

"Doubt, Faith and Assurance"
Pastor Wally Contreras
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"Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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 see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:24-31)

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In Thomas I can see someone doubting the power of God in his life. How about me? It's easy to look at someone like Thomas and start playing the old comparison game, the old, "I may sin 'a little', but at least I haven't _____" (fill in the blank). At least I haven't asked to stick my finger in the nail holes and to probe His spear wound with my hand...or have I in some way(s) made such excuses for sin in my life? If so, how so? If not, why not?

So, Thomas missed the memo and failed to show up at the meeting when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Because Scripture doesn't comment on it, some speculate that Thomas wasn't at the first meeting because he lost hope over the death of Jesus. C.H. Spurgeon once commented that he "...felt a great depression of spirit; I knew whom I had believed; but, somehow, I could not get the comfort out of the truth I preached. I even began to wonder whether I was really saved; and, having a holiday, and being away from home, I went to the Wesleyan Chapel, and a local preacher occupied the pulpit that morning. While he preached a sermon full of the gospel, the tears flowed from my eyes, and I was in such a perfect delirium of joy on hearing the gospel, which I so seldom have an opportunity of doing, that I said, "Oh, yes, there is spiritual life within me, for the gospel can touch my heart, and stir my soul." Spurgeon sought out a church that preached the gospel to find peace. Where do I go or to whom do I go when I can't find comfort/hope and why?

When's the last time that the gospel message touched my heart and stirred my soul?

As in the first meeting with Jesus, the disciples were still meeting behind locked doors out of fear of what the Jews might do to them, but locked doors not only keep people out, it also keeps people in and it precludes those inside from doing anything on the outside (kind of like the "stay-at-home" orders to combat the coronavirus). What doors, if any, have I "locked" that keep me from being the "messenger of reconciliation" that I've been called to be that Pastor Wally spoke of last week? Explain.

Pastor Wally spoke of Jesus' response to Thomas' need for physical proof that Jesus, who he watched die on a cross, was in fact physically raised from the dead and had previously appeared to the disciples. Jesus told Thomas to "[p]ut your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." (John 20:27) So, how far am I willing to go to help someone overcome their unbelief? How about for my "Who's Your One"?

Jesus told Thomas to stop doubting and believe. The Bible Knowledge Commentary said that "[t]his was a forthright challenge to a personal commitment." Thomas had committed that he would "never believe" until his conditions of proof were met. Jesus told Thomas to not just look at the evidence, but to physically touch (experience) the proof. Once Thomas' conditions had been met, Jesus told him to "stop doubting and believe." Thomas' worship and profession of belief speaks volumes. When God has shown up in the past in my life, have I stopped doubting and believed or has doubt been allowed to creep back into my life over time? If so, how so? If not, why not?

If I were to hold out my Bible and let go of it, even though I've never "seen" this thing called gravity, do I believe that it will fall to the floor? If so, why so? If not, why not?

What "evidence" have I previously seen that allows me to believe that what God has promised, will happen?

C.H. Spurgeon relied on Scripture as his "evidence", his assurance of God's promises. He once pointed out that, "The one thing to rest upon is the more sure word of testimony: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and whosoever believeth in him is not condemned. I believe in him, and, therefore, I am not condemned. Why do I believe my sin to be forgiven? Because Jesus died to put away the sins of believers, and there is no condemnation to those who are in him. Why do I believe myself to be justified? Because he that believeth is justified; the word of God says so. How do I know that I am saved? Because Jesus Christ has declared that whosoever believeth in him is not condemned. To believe in him is to trust in him, to make him my foundation. I do trust in him, he is my foundation, and I am saved, or else his word is not true. I know that his word is true, and therefore I am at rest. It is written, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." I believe in him, therefore I have everlasting life. I have his promise that I shall never perish, neither shall any pluck me out of his hand; therefore I shall never perish, neither shall any separate me from his love. You see, then, there is no hope of salvation but what is fixed upon Christ alone; and I do invite and entreat you, if any of you have any hope which goes beyond Christ or beside Christ, get rid of it, throw it on a dunghill, and loathe it as an insult to God." Well, is there any hope in my life "which goes beyond Christ or beside Christ" that I need to "throw on a dunghill, and loathe it as an insult to God"? Explain.

R.C. Sproul in an article “Faith Has Its Reasons” has said that, “We are called to trust Him whom we haven’t seen—God—but He hasn’t remained wholly invisible. We have seen the Lord’s handiwork in this world, which Calvin called “a magnificent theater of natural revelation.” One day we’ll see Him directly in the beatific vision of His glory, but until then, He has not left Himself without a witness in creation... When we talk about faith as the evidence of things not seen, we’re talking about believing the Lord who has spoken. Not just believing in God but believing God. Believing God for things we cannot see now is the essence of faith, but it’s not an irrational or unscientific faith. God makes it very rational for me to believe He’s there. He’s shown Himself in the created order. He’s broken into time and space. Jesus came in the flesh, was seen, and rose from the dead in history. The Apostles testify to these events in Scripture, recording those things they witnessed with their senses.” What is the difference, if any, between “believing in God” and “believing God”?

Check out R.C. Sproul’s discussions of being “Justified by Faith Alone”, one of Pastor Wally’s recommended lessons found on RightNow media. Each of the 10 sessions is less than 25 minutes long and is great for watching while you take a break to eat lunch or while working out on the treadmill.

In John 20:30-31, John said that “...Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Regarding this passage of Scripture, John Piper wrote “I feel so strongly that among those of us who have grown up in church and who can recite the great doctrines of our faith in our sleep, and yet who can yawn through the Apostles’ Creed — that among us something must be done to help us once more feel the awe, the fear, the astonishment, the wonder of the Son of God, begotten by the Father from all eternity, reflecting all the glory of God, being the very image of his person, through whom all things were created, upholding the universe by the word of his power... One of these days lightning is going to fill the sky from the rising of the sun to its setting, and there is going to appear in the clouds the Son of Man with his mighty angels in flaming fire. And we will see him clearly. And whether from terror or sheer excitement, we will tremble and we will wonder how we ever lived so long with such a domesticated, harmless Christ. These things are written — the whole Bible is written — that we might believe — that we might be stunned and awakened to the wonder — that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into the world.” Do I need God to do something to cause me to “once more feel the awe, the fear, the astonishment, the wonder of the Son of God”? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Take some time this week to reflect on “the wonder of the Son of God, begotten by the Father from all eternity...through whom all things were created, upholding the universe by the word of his power.”