

Moving Beyond Doubt to Confession

John 20: 19-31

Grace and Peace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:4

The high priest strongly rebuked Peter saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." Peter responded that he and his fellow apostles must obey God rather than any human authority. They were commissioned, as we are, to bear witness that, despite his death at the hands of sinners, God raised up Jesus to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

Peter reminds us that they were eyewitnesses to these things. They were taught and commissioned by Jesus Christ to go and make disciples, with the work of the Holy Spirit bringing people to faith and repentance, through preaching the good news.

Peter and the apostles answered...

We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.

Acts 5:29-32

It was not a time then, and it is not a time now, for Christians to remain silent. The silence of the grave has been broken by the triumphal bursting forth in victory of Jesus Christ, who shares that victory and peace with God through the forgiveness of sins.

Though we are not eyewitnesses of these events, we have heard and read, and have been led by the Holy Spirit to believe. We are not to be silent, but are to share good news of Christ — not only confessing what the scriptures say about him, but also what God has done in our lives through the risen Lord Jesus, present with us now.

We are not to be silenced by earthly authorities, but to speak, even in the face of those who consider Christ and the church to be irrelevant. Despite threats to sanction or even harm us for being Christians, we are to stand firm, prepared to give an account of the reason for our hope, and also by doing good to even those who hate us.

So far there are no laws against us believing in God and praising him here in Australia. Some maintain their right to slander and misrepresent us, to restrict us with legally-required processes and policies; but they cannot stop us from believing in and following Jesus. They want us to keep silent, but silent believing is not what we are called to do. We are called to share the good news of Jesus. How are we doing?

The reality is that some people to whom we witness refuse to believe, and tragically some followers of Christ begin to doubt, and fall away. Some do so out of fear of the world and what others say. They become ashamed of the cross. Without being forced to leave Christ, the cause of doubting and falling away may be due to us and our own choices.

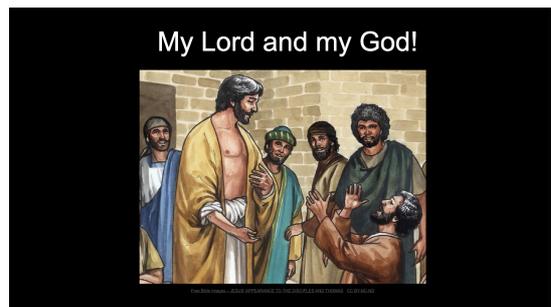
Thomas, known as doubting Thomas, is an example of a person choosing to believe in only what they personally experience. It wasn't so much that he doubted his friends truthfulness (although his questioning the integrity of their testimony that they had seen Jesus, must have been quite offensive) — it was that reports of Jesus crucified and dead, being alive again, seemed beyond his ability to believe.

Logic told Thomas that the other disciples must have been mistaken – someone posing as Jesus had possibly tricked them. He wanted tangible proof that Jesus was alive by examining the life-taking wounds of his crucifixion. Thomas didn't express doubt, but a firm categorical refusal to believe, which is common to many people when told Jesus is risen from the dead. "I will not believe unless I have proof — proof on my own terms!"

What is the goal of the Gospel writer? To encourage us with a proof of the resurrection? Well, yes; but not in the way we might expect, or what Thomas demanded before he would believe. We cannot demand faith on our own terms — faith is a gift from God.

Jesus did appear, but Thomas didn't need the physical proofs he had demanded. Jesus did not rebuke him nor ridicule him for his doubts, but lovingly showed that He knew Thomas, his struggles to believe, and his vow not to believe unless he could put his fingers into the risen Lord's nail-pierced hands and side.

Jesus invited Thomas to do so; but recognising the Saviour for knowing all about his doubts and his words — Thomas fell to his knees, saying, "My Lord and my God!" He had moved from refusal to believe to the fullest confession, not only that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead, but that he is the Lord God to be worshipped and praised.



John does not avoid including the details lest they reflect poorly on his fellow apostle; but rather by sharing the detail of Thomas's struggle, he makes sure that the purpose of his Gospel is clear — that by hearing the testimony of eyewitnesses, by the words of

Jesus, the living word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we believe. That doubts are not shameful, as some of those same eyewitness had doubted and had to be convinced.

Jesus asked if Thomas believed only because he had seen him? How blessed were those who believe without having seen. Though unseen, Jesus is present in every age. We need not demand physical proof, but come to faith by his presence and constant care for us. The miracle of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit poured out on the church. The Spirit empowers our testimony and convicts hearers of its truth.

This is the blessing Jesus talks of, that having not seen, we believe by the gift of the Spirit-filled witness of the Gospel, and of those who share it. People may need to hear it more than once, and to be prayed for, in order to move beyond unbelief or doubt. Our love and care is also a testimony that the risen Lord is present in our fellowship.

What should we do about our doubts?

- Don't hide them be open and honest about them.
- Find support from fellow Christians and remain in the company of those who believe.

We need to also be honest about our own doubts. Beyond those who refuse to believe, I think John also speaks of doubts that come to us time to time. What can we do during times of doubt? Let's examine the things that helped Thomas, who wanted to believe, to move beyond doubt.

Firstly, he didn't hide his doubts from his friends.

Secondly, he remained in the company of those who believed Jesus is alive. They are not recorded as being frustrated or irritated by him, but remained with him throughout his struggle with doubt. We may need to faithfully remain close to those in our circle who doubt, and for a much longer period than the seven days that Thomas doubted.

When doubts assail you, or if your faith burns low, for goodness sake don't leave the church. Seek prayer and support from those who believe. Pray for faith in Jesus to overcome unbelief, like the father (recorded in Mark 9:20-30) who, upon bringing his demon-possessed son to Jesus for healing, said, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!"

Stay with the company of Christ's friends; nowhere else are people saying, "The Lord is risen!" Hold on by their faith until it is your own. They will wait upon the Lord with you, and show his love and care as you wait for his revealing himself to you.

Wait on the Lord. Trust that he sees you, knows you, remains close to you and loves you, even when you struggle with doubts. He remains as Revelation 1:4 says,

"The faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address: <https://youtu.be/X67d317t2EI>

