

# Doubting Thomas

R. David Pogge

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*Blessed is he who believes.*

Our faith is built on the belief that Jesus died, was buried, but came back to life, and is alive today. So let's begin our broadcast as Erika Robinson and JoAn Witzel perform, "Because He Lives."

[music – Erika Robinson and JoAn Witzel, "Because He Lives"]

## Part 1

Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and also to several disciples in the upper room shortly after His resurrection. But since Thomas was not there, and because it was so incredible, Thomas could not believe it.

Ellen White recounts the story in Chapter 84 of her biography of Christ, titled, The Desire of Ages.

On reaching Jerusalem the two disciples [who had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus] ... make their way through the narrow streets by the light of the rising moon. They go to the upper chamber where Jesus spent the hours of the last evening before His death. Here they know that their brethren are to be found. Late as it is, they know that the disciples will not sleep till they learn for a certainty what has become of the body of their Lord. They find the door of the chamber securely barred. They knock for admission, but no answer comes. All is still. Then they give their names. The door is carefully unbarred, they enter, and ... the door is again fastened, to keep out spies.

The travelers find all in surprised excitement. The voices of those in the room break out into thanksgiving and praise, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Then the two travelers, panting with the haste with which they have made their journey, tell the wondrous story of how Jesus has appeared to them. They have just ended, and some are saying that they cannot believe it, for it is too good to be true, when behold, another Person stands before them. Every eye is fastened upon the stranger. No one has knocked for entrance. No footstep has been heard. The disciples are startled, and wonder what it means. Then they hear a voice which is no other than the voice of their Master. Clear and distinct the words fall from His lips, "Peace be unto you."

"But they were terrified and [frightened], and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet."

They beheld the hands and feet marred by the cruel nails. They recognized His voice, like no other they had ever heard. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and [a piece] of a honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them." "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." Faith and joy took the place of unbelief, and with feelings which no words could express they acknowledged their risen Saviour.

...

The resurrection of Jesus was a [foretaste] of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The countenance of the risen Saviour, His manner, His speech, were all familiar to His disciples. As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who sleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their identity will be perfectly preserved. ...

When Jesus met with His disciples, He reminded them of the words He had spoken to them before His death, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him. "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

The disciples began to realize the nature and extent of their work. They were to proclaim to the world the wonderful truths which Christ had entrusted to them. The events of His life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies that pointed to these events, the sacredness of the law of God, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins,--to all these things they were witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world. They were to proclaim the gospel of peace and salvation through repentance and the power of the Saviour.

...

"Reprove, rebuke, exhort," the Lord says, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4:2. Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. 5:21. If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. ... "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. All who repent have the assurance, "He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Micah 7:19.

Let the repentance of the sinner be accepted by the church with grateful hearts. Let the repenting one be led out from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith and righteousness. Let his trembling hand be placed in the loving hand of Jesus. Such a remission is ratified in heaven.

Only in this sense has the church power to absolve the sinner. Remission of sins can be obtained only through the merits of Christ. To no man, to no body of men, is given power to free the soul from guilt. Christ charged His disciples to preach the remission of sins in His name among all nations; but they themselves were not empowered to remove one stain of sin. The

name of Jesus is the only "name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

When Jesus first met the disciples in the upper chamber, Thomas was not with them. He heard the reports of the others, and received abundant proof that Jesus had risen; but gloom and unbelief filled his heart. ... [He] declared, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." He would not see through the eyes of his brethren, or exercise faith which was dependent upon their testimony. He ardently loved his Lord, but he had allowed ... unbelief to take possession of his mind and heart.

A number of the disciples now made the familiar upper chamber their temporary home, and at evening ... gathered here. ... While the disciples were taking their evening meal, they talked of the evidences which Christ had given them in the prophecies. "Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you."

Turning to Thomas He said, "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." These words showed that He was acquainted with the thoughts and words of Thomas. The doubting disciple knew that none of his companions had seen Jesus for a week. They could not have told the Master of his unbelief. He recognized the One before him as his Lord. He had no desire for further proof. His heart leaped for joy, and he cast himself at the feet of Jesus crying, "My Lord and my God."

Jesus accepted his acknowledgment, but gently reproved his unbelief: "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The faith of Thomas would have been more pleasing to Christ if he had been willing to believe upon the testimony of his brethren. Should the world now follow the example of Thomas, no one would believe unto salvation; for all who receive Christ must do so through the testimony of others.

Many who are given to doubt excuse themselves by saying that if they had the evidence which Thomas had from his companions, they would believe. They do not realize that they have not only that evidence, but much more. Many who, like Thomas, wait for all cause of doubt to be removed, will never realize their desire. They gradually become confirmed in unbelief. Those who educate themselves to look on the dark side, and murmur and complain, know not what they do. They are sowing the seeds of doubt, and they will have a harvest of doubt to reap. At a time when faith and confidence are most essential, many will thus find themselves powerless to hope and believe.

