

## I Doubt It!

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**JOHN 20:19-31** *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After He said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "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." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.*

Something most people know about me is that I tend to be a **skeptic**. I question things a lot. I like proof and evidence. You have to convince me of many things. And in some matters, I can be very cynical. I often find myself thinking, "I don't believe that--it is too good to be true!" My wife sometimes accuses me of being from Missouri, the "Show Me State." I have become this way because of the things I have experienced in my life, and I would imagine you have experienced many of the same things. You get a postcard or a phone call or an email telling you that you have won a free trip to the Bahamas. All you have to do is call in to claim it! But when you call, you find out that your free trip will cost you \$1000 per person. Or you see an ad in the paper for something you have been wanting at a great price, only to get to the store and find out that it is not what you thought it was and they are pulling the old "Bait and Switch" on you.

Once when I needed a front end alignment on one of my vehicles I found a coupon that said I could get it done for a fairly reasonable price. Even though I had my doubts, I took it in to that place and dropped it off. A little while later I got one of those phone calls telling me that there was a part in my steering mechanism that was worn, and they would not be able to align it properly unless that part was replaced. The end result? The job cost me five times what the coupon had said.

So I remain a skeptic. I know there is no such thing as a free lunch. I try not to be cynical, but I am skeptical. But I don't believe being a skeptic is all bad. Let me share another automotive story with you to prove my point. This was the time we needed a **new set of tires** on our old

Volkswagen van that some of you remember. I heard about this place that gave an unconditional replacement guarantee on tires, even if it was a road hazard that caused the damage. Their price was competitive, so I bought a set there. Eleven months later, I noticed a bubble on one of the rear tires. Being the skeptic that I am, I dug out my receipt and guarantee, went back to the place. I was preparing myself for some outrageous price for putting on a new tire. When I pulled up and showed the man the tire, he simply said, "O.K. Have a seat." I watched him jack up the van, and waited for about ten minutes while he put on a brand new tire. Then, when he started walking toward me, I prepared myself for the worst. You know what he said? "You're all set. Have a nice day." I was stunned. He never even asked to see my receipt. And this skeptic was convinced that I would not hesitate to do business with that company again. I recommended them to others many times. They made a believer out of me. And this is an important point. Once you convince a skeptic of something, you have a life-long supporter. If you prove something to a skeptic like me, you have someone who is then dedicated to the cause.

I guess I am like Thomas. It took some concrete evidence and proof to satisfy Thomas. But once he was persuaded, He was forever dedicated to His Lord. He knew that Jesus was alive. He declared his support by saying, *my Lord and my God*. Once he was convinced, nothing would stop him from proclaiming the truth of the resurrection. Tradition tells us that he took the Gospel to India and spent the remainder of his days preaching and teaching there. When I was there last year, I discovered that the Christians in India have a special connection to St. Thomas.

Jesus said, *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*. But I think that the majority of people, rather than being "blessed," are like Thomas and me. Skeptics, that is. They question things. They know there is no free lunch. They have been jaded and disillusioned by what they have encountered in this world. And because of that, they are skeptical even of the promises of God in the Gospel message. They apply their skeptical attitude to the offer of free forgiveness and salvation for the sake of Christ. They have to be convinced that it is true. I think that it is maybe easier to be a skeptic today. After all, we are 2000 years removed from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. People think, "Even if what you say is true, what does that have to do with me? What does it matter? It is not in the realm of my experience." So how do those of us who know of the great gift of eternal life go about convincing them?

There was a pastor who went into his pulpit one Sunday with an **old beat up bird cage**. Everyone in the congregation saw it sitting there, and was wondering what it meant. The pastor explained that he had seen a little boy carrying that cage with several wild birds in it. He asked the boy where he got the birds. He said, "I set a trap for them and caught them." "What are you going to do with those birds?" "I'll take them home and play with them awhile." That pastor then asked, "What about when you get tired of them? What will you do with them then?" The little boy replied that he had a cat at home, and since cats like birds, he would give them to the cat when he was done with them. The pastor asked, "How much do you want for those the birds?" The boy looked at him as though he were crazy. "You've got to be kidding! These ol' birds ain't worth anything." But he asked again, "How much do you want for them." The boy thought about it a bit, and finally said, "Two dollars!" The pastor handed him the money in exchange for the cage, and the little boy ran off with his treasure. The pastor then opened the door, and one by one encouraged the little birds to fly out and once again be free.

The devil once baited a trap, and in the Garden of Eden he caught his prey. He held mankind captive in the cage of sin and death. And then Jesus went to the devil and said, "What have you got there?" "I've got these people." "What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them. I'll make them fight, marry and divorce, rob and steal, use and abuse, hurt and kill each other. They'll be lots of fun." Jesus asked, "What about when you get tired of them?" The devil said, "I'll damn 'em. They aren't good for anything anyway." So Jesus asked, "How much do you want for them." The devil said, "You must be kidding! They aren't worth anything. They'll just spit on you and mistreat you and break your heart." But Jesus asked again, "How much?" The devil thought about it for a minute and answered, "It will cost you all of your tears and every drop of your blood." And Jesus took the cage, and opened the door.

My friends, you and I know this to be true. God has set you free from sin. He did this for you by paying the **price of His Son**. It is real for you, because it is in your experience. So how do we convince the skeptics of the world? How do we get this message across to those who are still huddled in that cage, afraid to come out? Jesus said, *as the Father has sent me, I am sending you*. We must first of all be proclaiming this life-giving, soul-renewing message. And since a skeptic wants proof, we must give them visible evidence. As those who have been set free by

Christ, our lives are to be a reflection of His love. People need to be able to see Christ in your lives. He needs to be made personal for them. That is the proof they need.

As I said, this is something that is already in your experience. You have had it made personal for you. You have heard God's promise of forgiveness, His plan of salvation, through His Word. You receive personal assurance of your forgiveness when you approach this altar for the Sacrament of Holy Communion. And you have in your experience that blessed Sacrament of Baptism. God's Word, united with ordinary water, performs the miracle of rebirth and cleansing from sin.

That is what we have, by the grace of God. That is what all men need, by the grace of God. That is what you and I will share, by the grace of God. The Spirit has promised to work through the proclamation of the Word. He will work through you as you live out your faith. Through us, the Spirit can and will lead others to the conviction that Jesus is risen, that He is their Savior.

Those who have not seen and yet have believed are blessed. But the skeptics of this world, like me, who have been convinced of the gift of life that is ours through the suffering, death and rising again of Jesus are also blessed. And those skeptics who have not yet been led by the Spirit to faith can also be blessed if they will accept that invitation to believe. For all who have faith in Christ, no matter how they were led to that faith by the Spirit, receive the same outcome of that faith, stated in our text: *by believing, [we will] have life in his name.*