

**TRINITY BIBLE CHURCH
WHY DO I DOUBT?
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IN MY MINISTRY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME WHO HAVE COME TO ME TO HELP THEM DEAL WITH THEIR DOUBTS. ONE, IN PARTICULAR, AFTER EXPLAINING WHAT WAS TROUBLING HIM, ASKED ME THIS POIGNANT QUESTION. "IF I BELIEVE, WHY DO I DOUBT?" AND PERHAPS THIS IS A QUESTION THAT, YOU YOURSELF, HAVE ASKED!

I AM GOING TO ADDRESS THIS QUERY AND I PRAY THAT WE CAN LEAVE HERE TONIGHT UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF DOUBT AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO WHEN FACED WITH THIS DILEMMA.

IT SEEMS THAT THE SUBJECT OF DOUBT IS AN UNFAMILIAR TOPIC TO MOST PEOPLE, EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE WHOLE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE THAT DEAL WITH THIS ISSUE IN VARIOUS WAYS — SUCH AS JOB, ECCLESIASTES, LAMENTATIONS AND HABAKKUK. AND MANY OF THE PSALMS TOUCH ON THE THEME OF DOUBT AND THE FEELING OF BEING ABANDONED BY GOD.

EVEN THOUGH JAMES IN CHAPTER 1 AND VERSES 5-7 TELLS US NOT TO DOUBT, HE SAYS: "IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. BUT WHEN YOU ASK, YOU MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE THE ONE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND", WILL ALL DO, DON'T WE? AND THERE IS PROBABLY NOT A DAY THAT GOES BY THAT SOME KIND OF DOUBT DOESN'T CREEP INTO OUR THOUGHTS.

FOR ME, I THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS AS — HAVE I TRULY ACTED IN A CHRIST-LIKE WAY OR HAVE I UNRIGHTEOUSLY JUDGED SOMEONE? AND SO ON AND SO ON. AND I WOULD SUSPECT THAT EACH OF YOU HAVE SIMILAR EXPERIENCES, TOO!

FRANKLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW A PERSON CAN BE A CHRISTIAN AND NOT HAVE DOUBTS FROM TIME TO TIME. YOU SEE, FAITH REQUIRES DOUBT IN ORDER TO BE FAITH. IF YOU EVER ARRIVE AT A PLACE WHERE ALL YOUR DOUBTS ARE GONE AND ALL YOUR QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED, TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND RELAX BECAUSE YOU'VE ARRIVED IN HEAVEN.

THIS IS ONE OF THE HIDDEN SECRETS OF THE CHURCH. WE ALL DOUBT FROM TIME TO TIME. AND DOUBT ITSELF IS NOT SINFUL OR WRONG — IT IS WHAT WE DO WHEN WE DOUBT THAT MATTERS. HENRY BLACKABY, IN HIS STUDY ENTITLED "EXPERIENCING GOD", CORRELATES DOUBT AS HAVING A CRISIS OF FAITH AND SAYS "THAT WHAT WE DO WHEN WE HAVE A CRISIS OF FAITH REVEALS OUR TRUE BELIEF ABOUT GOD." AND IT CAN EITHER BE A POSITIVE EVENT OR A NEGATIVE ONE — IT CAN LEAD US INTO WORRY AND FEAR OR IT CAN BE THE CATALYST FOR NEW SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

AS I STUDIED THIS ISSUE, I REALIZED THAT OUR DOUBTS TEND TO FALL INTO THREE CATEGORIES: FIRST, THERE ARE INTELLECTUAL DOUBTS. THESE ARE DOUBTS MOST OFTEN RAISED BY THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD? IS JESUS THE SON OF GOD? DID HE REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD? THESE ARE THE DOUBTS RAISED BY THE DA VINCI CODE, THE SO-CALLED GOSPEL OF JUDAS, AND THE CONTROVERSIES STIRRED BY RICHARD DAWKINS, SAM HARRIS, CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS AND OTHER CONTEMPORARY APOSTLES OF ATHEISM.

SECOND, THERE ARE SPIRITUAL DOUBTS. THESE TEND TO BE THE DOUBTS OF THOSE INSIDE THE CHURCH. AM I REALLY SAVED?

DO I TRULY BELIEVE? WHY DO I STILL SIN? WHY IS IT SO HARD TO PRAY? WHY DO I STILL FEEL GUILTY? WHY IS IT TAKING ME SO LONG TO GET BETTER?

THIRD, THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANTIAL DOUBTS. THIS IS THE LARGEST CATEGORY BECAUSE IT ENCOMPASSES ALL THE “WHYS” OF LIFE. WHY DID MY CHILD DIE? WHY DID MY MARRIAGE BREAK UP? WHY CAN’T I FIND A HUSBAND? WHY DID MY FRIEND BETRAY ME? WHERE WAS GOD WHEN MY UNCLE WAS ABUSING ME?

THESE ARE THE QUESTIONS WE MEET AT THE INTERSECTION OF BIBLICAL FAITH AND THE PAIN OF LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD.

IN MY EXPERIENCE THESE ARE TOUGHEST DOUBTS OF ALL, AND WE TEND SOMETIMES TO SWEEP THEM UNDER THE RUG AND TO PUT DOWN THOSE IN THE CHURCH WHO STRUGGLE WITH THESE ISSUES. BUT WHEN WE REFUSE TO DEAL WITH CIRCUMSTANTIAL DOUBTS, THEY SOON BECOME SPIRITUAL DOUBTS, AND THOSE SPIRITUAL DOUBTS EVENTUALLY BECOME INTELLECTUAL DOUBTS. AND THEN PEOPLE START LEAVING THE CHURCH ALTOGETHER.

