

DEALING WITH DOUBTS

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- Do you have trouble understanding why God allows so many innocent people to suffer in this world?
- Have you ever wondered why we don't seem to see as many miracles today as we find in the pages of the Bible?
- Do you have trouble understanding how God can give each and every one of us free will yet still have an eternal plan as His purposes are worked out?
- Have you ever thought of the billions of galaxies and stars out there – many with planets – many like our own planet Earth. Many with conditions just right for the emergence of some form of life? What does our faith say about these?
- Do you have trouble believing in the Trinity? Three Gods yet only one God? Can you fathom that?
- Can you sing “I know that my Redeemer liveth” with as much confidence and assurance as we hear in Handel’s Messiah?

If you have doubts about any of these things – and most of us do – then you are in good company! Thomas had doubts too!

Thomas as we know, could not accept the stories that the other disciples were exuberantly telling him.

- He could not believe that his Lord was risen.
- It seemed too far-fetched for him
- He knew that his Lord was a very special and wonderful person.
- But not **that** special! Not **that** special that he could conquer death itself and actually rise from the grave!
- And he is recorded as saying “I will not believe unless I put my hands in his side and see the nail imprints in his hands”

So, like so many of us, Thomas wanted proof!

How do we deal with our doubts?

First we shouldn't feel guilty. Jesus didn't berate and castigate Thomas. Instead he lovingly led him through his doubts. Christ came to Thomas where he was and encouraged him. Gave him new heart and quickened his faith. He urged him to step confidently into the future in spite of the things he didn't understand.

And Thomas emerged. He was never the same again. He became a missionary – giving his life to his Lord. And tradition has it that he was killed by a spear in Mylapore near Madras in Southern India.

No we shouldn't feel guilty because we have doubts. It would be more worrying if we were to have no doubts whatsoever for then we would be saying “**we know it all**” or perhaps even more sadly “**what we know is all that there is to know!**”

Japanese and Chinese women used to have their feet bound because it was deemed to be dainty and becoming to have tiny feet – even if there was no room to grow – even if they could hardly walk and could very easily stumble.

Honest doubts give us room to grow. They leave space for faith – where we proceed by faith because we **don't** have all the answers. We often see lists of desirable character traits such as self-assurance, integrity, courage, humour, selflessness etc. To any such list I would add faith. For me it is imperative that we develop the ability to believe in something or someone – come what may, no matter what! - even though the facts cannot be nailed down.

When a husband and wife are secure in a love for each other, they have no doubts about the reality and faithfulness of this love. They don't need scientific proof. They don't need a private detective to check up on their partner at every twist and turn of their living. There are no doubts – for they know each other and enjoy a loving relationship with each other.

So should it be with our faith in God

Mind you I am not saying “be gullible” What I am saying is

Know your facts,
Be aware
Do your homework
Absolutely!
But when the facts run out
When the available knowledge ceases
Don't stop there
Be prepared to proceed further in faith.
And it may be very new territory we are entering
And we may not feel as secure
or be in control as much as we would like
But maybe in so doing we are becoming more complete
For the faith side of our make-up is growing
Not just our brains.

SECOND.

Let us come to terms with our doubts. And by doubts I mean real, honest questioning.

In his book “Crucified and Crowned”, William Barclay says that there are two kinds of doubts.

“There is doubt and doubt. There is the kind of clever doubt which takes pride in its scepticism. There is the kind of intellectual society in which it is discreditable to profess anything other than agnosticism. There is a kind of comfortable agnosticism which enjoys the twilight of uncertainty that is not altogether unpleasant.

But there is also the doubt which is a desperate and passionate thing. A doubt which is an agony of spirit because it matters to be sure. A doubt which is a matter of life and death.”

We can ask questions such as “Who won the cricket?” or “What is the capital of Mozambique?” or “How high is the Eiffel Tower?” and the answers may be useful at dinner parties but of no great consequence to our lives.

And then again we can ask questions such as “How did I go in my final exams?” “Was the tumour malignant or wasn’t it?” or “Are my children really using drugs?”, or “Where is my little girl, she was here a minute ago?” and the stakes are pretty high!

And we can ask the question “Did my Lord Jesus Christ really rise from the dead?” “Is he truly alive today?”

Paul (in Corinthians) says the stakes are pretty high here too

If Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith. If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

We must come to terms with our honest questioning:-

- Some of our questions will be answered as we study the Bible and pray and mature in our Christian faith. As we persevere.
- Some of our questions will be answered by others, their conversation, their experiences, their witness and their lives. We soon realise that what we don’t know is different from what others don’t know - and in fact there is a body of knowledge out there waiting to be known and experienced. God often answers our questions through the advice and experiences of others,
- Finally there are some questions we will never know fully in this life as our minds and understanding are so limited. As Paul says we are seeing but a poor reflection in a mirror but later we shall see face to face. Now we know in part but then we shall know fully even as we are known by God.

- Some things we need to put on the shelf for a while - or on the backburner. Put them to one side for the moment and still proceed –
IN FAITH.
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THIRD

These doubts do not preclude us from drawing benefit from our faith and experiencing its reality

Few amongst us would know the exact details as to how a television set works. Yet we have no trouble watching it and drawing benefit from it daily. Who would doubt its reality?

People use computers just about everywhere these days. We run the programs and complain when they go screwy. Very few however would know how to get into the inner workings – the core - of the computer. Into its actual machine language to write your own program from scratch - making it do exactly what you want it to do. Who would doubt the reality and power of these computers however.

I have some doubts about the Harbour Bridge. How long it took to build, how wide is the road, how long it takes to paint it etc. This does not however preclude me from using it and experiencing its strength and reality. There are things I could not prove about that bridge but I have faith in it that it will hold me up each and every time I go across it!

Sure we will have doubts about our faith and our God. How He operates here, why He doesn't step in there. How He gives us free will and still works out His eternal purposes. But none of this need preclude us from experiencing His reality. And in drawing near to Him we can come to know His strength and love and grace.

Jesus gently led Thomas through his doubts and he emerged.

And our Lord can lead us in the same way to the point where we can confidently claim "I know that my Redeemer liveth – Christ is risen indeed!!

Let us not feel guilty about our honest doubts and questioning
But let us come to terms with our doubts
Because of our doubts our faith can grow
And become our own truly personal faith!
And then let's get on with the business of living
Close to our Father God.

Dora Greenwell was an English poet from the 19th century. She had this to say about doubts

I am not skilled to understand
What God hath willed, what God hath planned;
I only know at His right hand
Stands One who is my Saviour

I take God at His word and deed:
Christ died to save me – this I read;
And in my heart I find a need
Of him to be my Saviour.

And was there no other way
For God to take,? I cannot say;
I only bless Him day by day
Who saved me through my Saviour

That He should leave His place on high
And come for sinful man to die
You count it strange? So do not I,
Since I have known my Saviour.

Yea living dying, let me bring
My strength my solace from this spring,
That he who lives to be my King
Once died to be my Saviour.

Amen