

Today we're starting a short series leading up to Pentecost but it's not about the Holy Spirit, it's about doubt. We're calling it Doubters Anonymous. Doubt is something we don't talk about very often in church but it is something everyone struggles with at some point. Next week, we are going to deal with a very common doubt. Some people doubt the existence of God, or His goodness, because so many bad things happen to good people. Today we're setting the ground.

The bible claims that God loved the world so much that he became one of us when he came in the form of a man, born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect life and sinless life, died on a cross, was buried and three days later there was a claim that he had risen from the dead. The three words that are translated, "He is risen" come from one Greek word, haguero, which means to waken or to rouse from the dead. The question today is, "What does the haguero mean to us?" I mean, really. Here we are a couple of thousand years after the claim that the tomb is empty. What does this mean to us? And, the bible clearly answers this question and shows us what it means if Jesus is not risen, and it shows us what it means if He is risen.

1 Corinthians 15: 17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

In other words, what we are doing right now is really a joke. I mean, it may make us feel good, and may help us to be slightly better people, but this whole church thing, if Jesus has not risen, is really a joke, and in all reality, we are simply playing church and we are to be pitied.

On the other hand Peter writes about what is true if Jesus really did rise from the dead

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1 Peter 1: 3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*

If Jesus really did rise from the dead then we have new birth. In other words, not only can we be born physically, but we also can be born spiritually. All of our sins can be forgiven. We have a spiritual do-over. We are forgiven, and the scripture says we become new creations. We become new in Christ. When we are born physically we are born into the world. Peter says that when we are born spiritually we are born into two things: a living hope and an inheritance that will never disappear.

We have a hope in God, who rules and reigns.

We have a hope in the world to come that we can live forever in the presence of God. If He is risen, we have the potential of new birth and of living hope and a lasting inheritance.

At some point we all need to deal with the claim that he is risen – why? Because everything in life hinges on the answer to that question.

If he is risen then his teaching, example, life, death and resurrection demands our entire life. And, if He is not risen, this is all just a big joke. So, a lot of people have doubts about this subject, and in the next few weeks, we are going to talk about this doubt, doubting really, the resurrection of Jesus and some other common doubts, as well.

In order to build kind of a foundation, what I want to do first of all is to embrace the truth that there are different kinds of believing, or there are different kinds of believers. For example, you can believe in something without necessarily believing it to be true for you. Let me illustrate it this way

Jean-Francois Gravelet (1824 -1897), better known as Blondin, was a famous tightrope walker and acrobat. He was perhaps best known for his many crossings of a tightrope 1,100 feet (335m) in length suspended 160 feet (50m) above the Niagra Falls. His act would be watched by large crowds and began with a relatively simple crossing using a balancing pole. Then he would throw the pole away and begin to amaze the onlookers. On one occasion in 1860, a Royal party from Britain went to watch Blondin perform. He crossed the tightrope on stilts, then blindfolded; next he stopped halfway to cook and eat an omelette. He then wheeled a wheelbarrow from one side to the other as the crowd cheered. He put up a sack of potatoes into the wheelbarrow and wheeled that across. The crowd cheered louder.

Then he approached the Royal party and asked the Duke of Newcastle, 'Do you believe that I could take a man across the tightrope in this wheelbarrow?'

'Yes I do,' said the Duke.

'Hop in!' replied Blondin. The crowd fell silent, but the Duke of Newcastle would not accept Blondin's challenge.

'Is there anyone else here who believes I could do it?' asked Blondin. No one was willing to volunteer.

Eventually, an old woman stepped out of the crowd and climbed into the wheelbarrow. Blondin wheeled her all the way across and all the way back. The old woman was Blondin's mother, the only person willing to put her life in his hands.

The Duke believed that Blondin could take someone across but not enough to go himself.

James, in scripture, addressed this when he talked about belief in God. So, you are here today, and most of you would say, "I believe in God." James would say to you through scripture, James 2:19, "*You believe there is one God. Good! But even the demons believe that, and they shudder.*" In other words, there are different kinds of believing. Just because you believe in something does not mean that you believe it enough to take action. Let's talk for a moment about what I would call three different kinds of believers. There are those that I would call **casual believers**, and many people in churches today, quite honestly, are probably casual believers. What does that mean? You believe in God, and you are genuinely a good person. You've got good morals and you are polite, and you let people in front of you in queues, and you pay your taxes, and you are casual believers, but in all reality, you are more like

practical atheists. In other words, you believe in God, but practically speaking, you don't let the teaching of Christ impact your daily life. You are a casual believer.

There is another kind of believer that I would call **convenient believers**, and oh, that's popular. Convenient believers, if it helps you, you are a believer. [Jordan, USA] If you are doing a business deal, and it helps you, say you are a member of a church. The opposite might also be true – it's Sunday morning but your team is playing; it's raining; family or friends have arrived so I'll miss church because it's not convenient. Guess what I read this week? I read an article that said, that of the average American church-goers, regular American church goers, thirty to forty percent did not give a dollar to their church last year, nor did they serve anywhere in their church. We need to understand this - that is convenient faith. That is the consumer mindset. ***"I'm here for what I can get, but my faith isn't going to cost me anything."*** Casual believers, convenient believers, and then the third would be what Jesus would call us to be, and that is, **committed believers**. When Jesus said, "If you would like to be My disciple," He didn't say, "You can casually go about it." He said, Luke 9: 23 ***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*** It stops being about us and become all about Him. This is a lifestyle of following Jesus, where our heart cry becomes no longer my will, but, "Your will, Lord Jesus, be done." Where my life goal is to know Him and to make Him known. Where I exist for the sole purpose of glorifying God in everything that I do. His truth must consume me and impact every area of my life.

