

Doubters Welcome

There is a hymn we used to sing, "I love to Tell the Story." Here is the story of Jesus:

Before creation Jesus existed with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit. All things were created by Him and were created for His glory.

Jesus left heaven to live on the earth. He was born of the Virgin Mary in the most humble circumstances. He was fully God and fully man. He was tempted in all ways as are we, yet without sin.

Jesus came to show us the Father. He taught God's will to us. He taught us concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. For about three years He performed miracles and healings along with His teachings. He trained the apostles to lead the ministry upon His return to the Father.

Ultimately, He was betrayed by one of those apostles, Judas. He was arrested and tried illegally. Pilate scourged Jesus believing he would then release Him. Even though they could find no fault in Him, Herod and Pilate turned Jesus over to the angry mob to be crucified.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals. He died and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Soldiers guarded the tomb to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing the body to make an empty claim about resurrection.

Those guards were unable to prevent the actual resurrection of Jesus from the dead. On the third day, Jesus conquered death, hell and the grave. He rose from the dead. His closest followers and later 500 people at once saw Him alive. Forty days after the resurrection Jesus was seen ascending back to heaven.

This is the good news—the Gospel of Jesus. If you believe this message in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you shall be saved.

John 20:24-31

Do you believe in miracles? That's a good question on Easter. By miracles I mean contrary-to-human-possibility events that have no natural explanation. The resurrection of Jesus is that kind of miracle. It is totally unexplainable by any human or natural means. We don't know how it happened. Do you believe in the greatest miracle of all—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

If you answer "No" or "I'm not sure," you are in good company. There are many people who aren't sure they believe it or not. There were many people on the first Easter Sunday who weren't sure either. Folks like Peter, James, John, Matthew and Thomas, Doubting Thomas. None of the apostles truly believed until they saw Jesus for themselves. The women came to the tomb to finish anointing His body, not to meet the risen Lord. None of the apostles believed the report of the women. They had to see for themselves.

Little is recorded of Apostle Thomas. Thomas is best known for his lack of belief. In reality, Thomas was an honest and courageous follower of Jesus. There were many threats against Jesus' life. Yet, He chose to go and raise Lazarus from the dead, even with the threat of being stoned to death. When facing the possibility of being killed by the angry mob, Thomas responded, "Let us go, that we may die with Him (John 11:16).

After all these years, we seem to only identify Thomas with his doubts. We look down on Him; but not Jesus! Eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time. This time Thomas was there. Jesus spoke to Thomas as to one whose faith is weak. He did not call him evil. Jesus met Thomas exactly where he was and said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:27)

Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He came just so Thomas could be sure. He did not condemn him. He proved Himself to Thomas. **Doubters are welcome at the empty tomb.** It's okay to be an honest doubter. I believe that Jesus can and will reveal Himself to you as well. It's okay to doubt, but don't let your doubts keep you away. Come to the empty tomb yourself. When his doubts were satisfied, Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28) This climax of John's gospel comes from the man who had the strongest doubts.

In fact in history, the wonderful truth is that the greatest doubters often become the strongest believers. Honest doubts, once resolved, become the bedrock of unshakeable faith. It has been said that no true is so strongly believe as that which was once doubted.

Thomas' unvarnished story is vital in Jesus' story. Honest doubters are encouraged to examine the claims of the empty tomb without condemnation. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save. Every person must decide what he or she believes about Jesus. Thomas did not believe based on the experience of others. He had to see for himself.

No one can remain neutral forever. You can bring your doubts to the empty tomb, but you have to make a choice! This is Easter Sunday. It's a wonderful day to make that choice. It's a great day to stop doubting and start believing.

Jesus died. He died for you. He rose from the dead, so that you can be saved. Jesus came to give you eternal life with Him.

If you wish to call Thomas a doubter, please don't call him an unbeliever. There are two kinds of doubters. Hard core rationalists don't believe and nothing will ever make them believe. This person is only looking for an argument, not answers. The other kind of doubter says, "I don't believe, but I'm willing to believe, if I can see for myself."

No one wanted to believe more than Thomas. But, there is no such thing as second-hand faith. You are surrounded by scores of people who have a testimony of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They know that they know that they know that Jesus is alive. He lives in us. This is not something that can be experienced vicariously. You must believe in and confess Jesus for yourself.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the beauty of Easter. We thank you that the deepest questions of life are answered with the empty tomb. Lead us into the garden of resurrection where we may meet our Lord.

May we never live again as if Jesus is dead. May those who doubt now believe and find life in Jesus' name. Amen.