

OUR DOUBT AND THE TRUTH OF GOD

Matthew 11:1-9

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Conclusion:

1. Let your doubts move you to seek God, not turn away from God.
2. If you find it hard to trust Him, will you ask Him for the strength to believe? (Mk 9:24)
3. Let courage be forged under the intense heat of fear and doubt.

Discussion:

1. What are the common doubts that Christians struggle with?
2. How can the church and parents do a better job in helping those with doubts about their faith?
3. What is meant by "I believe, help my unbelief?" (Mark 9:24). How has God helped you through your doubts?
4. Is focusing on the accomplishments of Christ in Scripture more effective than on arguments about Christ philosophically (Apologetics)? Why or why not?
5. How is faith strengthened through the furnace of doubt?

OUR DOUBT AND THE TRUTH OF GOD

Matthew 11:1-9

Introduction:

1. Second Guessing – that’s being between a rock and a hard place.
2. It’s one thing to second guess our own decisions. After all, we’re human. We’re limited in knowledge and foresight.

Yet, it is another matter to second guess God – who has all knowledge and foresight.

3. Some of the greatest men in Scripture struggled with doubt before God.
 - John the Baptist, who had proclaimed the coming of the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” came to a point of despair in his life where he asked Christ if “You are the Coming One, or do we look for another?”
 - Thomas, the disciple, doubted that Christ resurrected and stated that he wouldn’t believe it unless he could stick his finger in the pierced hand of Christ.
 - Job began to doubt God’s goodness in his life.
 - Moses, Jonah and Elijah struggled with doubt concerning God’s will for their life.
 - Ie/ My struggle with doubt came in my freshman year at UCSD with 18 units of humanities in 1 year that attacked what I had known for 2 years about God and the Bible. It was a serious struggle for me intellectually and it became an emotional struggle. I knew God was right and the professors weren’t, but I didn’t know how to argue against them.

I. About Our Doubt

A. The Biblical Words For Doubt

- *Dipsychos* – dual minded

James 1:8 He is a double-minded (*dipsychos*) man, unstable in all his ways.

- *Diakrino* – lit. to judge between two, to distinguish

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting (*diakrino*), for he who doubts (*diakrino*) is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts (*diakrino*) is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

- *Dialogismos* – carefully think through, reason, to think so deeply that you remain in doubt

Luke 24:38 And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts (*dialogismos*) arise in your hearts?”

- *Distazo* – to doubt, waver (used 2x)

Matthew 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Matthew 28:17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

- All words for doubt have to do with “double” or “split”.
- The Chinese call this having “a foot in two boats”
- The Navajo define doubt as “that which is two with a person”
- Such words regularly indicate a state of vacillation or questioning, even of anxiety, despair, or unbelief. (Conway, Bobby. *Doubling Toward Faith*, p. 24, Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition)

B. The Practical Definition For Doubt

- The English word “doubt” comes from the Latin *dubitare* from an Aryan root meaning “two”
- Os Guinness: “To believe is to be ‘in one mind’ about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be ‘in one mind’ about rejecting it. To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and disbelieve at once and so be ‘in two minds.’” (*Two Minds*)
- J.I. Packer “What is doubt? It is a state of divided mind...and it is found both *within* faith and *without* it. In the former case, it is faith infected, sick, and out of sorts; in the latter, it belongs to a struggle either toward faith or away from a God felt to be invading and making claims one does not want to meet...In our doubts, we think we are honest, and certainly try to be; but perfect honesty is beyond us in this world, and an unacknowledged unwillingness to take God’s word about things, whether from deference to supposed scholarship or fear of ridicule or of deep involvement or from some other motive, often underlies a person’s doubt about this or that item of faith.” (*Growing In Christ*)
- Blaise Pascal: “There is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don’t.”

C. A Realistic Evaluation Of Doubt

- Doubt gets a rough knock. If we were Thomas, having been told that our Mentor for 3 years was resurrected from the dead, we would have experienced incredulity and skepticism.
- C.S. Lewis points out that those who are theologically liberal are too soft on doubt – hailing ambiguity and uncertainty as spiritual virtues. Yet the theologically conservative can tend

to be too hard on doubt that propagates a sense of spiritual perfection that causes guilt and results in many being shipwrecked in their faith.

