

Resurrection Sunday - Doubting God - Introduction

Matt 28:1-6 (CSB)—After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. The angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said.

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Son of God came to earth, born of the virgin Mary. He grew up, full of wisdom, and began declaring the Kingdom of God has come. He healed the sick, the lame, and the blind. He fed the hungry and raised the dead to life. He shared the message that our Heavenly Father loves us and wants to know us. He was arrested, beaten, tortured horrifically, and then murdered by crucifixion on a Roman cross. But three days later, three days later He rose from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. It is the crowning proof that Jesus defeated sin and death. His resurrection declares that His death was enough to pay for our sins and that when we come to Him, there is nothing in Heaven or Earth that can separate us from God's love.

Scripture records 13 different times that Jesus appeared to people after His resurrection. He appeared to the women at the tomb, to two guys on the road to Emmaus, to His disciples, and, at one point, to over 500 people at once. The Apostle Paul writes that the appearance of Jesus is an indisputable fact.

The final time Jesus appears to His disciples is just before He ascends into heaven. Just before He leaves them, He gives them their final instructions, the same instructions that we follow today: to go into all the world and tell the world what has just happened. Tell them the gospel message. Tell them about Jesus. How He came into the world to die for their sins, and how He was raised from the dead. Now, anyone who comes to Him and believes in Him will be forgiven and their life transformed.

Matt 28:16-17 (CSB)—The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, **but some doubted**.

It says, “**When they saw him**”

They actually saw the resurrected Jesus, but some still doubted.

My wife would call me skeptical; I prefer to be called a realist. She will tell me about something that happened or maybe some story she read and I’m always like, “Did it really happen that way? What’s the real story?” If I wasn’t there I like to know all the facts and the details before I

make up my mind on something. How many of you would consider yourself to have a skeptical nature? That is me.

I don't know about you, but I feel pretty good about the fact that the disciples saw Jesus in the flesh but still had some doubts. They still had some questions.

There have been times in my life when I have had doubts and questions about my faith. The same may be true for you. You have questions about God, the Bible, or the Church that you have not been able to resolve.

There have been times when I have felt so close to God that His presence was almost tangible. But there have been other times when my mind starts to wonder, "God, are you really there?"

We are starting a new series today called **Doubting God - Dealing with questions and doubts.**

Today I want to talk about how **God meets us in our doubts and struggles.**

Many of us might see doubt, brokenness, or our struggles as weaknesses. You might see having some doubts and questions as a lack of faith.

Just the opposite can be true; our doubts and struggles can help us grow in our relationship with Jesus. They don't have to take us away from God; they can actually help us **draw closer** to God.

Our faith is a journey, it is not a destination.

You don't ever arrive. There is never this point when you graduate or finally have perfect faith, even for pastors. My wife will tell you I definitely have not arrived. She is still, I mean, God is still working on me.

We are always learning, growing, and changing, and our doubt and our struggles can actually help move us forward in our faith in Jesus.

God is not afraid of your hard questions and He is not afraid of your struggles. He can handle them. Christianity provides real answers to life's hardest situations. Following Jesus isn't a bunch of euphemisms and cliches. It can stand up to real life.

The strongest faith isn't a faith that never struggles.

The strongest faith is a faith that grows through our struggles.

The Bible has a great example of this in the life of the Apostle Thomas.

Most of you may recall the story of Lazarus. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus. Lazarus gets sick, but instead of going right away to heal Lazarus, Jesus waits a few days. In the meantime, Lazarus dies. After he dies, Jesus says to the disciples, let's go wake Lazarus (code for let's go raise Lazarus from the dead). The problem was the religious leaders in the region where Lazarus had lived really wanted Jesus dead. When the disciples hear that Jesus wants to go to Lazarus, Thomas speaks up and says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Lazarus was no chump. He was all in. He was ready to follow Jesus, even if it meant following Him to his death. He had real faith.

Let's fast-forward to the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus has risen from the dead, but the disciples are hiding in a house with the doors locked because they are afraid of the Jews. They are afraid they are going to suffer the same fate as Jesus. Suddenly, Jesus is there, standing amongst them. Let's pick up the account in Jn 20:24.

Jn 20:24 - (CSB)—But Thomas (called "Twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were telling him, "We've seen the Lord!"

