesus Christ. And when they're not particularly healthy and not particularly wealthy then they're going to have doubts about Him. The problem isn't with God. He never promised those things. The problem is with us in having an inaccurate view of who He is and that allows questions and uncertainties to come in.

And so, for first century Thomases and for 21st century Thomases, the answer to our skepticism is, "Come back to Jesus' words and promises. Keep hearing them. His words will take away your doubts. His words will change your minds. His words will keep you believing. After hearing His words, the Holy Spirit will equip us to say, "They're true, and I'm glad." Blessed are you who have not seen and yet believe."

Today you are hearing from God's Word that Jesus is alive. You are hearing that you can actually see the nail marks in His hands. Why does Jesus want us to still see those nail marks? Couldn't He have had the awful nail marks and the gruesome gash in His side divinely airbrushed out by some heavenly plastic surgery? He kept the wounds for us—so Mary and the women and the ten and Thomas could see them. The wounds remind us of the great price Jesus paid to take all our sins away. The wounds confirmed that this Man standing before them was no actor, not an angel or a ghost, but "their Jesus still the same," yet so wonderfully new. The last the disciples saw of Jesus before He ascended to heaven was the sight of His upraised, wounded hands in blessing, and the first we will see of Him when He returns to separate sheep from goats on the Last Day will be His wounded right hand, summoning us to share in the kingdom He has prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

There is an old legend that the devil appeared once to an aged saint and said to him, "I am Christ." But the saint put the devil down by asking, "Where are the marks of the nails?" Satan never died for anybody; only Jesus did. Those nail marks in the hands of the resurrected Christ assure you and me our sins have been paid for in full, and that God is our friend again.

What are you doubting this morning? Some of you are doubting God's care. "If God really cared, He sees what's going on, why didn't He do something?" Some of you are doubting God's power. "God, I'm going bankrupt! ... God! I've got a terminal illness. ... God! My husband/wife is walking out! ... My boyfriend's left me ..." And you're doubting God's power. Some of you are doubting God's forgiveness. You know something you did was wrong and you've already confessed it and God's forgiven you, but you keep coming back over and over saying, "God, I still feel guilty about that. Please forgive me!" You've asked it and you've confessed it fifteen hundred times and you keep coming back to it. God wants to say, "Shut up! I've already forgiven you. You're doubting My forgiveness." Some of you may be doubting God's faithfulness. "What's going to happen to me? What's in store for me? What does my future hold? I've just been laid off!"

Today, Jesus we admit our doubts to you. Forgive us for the times that we have questioned your ways and shook our fist at you. We want very much to doubt our doubts and be more trusting in your promises. Give us a less questioning spirit and a more trusting spirit. Thank you for giving us faith in You. Lord we believe, just help our unbelief!