- God has designed “doubt” for us to grow our faith on. It is not intended to bring us guilt about being perfect in our faith. It demonstrates that our mortal thoughts will never compare to the perfect thoughts of God. It magnifies the point that God’s ways are not our ways. Doubt is to bring us to subjection to God in faith, not to bring us to despair and guilt for not being perfect in faith.

II. Route To Doubt

- John the Baptist was no atheist or even an agnostic - He was a servant of God
- When the mothers of John the Baptist & Jesus were pregnant with the two of them, John the Baptist jumped for joy in the womb because of Jesus
- John the Baptist devoted His life telling people to prepare for the Messiah, the Expected, the Lamb of God who is coming to take away the sin of the world
- He was Jesus’ forerunner, announcer
- Like an announcer who introduces the star of the talk show or game show (eg/ Ed McMahon, Paul Schaeffer, Ed Hall), John the Baptist was the announcer of the Bright & Morning Star who’s sandal strap he felt unworthy to tie
- But even God’s servants become plagued with doubt

A. Troubling Circumstances (2)

¹Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. ²And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples

- John the Baptist was an outspoken advocate for righteousness
- The ruling governor of Galilee, Herod Antipas, seduced his brother’s wife Herodias, then divorced his own wife to marry her
- JB confronted Herod with his sin to his face, and that landed John in prison
- Only because of Herod’s fear of John’s popularity with the multitude kept him from executing him

- The Bible doesn’t tell us where, but Flavius Josephus informs us on the location of John the Baptist’s imprisonment: *Accordingly, he [John the Baptist] was sent a prisoner, out of Herod’s suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death.* (Antiquities of the Jews 18.5.2).

- The prison was at an old fort at Machaerus 5 miles southeast of the dead sea
 - in a hot, desolate desert - always thirsty, always sweaty
 - little circulation of air in a fortress in the desert wilderness
 - little light in the isolation cell
- JB may have been thinking - “I stand for truth and this is what I get? This is the pits!”

- John Bunyan: “There was a castle called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant Despair.”

- IE/ It's easy for doubt to creep up when you're going through difficult times
- start wondering if God is faithful, loving, fair, and present
 - death of loved one
 - family member with cancer
 - lost a child
 - lost a job
 - parents divorce
 - endure a break up
 - hurt by a friend
 - persecution in China

B. Misguided Expectations (3)

³and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

1. Misguided Expectations About God

- Many Jews expected the Messiah to come as King and deliver them from the oppressive domination by the Roman Empire
- Jesus had a larger goal in mind - to deliver a world from sin and the domination of Satan in the world
- The Jews wanted a political deliverer, Jesus was a spiritual deliverer. The Jews wanted physical warfare, Jesus fought a spiritual warfare. The Jews wanted to be free from Rome, Jesus freed us from sin.
- After a year in prison focusing on personal suffering and desiring a deliverance from jail, John the Baptist's expectation of Jesus shifted.
- David L. Turner: "Perhaps the use of the word ἕτερος (*heteros*, another) here indicates that John is pondering whether to look for another Messiah of an entirely different kind from Jesus." (*Matthew: Baker's Exegetical Commentary*)

** Similarly, when we suffer physically from illness or incarceration – we begin to focus on physical deliverance. If we're stuck in a bad marriage, frustrated by stubborn kids, or we hate our jobs – we focus on deliverance from people. It becomes easy for us in our frustration and doubt to focus on God as our primary Deliverer from sin and the Provider of Grace. Thus, our expectations for God becomes **misguided** or **shortsighted**

ie/ Some think of God as a Santa Claus - that He'll give you whatever's on your wish list - and you get disappointed when you don't get what you want

- the house you bid for
- the spouse you thought you would get before you were 30
- the job you thought you were overqualified for but didn't get
- getting into the college you wanted to

- The Bible never describes God as a Santa Claus - though it does say that
- "Every good and perfect gift comes from above from the Father of Lights with whom there is no shadow or variation of turning"

- we're to serve and submit to God, not the other way around

ie/ Others may think of God as a means of self-improvement and self-empowerment

- God will improve my marriage
- God will get me ahead in business
- God will boost my self-esteem
- God can be that higher power in my 12 step program to overcome alcoholism

Ie/ I once asked a man if his God is his Self-Improvement Guru or his Lord & Savior. Dispensing Christian counseling principles only got so far – he needed to deal with the root of his problems – his relationship to Christ.

ie/ Some shape God into one's own perspective of justice and religion.