How do we get from the reality of a casual, or a convenient believer into one who is completely committed? For many of us, that journey starts with doubts.

We are going to look at, for a few moments, the life of the most famous biblical doubter. [Time for pic] Most of you know who he is – Thomas. I am going to tell you right now that Thomas is getting a raw deal. He should not be known for his doubting; instead, I am going to show you that he should absolutely be known as a person of great and Biblical faith. Let me give you a little background, just so you will kind of understand this guy. During the time of Jesus' life, it was very common for different rabbi's to travel throughout the land to look for students, or disciples, and what they'd do is, they'd look to see where are the elite, the most educated.

And that is the people that they would choose, and then, they would teach them, disciple them, and say, "I am going to help you to be able to do what I am doing now." It was the dream of many young boys to be approached and invited to become a disciple of the great rabbi's. Well, Thomas, most likely, didn't qualify. He probably didn't even go to class. He was most likely a very uneducated, unlikely candidate. He was a fisherman, not known, really, for much of anything, and then one day, this different kind of rabbi came along. One who was healing people and doing miracles, and choosing people that everyone else overlooked, and this rabbi, Jesus, chose Thomas, and said, "Will you follow me?" He was being called by a rabbi, not just any rabbi, but one that seemed special and different. That's why it was

easy for Thomas to leave behind his business. That's significant - he left his business. He left everything, and for three years, he followed Jesus. He believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be. That's why, when Jesus died on the cross, Thomas wasn't around. If you read carefully through scripture, after the death of Jesus, all of the other disciples gathered together. Thomas didn't. For the first few days, he was missing in action.

I suspect he was completely devastated, because with everything in him, he wanted to believe that Jesus was the messiah, but he couldn't believe in a dead messiah. So, his world fell apart. Then, Thomas uttered some words that have branded him to this day as "doubting Thomas." I am going to set Thomas free today, and help you to see, if you struggle with doubts, you can become, still, someone used powerfully by God. Remember, **the road to committed belief often starts with doubts!**

John 20:25 *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

What was he saying? "You have no idea what this means to me. I have to know for myself. If this is true that he is risen, it demands the entirety of my life. If it's not, I've got no hope at all.

You might have doubts of your own today and I want to say that doubt is a great place from which to seek God. Doubt gives the impetus to seek God, and when you find Him, you, like Thomas, will find him and your life will be transformed. Since when have hard questions been bad? Even Jesus, on the cross, cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Thomas had to know for himself.

The second thing we see after doubt is that God will often give us a **season of discoveries**.

Look how Jesus responded to Thomas in verse 26 and 27. This, to me, is amazing. *26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

A week later – Jesus was not in a hurry to help Thomas! Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Now, in the Greek language and in this time, this was the number one most benevolent and generous greeting that one person could give to another. Literally, what this statement meant was this: All peace in all ways at all times be with you. Notice, Jesus didn't belittle him for his doubts, wasn't angry at him for his doubts, He greeted Thomas with the most benevolent greeting possible, and then in verse 27, He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." "Stop doubting and believe."

What I want you to notice is that Jesus did exactly what Thomas needed to believe, and I believe with everything in me that if you take your honest and sincere doubts to God, He will do what you need to believe.

The bible says that if you seek Him, you **will** find Him. That leads to the third thing: after doubts and discoveries there is **deep faith**.

Watch what Thomas said after he touched Jesus. Some of the most dangerous words recorded in all of scripture, verse 28, *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"* Why are these words so dangerous? Let me explain them to you because, for a Jew to make this statement, this was considered a blasphemous statement that was punishable by death. That's how dangerous it was. For Thomas to say that, meant with any witness to accuse him of that, he could be immediately executed, because he basically said, "You are God. You are the Son of God. My Lord and my God." Why did he say that? Because, at that point, he had what he needed. Haguero, he believed that Jesus is risen, and because of that one fact, Jesus had the remainder of Thomas' life.

Doubting Thomas? Guess what common tradition believes - it is commonly accepted that between about 52 and 72 A.D., Thomas led an evangelistic crusade to India. You can go there today and see remnants of his work honoured all over India, because of doubting Thomas' faithful work, telling people that Jesus had risen from the dead, and it's commonly accepted one day that some non-believers approached him and said, "Thomas, renounce your faith in Jesus Christ, and you will live. Embrace your faith in Christ, and we will kill you on the spot." And it is commonly accepted that he looked up to heaven and said, "Never will I deny the one who died for me," and they tied him to a tree and drove a stake right through the heart of his body. Doubting Thomas, that's bogus. This was someone who surrendered the remainder of his life to the One who died for him. Great faith often starts with honest doubts, followed by God revealing Himself through spiritual discoveries, followed by a belief that cannot ever be shaken. Why are Christians all over the Middle East being executed – because they have really understood this as well.

Thomas' belief was committed enough to die for Jesus. Is our belief committed enough to live for Him?

Either we believe that all things are possible, that Jesus is risen, if we believe that, friends, it demands our whole life, everything. If it doesn't impact our whole life, we are just kidding ourselves. Haguero, the tomb is empty. The stone is rolled away. God did it. He's back! Death, hell, and the power of sin has been broken. There is no other cause as worthy as submitting our lives fully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Either we believe God, or we are just playing church.