That phrase, "We've seen the Lord!" in the original Greek is in something called the Active Voice. It means they kept saying it. We've seen the Lord, we've seen the Lord, we've seen the Lord. Kind of like your kids in the back seat when you are on a long trip. "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

So, Thomas responds:

Jn 20:25 (CSB)—But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

This is the reason Thomas is often called Doubting Thomas. But I like Thomas. I can identify with Thomas. Thomas is a realist. He's probably had some hurts along the way and been disappointed by some people. He can be skeptical. He has questions.

Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong. It may be a sign that he is thinking.
-Oswald Chambers

Thomas was thinking.

Jn 20:26-28 (CSB)—A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even 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 and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe." Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas had doubts and questions, but eight days later, he showed up again. Even though he had some struggles, he showed up. Some of you have some struggles and hurts, but here you are this morning. You showed up.

When did Jesus come to Thomas?

When he was doubting! In the middle of Thomas' doubt, Jesus shows up and gives him exactly what he needs. What did Thomas say to the other disciples? "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Then Jesus showed up and said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." He knew **exactly** what Thomas needed, and Jesus met him in that need.

Jesus is not a distant Savior.

Some of you need to hear this!

He wants to meet you where you are. In your doubts, struggles, pain, baggage, and sin, Jesus is reaching out to you.

The Bible contains many accounts of Jesus reaching out to the doubters, the hurting, the broken, and those whose lives were full of sin.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus tells a guy who has lived a pretty messed up life, "I have come to seek and save the lost." He says this right before he invites himself to dinner at this guy's house.

In Mark 2, Jesus is having dinner at the house of Levi, a tax collector. It says many tax collectors and sinners were around the table with Jesus. When the religious leaders saw Jesus eating with these people, they asked the other disciples why he was eating with these unclean people.

Mk 2:17 (CSB)—When Jesus heard this, he told them, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus often told stories called parables to illustrate what God's Kingdom is like and how God's perspective is often so different than our perspective.

One of those is in Luke 15. This is my favorite parable of Jesus because it gives us a picture of God's posture toward us.

Luke 15:1-7-(CSB)—All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “What man among you, who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance.

Jesus is not waiting for you to figure it all out or get your life in order. He is not a distant savior; He is reaching out for you right where you are at, searching for you, and going after you.

This is Jesus’ invitation to all who would hear him:

Matt 11:28-29 (CSB)—“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Thomas showed up, and Jesus met him right where he was and changed him. The result is that Thomas served Jesus faithfully for another 72 years. Tradition tells us He served Jesus until he was martyred in India in 72 AD. This guy who had some baggage and some doubts had been transformed into a guy who would not back down from his faith in Jesus, and so they drove a spear through his stomach and killed him.

-Dr. Tony Evans

God will meet you where you are in order to take you where He wants you to go.

You may have some things going on, but Jesus is reaching out to you. Thomas had questions, and he had doubts. You may have questions, and you may have doubts. You may have hurts. You may have a past. You may have secrets that no one else but you and God know about. If that’s you, God is reaching out to you this morning. He is. He wants to meet you where you are at. And He wants to take your life and transform it and make it something new.

Rev 3:20 (CSB)—See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Jesus is standing at the door to your life, knocking. Don’t ignore the knock. Go to the door, open the door, and let him in.

Jesus came and died on the cross and rose from the dead three days later. He did that for the skeptics, for the doubters, for the broken-hearted, for the depressed and anxious, for the sick and hurting, and for sinners like you and me.

He wants to meet us right where we are, just as we are, because He has somewhere He wants to take us.

Faith isn't the absence of struggle. Faith is the means to follow Jesus through our struggles.

Faith is the means to follow Jesus through our doubts, fears, brokenness, anxiousness, and hurts.

How do we do that? Faith begins by believing that God loves you and sent His Son for you.

Jn 3:16 (CSB) - For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Faith begins with believing in Jesus, and then by acknowledging our brokenness and our sin, and confessing that we need a risen Savior named Jesus.

Rom 10:9 (CSB) - If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Maybe you sense that God has been speaking to your heart this morning. He has been knocking at the door of your life. You recognize your brokenness and your need for Jesus.

If that's you this morning, I want to invite you to pray a very simple prayer with me. I prayed this prayer when I was in junior high. I didn't know much back then, and I certainly had my share of doubts and brokenness, but I prayed this prayer in faith, trusting that God would hear me and forgive me.

If you've never prayed this prayer, I want to invite you to pray with me this morning.
(Pray)

Maybe you prayed that prayer once, but recently, you have not been following Jesus to where He wants you to go.
(Pray)