- Some focus on human justice and try to fit God into their premise and perception of what fairness is. They believe that God is not fair to allow poverty in 3rd world countries, AIDS in innocent children and the results of terrorism to the unsuspecting.
- But God is more than fair!! He's merciful!!
 - Because God is fair, He must judge sin.
 - Because God is merciful, He prefers to be merciful to us.
 - Because God is fair, He must hate sin.
 - Because God is merciful, He loves the sinner.
 - Because God is fair - the ransom for sin must be paid - that's why Jesus Christ died on the cross - to pay for our sins
 - If we only want a fair God - we would all go to hell because of our sin.
 - Because we have a merciful God - we can be forgiven of our sin and spend eternity in heaven

ie/ A politician was examining picture proofs from a studio photographer for his posters for an upcoming election

- Politician: "These pictures don't do me justice"
- Photographer: "With a face like yours, you don't want justice, you want mercy."

ie/ Kids who grow up in Christian homes and especially in homes of pastors and missionaries will have to come to their own understanding of who God is.

- Some ministry kids may have been over-exposed to the hardship of ministry and grow bitter towards God for allowing such hardship in the home
- Some ministry kids may have been under-exposed to the hardship of ministry and have not seen God work miracles and demonstrate grace
- Some kids see hypocrisy in their parents and ill begin to think God isn't real or that he doesn't care.

Ie/ Wang Ming Dao, the famous evangelist in China, who spent many years in prison for his faith. Stephen Wang, in his biography of Wang Ming Dao, *The Long Road To Freedom* (Sovereign World Ltd., England, 2002) points out how the Communists were

successfully influencing young people to embrace Marx and Lenin. The communist forced the writings of Marx & Lenin to be taught in churches so that even Christian young people began to abandon their faith.

- "Some gave up their faith and joined the Communist Party. Under the influence of new ideologies after liberation, even Wang Mingdao's son, who was in his second year of the university, began to doubt his faith. He did not completely give up his faith, but wavered between belief and unbelief." (p. 39)
- Because Wang Mingdao was so busy, he did not talk to his son for several years. But eventually he got to his son, talked to him for 2 hours and eventually his son would come around back to Christ.
- "Information from his diary and his friends indicate that nothing hurt him more than his son's unbelief." (p. 39)

Q: Do you have a vacant God or an ever-present God?

Q: Do you have a designer God or a Sovereign God?

JB: "Are you the Expected One or should we look for another?"

2. Misguided Expectations About Faith

- Some in our pews believe that faith has to be perfect.
- Os Guinness: "If you believe that you can, or need to, know everything with absolute certainty, your faith will be in difficulties very soon."
- Faith isn't about perfection, but dealing with the unknown to a point where you trust God moment by moment.

Ie/ Even the great apologist, Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis struggled with doubt.

- C.S. Lewis encouraged the founding of the Oxford Socratic Club in 1941. This group comprised of 80 undergraduates who would meet every Monday evening from 8:15 – 10:30 p.m. to debate the pros and cons of Christianity.
- Like Socrates, they were to follow the argument wherever it would lead them.
- Lewis would be the brilliant star in these debates.
- On February 2nd, 1948, he would meet his match. Yet it was not an atheist that would be his biggest challenge, but a Catholic Philosopher, he had thought would take his side. But Elizabeth Anscombe was not his ally that day. After a lively debate, she out-witted Lewis and dismantled chapter 3 of book *Miracles* which dealt with the "Self-Contradiction Of The Naturalist"
- After this defeat, several recount that Lewis admitted defeat and became greatly depressed.
- Biographer A. N. Wilson spoke of Lewis being "stung back into childhood by his defeat" and as a "little boy who was ... degraded and shaken."

