

DEALING WITH DOUBTS

Who can you trust? What can you believe? We bemoan the fact that we have a “communication gap” in dealing with people. We might relate a message to someone and they would interpret what we said in a way different from what we intended. Nowadays we are more concerned about the “credibility gap” in dealing with others. We see things on television and read about things in the newspaper and later on find that the information first related was not exactly the whole truth and nothing but the truth. People say things and then deny they said them. People do things and then deny they did them. Rumors abound and stories circulate about situations that were only true in the imaginations of one person. Is this a new problem? No, questions of credibility and doubts have been around as long as man has been around. We should not be surprised that the disciples of Jesus experience doubts and uncertainty following His death.

John 20:19-22 Late in the evening, the disciples had come together and they had heard a report of two others who had encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Rumors were all about and the disciples had reason to fear. Jesus had told them about the servant not being treated any better than the Master was treated. Their conversation was likely filled with “what ifs.” Suddenly, Jesus was there. How did He do that? The door was closed, but He came into the room. Jesus had a glorified body and it knew no barriers such as walls or closed doors. Since we are anchored in the physical world, we have a lot of difficulty understanding such things. The disciples were locked in the room for fear of the Jews; however, you can imagine that a different kind of fear faced them when Jesus suddenly appeared in the room.

On several of the occasions when Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection, they did not recognize Him at first. This raises an interesting question regarding whether we will be able to recognize our fellow Christians when they have glorified bodies. The glorified body will not have any faults, and that will make it difficult for most of us to recognize each other. We usually look at our brothers and sisters in Christ and only see their faults. We fail to see the goodness and the fine qualities, but see only the faults and the blemishes. The reason for this outlook is likely rooted in a lack of unconditional love.

Jesus appeared to His disciples to solidify their faith. We might think they should have been able to believe since they had spent over three years with Jesus. However, they needed to experience the risen Lord. The teachings of Jesus and the miracles are wonderful and we need them, but without the point and power of the resurrection we are left with trying to walk in the teachings and trying to benefit from the miracles in our old nature. It is good to witness about the teaching and the miracles but the testimony that brings change in the life of the hearer is that regarding the resurrection.

Jesus greeted them with a blessing of peace as was the traditional greeting of that time. The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. To help them recognize Him and to know that He was real, he showed them the evidence of the crucifixion. When we meet people and greet them, do we show any sign we have been to calvary or that we daily take up our crosses as we follow Jesus? If others are to see Jesus in us, then they will see Him in the evidence of our death to self.

A second greeting of Shalom was followed by words of commissioning the disciples as apostles. We might see the first greeting of “peace” related to the peace we have with God based on the atoning work of the Lord on the cross. This second greeting should point us to the peace of God we experience when we know His presence in our lives. Once we have these two blessings of peace, then we can be about accomplishing the purpose for which we were saved. We can be about the work God had ordained for us from the beginning of the world.

The disciples were sent forth by Jesus. Jesus sends us out to carry out His mission of redeeming the world. In the same way God sent Jesus, Jesus sends us. In the same way God empowered Jesus, Jesus empowers us. That is why He told them to receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not begin His miraculous earthly ministry until the Spirit came upon Him in power.

Jesus then breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In Genesis 2:7 we find that

after God had formed man from the dust of the earth, He breathed into his nostrils and man became a living soul. The breath of God and the Spirit of God were the same to the Old Testament writers. When the Spirit of God entering into the lifeless dust, a new entity was created that could relate to the Creator. After the fall of man because of sin, we need to be re-created and have a fresh breath of God in the Person of the Holy Spirit which brings life to our spirit which died in Adam. This experience of the disciples in which they believed in the risen Lord and received the Holy Spirit was likely when they were born from above.

John 20:23 We could conclude that the authority to forgive (remit) sins or to not forgive (retain) sins is contingent upon the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. This is very similar to the statement Jesus made earlier regarding “whatsoever things we bind (loose) on earth shall be bound (loosed) in heaven.” This is an awesome responsibility. As the church (and as individual members) we have responsibility to tell others about the forgiveness available through Jesus and if we have forgiving spirit we will want to share this with them. If the church does not do this, then it will not be done and others will not know about the forgiveness available through Jesus. Consequently, their sins will be retained.

John 20:24-25 Honest doubts that arise as a person searches for the truth is good. We should not naively believe every tall tale someone relates to us. The fact that Thomas doubted should give all of us greater confidence in the validity of the resurrection and the events that followed. We need to know that the truths of the Scripture are vindicated in the face of the strongest doubts. Beliefs that come via the path of a burden of proof are stronger and produce greater conviction in those who hold such beliefs.

Many people today still doubt. The message of the Gospel seems too good to be true and unless they see the truth manifested in the lives of God’s people, how can they help but doubt?

John 20:26-27 Thomas has been labeled as a doubter; however, we forget that all the disciples had doubts. The week between the meeting with Jesus and His disciples (when Thomas was not there) and the next time He appeared to them had to be difficult for Thomas. Jesus gave Thomas the same opportunity the other disciples had. He came into the room the same way and gave Thomas the same greeting He had given the others. Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for wanting to make sure. He gave Him the opportunity to prove to himself the reality of the resurrection. Just as Jesus exhorted Thomas (after the evidence was before him), the world is also challenged to “stop doubting and believe.” Our responsibility in the church is to provide the world with evidence that Christ has risen and then to exhort them to believe. The problem is not so much that people *can* not believe as they *will* not believe.

John 20:28-29 Most of the world has never had the opportunity to physically see Jesus and to be offered the opportunity to touch the scars of the crucifixion. However, we can see evidence that Jesus lives in the lives of others. We have the testimony of the scriptures and the witness of others whose lives have been changed by their relationship with the risen Lord. The blessing of believing is just as real for those who have not physically seen Jesus as it was for the disciples who did see Him.

John 20:30-31 Part of the testimony of the scriptures is the record John provided for us. John did not tell us all Jesus did but He related enough so that we could believe.