In His treatment of Thomas, Jesus gave a lesson for His followers. His example shows how we should treat those whose faith is weak, and who make their doubts prominent. Jesus did not overwhelm Thomas with reproach, nor did He enter into controversy with him. He revealed Himself to the doubting one. Thomas had been most unreasonable in dictating the conditions of his faith, but Jesus, by His generous love and consideration, broke down all the barriers. Unbelief is seldom overcome by controversy. It is rather put upon self-defense, and finds new support and excuse. But let Jesus, in His love and mercy, be revealed as the crucified Saviour,

and from many once unwilling lips will be heard the acknowledgment of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." <sup>1</sup>

When Thomas saw Jesus, he believed; but many of us believe without seeing.

It has been widely reported on the Internet that when the allied soldiers liberated a Nazi concentration camp, they found this inscription written on one of the interior walls:



I've been unable to discover in which concentration camp this poem was found. The same poem was allegedly found scratched on the walls of a cellar in Cologne, Germany, by a Jew hiding from Nazi persecution. It seems unlikely to me that a German Jew would write such an inspirational poem in English. Since I was unable to find anything close to a German or Hebrew version of this poem on the Internet, I suspect that the alleged authorship is fictitious.

Although the authorship is questionable, such faith does unquestionably exist. We will see some examples of such faith in just a moment. But first, I want to play a song I wrote that was inspired by this alleged graffiti.

## Even When

R. David Pogge  
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I believe in the sun Even When it's half-past midnight.  
I believe in the spring Even When the trees are bare.  
I believe in these things Even When I cannot see them.  
And I believe in God Even When He's silent.

I believe in joy Even When no one is laughing.  
I believe in music Even When the song is through  
I believe in these things Even When I cannot hear them.  
And I believe in God Even When He's silent.

I believe in love Even When nobody loves me.  
I believe in the wind Even When the air is still.  
I believe in these things Even When I cannot feel them.  
And I believe in God Even When He's silent.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, Chapter 84, "Peace Be Unto You", [www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da84.html](http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da84.html)

## Part 2

In the first segment we compared the lack of faith by Doubting Thomas to the faith of a true believer. In doing so, we were laying the groundwork for the radical idea that faith is based on trust, not a guarantee of the desired outcome.

Our first example of this comes from chapter 3 of the book of Daniel. Everyone was required to bow down and worship king Nebuchadnezzar or be burned alive. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused.

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16-18)**

They were thrown into the furnace, and God did save them, but the key phrase in this text is, “even if he does not.” They had faith in God, no matter what. Their faith was based on trust, not a guarantee of safety.

Hebrews, chapter 11, contains a list of faithful people. As Everett reads the entire chapter, I’ll interrupt him from time to time with comments.

**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.**

**By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.**

**By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.**

Abel had faith, but he was murdered anyway. Abel did what God commanded because for no other reason than that God commanded it.

**By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

Enoch pleased God because he believed and trusted God.

**By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**

There had never been a flood before Noah built the ark. If Noah had as little faith as Thomas, he might have said, “Unless I see storm clouds gathering and the water rising, I’m not going to build a boat.” But Noah believed that a flood was coming, even though there had never been a flood before, just because God said it would happen. But Noah’s faith was nothing, compared to Abraham’s.

**By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

**By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.**

**By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.**

**By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.**

**By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.**

**By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.**

**All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.**

Let’s not miss that important point. “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.” They didn’t insist on immediate gratification from God. “Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” May God grant us all the same faith and patience that they had.

**By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.**

Pharaoh had ordered all male Jewish babies to be killed. But Moses’ parents, trusted God, and did not murder their baby, despite how inconvenient the pregnancy was.

**By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.**

Moses could have yielded to the temptation to live the easy life; but he didn't. He believed that God had something even better for him. He trusted God, and endured the trial of leading a stiff-necked and rebellious people.

**By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.**

Ironically, the people had faith in God before He parted the Red Sea for them; but then, after witnessing this miracle, and many others, they lost their faith. Is your faith stronger now than when you first believed? Have the miracles God has done in your life strengthened your faith? Or have you come to take for granted His blessings, and complain when you think He hasn't blessed you enough?

**By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.**

**By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.**

**And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.**

If these people, and their stories, aren't familiar to you, you need to read the Old Testament more carefully. The Old Testament is full of inspiring stories of faith which will bring you comfort.

**These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

None of these heroes of the faith received everything that was promised to them; but someday they will receive so much more than was promised.

The promises are for you, too. You can stand on those promises, just like the students at Fountainview Academy do in this song.

[music – Fountainview Academy, “Standing on the Promises”]