- When we think that our faith should be perfect and it isn't – depression, guilt and defeat can easily follow.

C. Insufficient Knowledge (3)

- John the Baptist had not seen Christ for a while - he was in prison a year and even when traveling around preaching - JB had little if any contact with Christ
- John was not an "eyewitness" to the ministry of Christ - he just heard things
- John shaken in prison for a year, rethinking his expectations, and not having enough knowledge caused doubt in his mind

** Maybe you don't know Who God is or How He operates.

- in America, 97% of the population believes in a Supreme being - but you don't intimately know Yahweh - the One True God

- You may have gone to church - heard some things about God, saw some things you didn't like - and because you saw hypocrisy from men your image of God is tainted
 - You may see hypocrisy & failure in man, but you won't in God
- You may even believe God exists, created the world, and even pray to Him from time to time - but never put your trust in Jesus Christ as the Savior of your sins
- Our knowledge of the person of God falls short of Him being the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Ultimate Savior. He is reduced to a higher power, mystical being or a good teacher.

III. Bout With Doubt

Doubt itself is not wrong - it's only an indication that we don't know something or we're not sure of something.

What matters is what we do with the doubt - there are basically 3 responses to doubt:

A. Resistance - "I Doubt, Therefore There Is No God"

- because you can't see Him or touch Him, He's not worth seeking

- **Experientially:** because things didn't turn out your way the last time you prayed to God, then He must have failed you
 - you reject Him because you think He failed you – in a bad marriage, single, stuck with rebellious kids, terminally ill, hate your job
 - you had a bad experience at church, so you turn away from God

ie/ just because you had one bad meal, doesn't mean you stop eating

ie/ my college cafeteria at University of California San Diego was rated the worse of the UC cafeterias - yet can't stop eating

** Just because you had one bad meal at a church doesn't mean you should stop feeding on God & His Word

- **Intellectually:** it seems absurd from an intellectual point of view to believe in a God who sends His Son to the cross to die
 - you might believe that religion is the opiate of the people or a crutch for weak people
 - because you can't see God, you won't believe in Him

B. Paralysis - "I Doubt, Therefore I Don't Care Either Way"

- Doubt easily paralyzes us

ie/ Exam - all four of multiple choice answers look reasonable
 - so you leave it blank

ie/ Don't know if she likes you - so you never ask her out

ie/ Don't know if the company will hire you - so you never apply

ie/ Don't know if the new person wants to go to lunch with us after church - so we don't ask

ie/ Afraid of what the prognosis might be for the pain in your gut - so you don't go to a doctor

- Doubt can paralyze us from doing anything

- Don't know if God is real - so don't inquire about Him
- Don't know if God cares - so don't come to Him
- Don't know if God accepts you - so don't approach Him
- Don't know if God will forgive your sins - so why deal with it

ie/ when Daisy and I were dating, I had my doubts if she was interested in me or in the swarm of other men that realized how wonderful she is
 - there were times I was too afraid to find out
 - there were times I just had to know
 - I'm glad my doubts and fears were relieved

- Find out about God:
 - Does He love you?
 - Is He righteous?
 - Is He our Creator?
 - Why did Jesus die?
 - Why did Jesus resurrect from the dead?

C. Pursuit - "I Doubt, Therefore I Seek"

- Doubt should move us to inquiring

ie/ this is the basis for modern scientific advancement – to work through the doubt towards a new invention or discovery
 - to test what we are not sure of until we are sure about it

ie/ this is the basis for journalistic reporting – to seek out the facts behind the circumstances

John 20:24-29

- the disciple Thomas unfortunately has a bad reputation – he has the nickname of “Doubting Thomas” - because when Jesus appeared in His resurrected form to the disciples, he was absent
- so Thomas said I have to see it and put my finger in the nail print in His hand and side
- 8 days later, Jesus came - through the closed doors - Cool sight!
- Goes to Thomas - greets Him sweetly saying “Peace to you!”
- Tells Thomas to put His finger in hand and side. “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”
- Thomas didn’t have to touch - he had all the evidence he needed and he answered “My Lord and my God.”

