

2017-18- 24 John 20:24-31 **Does Christianity Demand Blind Faith?** Easter 2 April 8, 2018

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and peace are yours through your Savior Jesus Christ, Son of God and our Lord of life. Amen
God's Word that describes the evidence of Christ victory over death is written in John 20:24-31
These are Your Words heavenly Father. Strengthen us by Your truth for eternal life. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christians, who believe in the risen Savior,

Every week there are trials in courtrooms. Trials by jury are especially intriguing. A jury didn't witness a crime. How can they determine the truth and make a judgment of guilt or innocence? They hear the evidence presented against or for the person charged. They hear witnesses. From that they must become certain to decide a verdict. Spiritually, the Bible makes it clear that we can't come up with the right verdict about God by our reason or senses. The Holy Spirit must convince us so that we entrust our lives into Jesus' hands! God spoke through John and the other Gospel authors to give a clear testimony of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Is there enough evidence in God's Word for us to believe in Jesus? Or in other words-

Does Christianity Demand Blind Faith?

First, the answer is No, but the Bible tells us of things we can't see. Think of the disciple Thomas. His close friends said that they seen the risen Jesus. But there was no evidence that Jesus had been there. The disciples could not direct Thomas to a place in Jerusalem where Jesus was staying. What did Thomas demand? *"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 it."*(v.25) Some people have called Thomas a doubter. Jesus used another word when He later appeared to Thomas. He literally said, *Stop your unbelief and believe!* (v. 27)

What should we think of Thomas as he refused to be convinced that Jesus was alive? He was stubborn and lacked faith not only in the disciple's witness but in Jesus' earlier words that He would rise on the third day. Think about how miserable and depressed Thomas must have been. He had depended on Jesus to save him and now Jesus was dead. How could he trust in anything any longer?

This wasn't the first time Thomas doubted. Earlier, Jesus had told Thomas that He was going to away to the Father. He said to Jesus, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5) Jesus was saying, Thomas, don't look for a physical path up a hill that leads to heaven. Don't expect an angel to drop a long ladder out of heaven so you can climb up to there on your own to follow me. You need to get there by faith in Me. But, he didn't understand.

Such is the nature of unbelief. John later wrote that Jesus did 100's of miracles as "signs" that He was the Son of God. But, no matter how many "signs" he did, even raising Lazarus from the dead, it wasn't enough. Unbelief demands more and still does not believe! Unbelievers can put on a front of arrogance, like Thomas, when he demanded to put his finger into wound on Jesus' hand and into His side. Unbelievers think that Christians are fools for believing in a God that they can't see and that we are wasting our time in worship, prayer, and in Bible reading. This shouldn't surprise us. Paul wrote, *"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."*(Romans 8:7) We can't argue someone into heaven.

But, second, it was possible for God to have Thomas believe. Despite all the demands and rejection of the eyewitnesses, God reached Thomas. A week later the disciples with Thomas were again in a room Jerusalem with all the doors of the house locked and Jesus appeared. After He greeted them with words of peace, He turned to Thomas and said exactly what Thomas had said a week before, *"Put your finger here, see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."* (v.27)

Did Jesus appear to rebuke Thomas for his sinful doubting or did Jesus come to bring him relief from doubting? It was both! His goal was to rebuke and sent away the unbelief inside Thomas. Jesus was the living Gospel, the power of God for salvation standing and speaking to him. His words and appearance replaced the unbelief with faith. It wasn't that Thomas had to stand there asking: Should I choose Jesus? That is not how faith comes to people. Unbelievers would never choose to trust in Jesus on their own. *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* (Romans 10:17) The Holy Spirit was at work changing the heart of Thomas from unbelief to faith in Jesus.

Thomas confessed to Jesus, *"My Lord and my God!"* (v. 28) He described Jesus to be the Son of God. Why would he do that? Jesus was physically standing before him with the scars of the nails and spear. Thomas was convinced that Jesus was physically alive. Why did he call Jesus his God? Earlier Jesus had promised, *"No one takes [My life] from Me.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again."* (John 10:18(NKJV) Earlier, Thomas had seen the Jesus raise Lazarus from death. But in this case, Jesus' body lay dead in the tomb. Yet by His own power as the God-man, Christ raised Himself to life. No man could do this, only God's Son. Also, Thomas realized from Jesus' words about what he previously said that in His glorified body Jesus knew all things and was everywhere present. He also realized that Jesus rising from death was proof of His promise earlier: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6) As God and man in one person, Jesus had paid the punishment of the world's sins when He died on the cross. He had risen from death and was preparing a place in heaven for Thomas. He believed in Jesus as his Savior and God and was certain to have eternal life!

Third, what does this mean for us? Jesus hasn't appeared to us in a locked room or anywhere else. He hasn't told us everything we said when we foolishly boasted or when we were tempted to watch a movie that disgraced Him, or when we doubted His power to help us or questioned His love. He daily calls to us: Stop your unbelieving doubts and trust in Me! That is what repentance means!

You've heard the old saying: A bird in your hand is better than two birds in the bush. That may be so in life; but not for Christians. God promises that we can let go of whatever we're trying to control and not be afraid. God's Word is constantly telling us not to worry about life, but to cast our cares on Him. Faith holds God to His promises. He kept His promise by sending His Son. Our Savior, loved us and died for us, and is now Lord of all! He is with us always! He will protect us and our faith as long as we trust Him in His Word.

Jesus told Thomas, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:19) John wrote that there was much more evidence about Jesus. *"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* (John 20:30-31)

We don't need a courtroom and jury to help us know the truth. God has given us His Word including that Thomas saw and believed! Just as Jesus promised, He is risen! There were 100's of witnesses including Thomas. But above all, the Holy Spirit brought us to faith through the power of the good news of Jesus, who died the death we deserved and rose from death assure us that He has power to save us from judgment. Jesus cannot lie. His life, death, and resurrection are proof that He truly will rescue us for all eternity. We thank God for including this lesson about Thomas whom Jesus convinced of the truth and along with him, He convinced us! May God help us to speak this saving truth, that others may also know and believe. Amen