

Dealing With Our Doubts

In the Gospels, a man brings his son afflicted by demonic torment causing the youngster to be out of control. Do you ever encounter “out-of-control” events in your life? The man took his son to the disciples and they could not help him. Now his doubts are being reinforced rather than alleviated. The seeker now advances toward Christ and asks Him a remarkable, astounding question: “...*if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us*” (Mark 9:22). What a question to ask the Lord of Glory! What a question to ask the Maker of Heaven and Earth! Can He do anything? On this side of the completed canon of Scripture we almost feel like shouting, Yes, dear sir, not only can Christ do anything and everything, He “...*is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*” (Ephesians 3:20). But alas, we, like that man, sometimes get into a quandary of doubt and, in essence, by our actions are saying, “Lord, if you can do anything....” Our Master challenges the man to believe and the next statement spoken by this man is where many of us may find ourselves today: “*And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*” (Mark 9:24).

Dr. Carl Hofmann says doubt “comes from a Latin word meaning ‘to waver or vibrate.’ Its origin has to do with the number ‘two’: to waver between two options with uncertainty. In ancient Greek the word for doubt means to find yourself ‘between two minds’ about something.” Os Guinness in an interview with Danielle DuRant said, “Americans...don’t admit they doubt. It is un-American to doubt, so I think there are very few books on doubt. Since doubt is so unpopular, nobody admits it.” I think we want to appear to be on top of everything; we are the go-getters, the ones hoping to appear to get it done. Doubt flies in the face of the assured man. The doubter appears to be hesitant, not sure of where he or she is going. Yet surprisingly enough it is the doubter, who upon perusal of doubts can find answers and deliverance from what we so often don’t want to admit: a wavering between two minds. It was Thomas who, after questioning the veracity of Christ’s resurrection, was told by our resurrected Lord, “...*reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing*” (John 20:27). At this moment the most dogmatic statement affirming the Deity of Christ appears in the Bible: “*And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God*” (John 20:28). Yet, as beautiful as this statement of faith is, Christ rebukes and encourages generations of doubters and believers to come: “*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (John 20:29).

Christ assures the believer a blessing for believing without the evidence on the table. “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). There are five times in the Gospels the word doubt comes from the lips of our Lord. I believe an examination of these pronouncements can help us deal with our doubts.

1. Doubt is present when we allow the fears around us to deafen the voice of Christ within us.

“*And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*” (Matthew 14:31). Simon Peter requested of Jesus to bid him come to Him over the water. Jesus said one word: “*Come!*” (Matthew 14:29). So Peter, with eyes fixed on Jesus, begins to walk, but soon we observe, “*But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink...*” (Matthew 14:30). When Peter looked at the evidence around him, everything said, “This is a storm and these are waves of ferocious water; man doesn’t walk on water and you are going to drown!” Listening to these fears, he began to obey the voice of fear and sink. His only hope was to do what he did, “...*he cried, saying, Lord, save me*” (Matthew 14:31). The Savior asked Peter, “...*O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*” (Matthew 14:31). Our Lord is rebuking his faithlessness because Peter was basing his behavior on his fears rather than steadfastly hanging on to the simple command, “*Come.*” If Jesus says, “*Come,*” then He will give us the power to overcome any and all circumstances.

He who allows the waves and the wind to beset us also has the power over the elements. So, let us turn up the voice of Jesus within us, faithfully adhering to His written Word and waiting before Him in prayer. *“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost”* (Jude, verse 20).

2. Doubt is relieved when blame is exchanged for trust.

“Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). Jesus said, *“...I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me”* (John 10:25). These unbelievers heard the voice of Jesus say who He was. They also bore witness of some of His miracles. Yet, they ignored His Words and deeds and cast blame on him because of their doubts. In our stubborn human way, we play the blame game, even to God! We are this way because you made us this way! We behave this way because you don't give us the power to behave otherwise. My advice is: calm down! Rest in the Lord! You are like a man beating a poor beast of burden who has collapsed under the heavy load. If you will just put your whip down, quit calling the donkey by names, he will get enough rest and eventually get back up. In our way of panic stricken unbelief we are castigating God with our problems when we need to enter His rest of belief. *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief”* (Hebrews 4:9-11). I would be remiss if I did not say that I firmly believe much doubt that blames God comes from an unwillingness to repent of our sins. Blame is a false projection on God for our own chosen shortcomings. We see this evidenced in the words of Jesus as He wept over Jerusalem, *“how often would I have...and ye would not!”* (Luke 13:34).

Doubt is relieved when we quit blaming and start trusting! Jesus said, *“But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you”* (Luke 11:20). We can believe what God has done and we can believe what God has said and when we do, we shall be living with *“...no doubt.”*

3. Miracles ensue when doubt is ignored.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matthew 21:21). Jesus said these similar words in Mark's Gospel, *“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith”* (Mark 11:23).

If you noticed, I did not say miracles ensue when doubts are removed. I want to emphasize when doubts are ignored. We are human and our kind and precious Lord understands. Let's return to the man that asked, *“...if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us”* (Mark 9:22). Our Lord answered with this compassionate challenge: *“...If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”* (Mark 9:23). Christ can be toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose in the face of a haughty skeptic with undertones of impending judgment. However, to the honestly seeking doubter He gives hope! He says, look, if you can just believe, I'll do what needs to be done. In other words He is saying, *“Give your belief a chance! You wouldn't bringing your needs to me if you didn't think there was even a margin of hope!”* Praise the Lord, in resigning terms the man tearfully cries out in desperation, *“...Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). Our Lord's response was instantaneous: *“...He rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him”* (Mark 9:25). Jesus said, *“No more....”* For the young man, no more foul demons! For the dad, no more heartbreak because of uncontrolled events with his boy! And for you, whoever may be doubting, no

more angst and agony. Ignore the doubt, don't entertain it; believe God, exercise your faith and be prepared for the miraculous!

- Pastor Pope -

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