- Jesus responded “Thomas because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (29)

- today - Jesus won’t appear to us visibly because all we need to know about Him is contained in the Bible

- Seek Him through the Word

- “Doubt can be valuable if they force a man to search deeper and longer for answers. For to pursue the doubts is to come upon some exciting beliefs and truths.” (C. Neil Strait)

IV. Out With Doubt

- “Doubt makes the mountain which faith can move.” (Decision Magazine)

A. Pursue The Truth With Questions (3)

³and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

- It’s OK to ask questions

ie/ Mark Littleton: “Turn your doubt to questions. Turn your questions to prayers. Turn your prayers to God.”

ie/ My testimony – as a high schooler, I was invited to a church youth group camping trip

- this is where I first heard the Gospel
- I was so curious, I interrupted the message and asked “What do you mean that God is love?”
- I had lots of questions about who God was, what Christ did and who I was in relation to God
- I attended church, Sunday School and youth group for the next three months asking questions to anyone that was willing to put up with me
- I didn’t have all my questions answered, I still have them, but I knew enough that I was a sinner and Christ is the Savior and trusted Christ at 16 years old
- had many questions answered - had many more opened up to me

- knew enough to know Christ died for my sins and I had to put my trust in Him
- you don't need all your questions answered to take care of your sin
- take care of your sin - and the rest of our lives and eternity we'll continue asking questions getting to know our infinite God
- it's OK – if you're an earnest seeker - God will reveal Himself to you

Judges 6:13-14 ¹³ Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

- God won't call you a dummy or ridicule you
 - He didn't do that to John - He knew the circumstances in his life which caused doubt
 - He didn't ridicule Thomas either

John 20:24-27 ²⁴ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." ²⁶ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

He invites all to come to Him with tender compassion

B. Go To The Source Of Truth (3-4)

³and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ⁴Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

- John sent 2 of his disciples to inquire of Jesus
 - a little tough to make personal inquiries in prison without cell phone or internet access
- Since Jesus is not physically present on earth today - the direct source of truth is the Bible
 - the Word is our source of Truth

Truth Is What Is Right According To God (Eph 4:21; Rev 15:3; Dt 32:4; Jer 10:10; Jn 14:6; 17:17)

Ephesians 4:21 ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the **truth** is in Jesus:

Revelation 15:3 ³They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and **true** are Your ways, O King of the saints!

Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of **truth** and without injustice; righteous and upright is He

Jeremiah 10:10 But the Lord is the **true** God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your **truth**. Your word is **truth**.

ie/ C.S. Lewis continued

- Lewis' friend, Hugo Dyson wrote that after Lewis conceded defeat, he struggled with doubt
- "Very well...now he had lost everything and was come to the foot of the cross."
- Lewis went back to the source of truth
- Lewis rewrote chapter 3 of *Miracles* (for the 1960 Fontana edition) and wrote of dangers for apologists in an essay called "Christian Apologetics"
- In this essay, Lewis warned that pride leads the apologist to believe that the validity of Christianity relies upon the apologist. Then he states that we must fall back from the web of our own arguments to Christ Himself.
- W. Andrew Hoffecker: "Apologists are no different from others who live under effects from the Fall. Athletes choke, writers suffer from blocks and apologists doubt. C.S. Lewis admitted his frailty and warned others lest they not understand." ("Doubt And The Apologist", *Tabletalk Magazine*, January, 1992)

C. **Expect The Gospel To Be The Superior Answer To All Our Doubts (5; cf. Isa 35:5-6; 61:1)**

⁵*"The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."*

- Jesus responded with what JB already knew from the OT
- David L. Turner: "Jesus's answer to John ([11:4-6](#)) reminds him of the fulfillment of biblical salvation promises, not judgment promises. John's doubts and the way Jesus deals with them are exemplary for all disciples." (*Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Baker Publishing, 2008, p. 290)
- Isa 35:5-6 & 61:1 mentions Jesus healing the blind, deaf & crippled

Isaiah 35:5-6 "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert."

Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound"

- Jesus reminds JB of OT prophecies he already knew and preached
- but Jesus goes one better than the OT - raising the dead

- Jesus stated His works as proof of His deity
- things no miracle worker or magician could do

D. **Realize The Work Of Christ Leads To Blessing Not Abandonment (6)**

⁶*"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

- Focusing on what Christ has accomplished leads to blessings, not failure
- This passage focuses on the works of Christ – not the arguments about Christ
- "offended" means stumbled (Gr. *Skandalizo*)
- "stumbling" (*σκανδαλιζω, skandalizō*), refers to a serious loss of faith, spiritual defeat, or apostasy (Turner)
- William Hendricksen: "Though the view according to which by means of this admonition John was being rebuked may well be correct, yet if so it was a tender rebuke, one that did not in any respect eclipse the Master's love for his momentarily confused disciple. In fact, rightly considered, the admonition contains a blessing, 'Blessed is he....' The Lord treats John ... tenderly ..." (*Matthew, Baker New Testament Commentary*)
- Don't stumble over the fact that God is invisible or because He doesn't fit your picture of what He should be
- Don't stumble over accusations of Christ being a myth or a mere man
- Trust the work of Christ in His life, His miracles, His death on the cross and His resurrection as revealed in the Scriptures

E. **Allow Your Faith To Be Forged Through The Fire Of Doubt (7-9)**

⁷ *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"* ⁸ *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.* ⁹ *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.*

- John the Baptist was victorious over his doubt
- Christ lauds John the Baptist as a courageous man
- Why?
- **Courage is not the absence of fear and doubt, it is the confrontation of fear and doubt**

ie/ Tennyson calls faith "the sunnier side of **doubt**"

John 20:28-29 ²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

- God takes our doubt from being under fire, hammers it painfully over an anvil – but that process only strengthens the iron of our resolve. Faith is forged through the fire of doubt.

- Ie/ A prominent figure in the English Reformation was **Thomas Bilney**
- a bright student from Trinity Hall in Cambridge
 - “of serious turn of mind and bashful disposition, and whose tender conscience strove, although ineffectually, to fulfill the commandments of God” (Jean Henri Merle D’Aubigne, *The Reformation In England*)
 - he started to doubt the teachings of the priests who gave less than satisfying answers about his place as a man before God
 - he found the answers in a new Greek translation of the New Testament reading the words of the Apostle Paul who said that “Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”
 - Bilney became a Christian and eventually a powerful preacher, preaching against the established church in England controlling the king and the people
 - the church called Bilney a heretic, imprisoned him and sentenced him to death at the stake
 - he was given the opportunity to recant
 - his friends visited him encouraging to recant so that he could live and preach another day
 - another bishop also encouraged him to recant
 - under great pressure and fear of death, Bilney recanted before the judge and the established church
 - a few days later, guilt riddled the now-freed Bilney
 - he determined that no matter the cost, he would from now on preach without compromise
 - he did and was returned to the stake in a matter of days
 - while being tied to the stake, he assured the crowd: “Good people, be not angry against these men for my sake; as though they be the authors of my death, it is not they.”
 - the fire was lit and Bilney was burned at the stake
 - - after his death, there was a great change in the heart of the people and even his persecutors, many who regretted taking Bilney’s life
 - Bilney’s courage was forged out of dealing with the fears and doubts in his life

Conclusion:

1. **Let your doubts move you to seek God, not turn away from God.**

- Find the answers about God through His own Words, the Bible
- Find the power of confidence the disciples had through the conclusiveness of Christ’s resurrection (Matthew 27-28; John 19-20; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15).

2. **If you find it hard to trust Him, will you ask Him for the strength to believe?**

Mark 9:24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “**Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!**”

3. **Let courage be forged under the intense heat of fear and doubt.**

Discussion:

1. What are the common doubts that Christians struggle with?
2. How can the church and parents do a better job in helping those with doubts about their faith?

3. What is meant by "I believe, help my unbelief?" (Mark 9:24). How has God helped you through your doubts?
4. Is focusing on the accomplishments of Christ in Scripture more effective than on arguments about Christ philosophically (Apologetics)? Why or why not?
5. How is faith strengthened through the furnace of doubt?