IN OTHER WORDS, WHEN WE DO NOT ADDRESS THE SEEDS OF DOUBT THROUGH FAITH, THEY OFTEN TURN INTO FORESTS OF FEARS! WHEN DOUBT OVERWHELMS US, WE STOP TRUSTING IN THE POWER OF GOD AND RELY ON OUR OWN STRENGTH AND DEVICES. AND WHEN WE EXERCISE OUR OWN WILL AND NOT GOD’S, THE CONSEQUENCES ARE OFTEN DISASTROUS. LET’S LOOK HOW ABRAM AND SARAI’S DOUBT HAS AFFECTED US TODAY!

IN GENESIS 15, ALTHOUGH ABRAM AND HIS WIFE, SARAI WERE NEARLY ONE HUNDRED YEARS OLD AND WITHOUT CHILDREN, THE LORD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAM THAT HIS DESCENDANTS WOULD INHERIT THE PROMISED LAND!

VERSE 6 OF GENESIS 15 TELLS US THAT “ABRAM BELIEVED THE LORD, AND HE CREDITED IT TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS”, BUT NOTHING HAPPENED — NO CHILD WAS CONCEIVED.

THEN IN GENESIS 16, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT SARAI, ABRAM’S WIFE, DOUBTED GOD’S COVENANT TO HER HUSBAND SAYING IN VERSE 2: “THE LORD HAS KEPT ME FROM HAVING CHILDREN. GO, SLEEP WITH MY SLAVE; PERHAPS I CAN BUILD A FAMILY THROUGH HER.” ABRAM AGREED TO WHAT SARAI SAID.”

BECAUSE OF THEIR LACK OF FAITH, SHE TOOK MATTERS INTO HER OWN HAND AND GAVE HER SERVANT, HAGAR TO ABRAM TO BEAR A CHILD. THROUGH HAGAR, ABRAM BORE A SON WHO GOD COMMANDED TO BE NAMED ISHMAEL, WHICH MEANS, “GOD HAS HEARKENED”.

BUT GOD DID FULFILL HIS PROMISE TO ABRAM. IN GENESIS 17:19 WE READ: “THEN GOD SAID, “YES, BUT YOUR WIFE SARAH WILL BEAR YOU A SON, AND YOU WILL CALL HIM ISAAC. I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT WITH HIM AS AN EVERLASTING COVENANT FOR HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM.””

NOTICE THAT ISHMAEL WAS THE FIRST-BORN AND THEREFORE, WAS ENTITLED TO BE ABRAM’S HEIR, NOT ISAAC! BUT GOD FOR WHATEVER REASON GAVE THIS BLESSING TO ISAAC. BUT GOD DID NOT FORGET ISHMAEL!

IN VERSE 20, GOD TELLS ABRAM: “AND AS FOR ISHMAEL, I HAVE HEARD YOU: I WILL SURELY BLESS HIM; I WILL MAKE HIM FRUITFUL AND WILL GREATLY INCREASE HIS NUMBERS. HE WILL BE THE FATHER OF TWELVE RULERS, AND I WILL MAKE HIM INTO A GREAT NATION.”

THROUGH THE DESCENDANTS OF ISHMAEL, WHICH WERE LATER CALLED ISHMAELITE’S, AROSE THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT THAT WE KNOW TODAY. AND THEY BELIEVE THAT THE LAND THAT WAS PROMISED TO ISAAC IS RIGHTFULLY THEIRS BECAUSE ISHMAEL WAS THE FIRST BORN AND RIGHTFUL HEIR TO GOD’S COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

THIS IS THE PRIMARY REASON WHY ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS WANT TO ANNIHILATE THE JEWS AND TAKE POSSESSION OF ISRAEL.

YOU SEE, THAT MUCH OF THE PROBLEMS AND FEARS WE FACE TODAY, INHUMAN TREATMENT OF PEOPLE AND TERRORISM, ARE THE DIRECT RESULT OF ABRAM AND SARAI’S UNBELIEF AND DOUBTS. PERHAPS THE WORLD WE LIVE IN TODAY WOULD BE VASTLY DIFFERENT HAD ABRAM AND SARAI LAID THEIR DOUBTS AT THE FEET OF THE LORD.

BUT BEFORE WE CAN TACKLE THE SOLUTION TO DEALING WITH OUR DOUBTS, WE MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF DOUBT. AS WE APPROACH THIS TOPIC, THERE ARE SEVERAL THINGS WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND UP FRONT:

FIRST, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE THAT THINK DOUBT IS THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH, BUT IT ISN’T. UNBELIEF IS THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH. UNBELIEF REFERS TO A WILLFUL REFUSAL TO BELIEVE, WHILE DOUBT REFERS TO OUR PERCEIVED UNCERTAINTIES.

SECONDLY, MANY PEOPLE THINK DOUBT IS UNFORGIVABLE, BUT IT ISN’T. GOD DOESN’T CONDEMN US WHEN WE QUESTION HIM. REMEMBER, THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST!

BOTH JOB AND DAVID REPEATEDLY QUESTIONED GOD, BUT THEY WERE NOT CONDEMNED. GOD IS BIG ENOUGH TO HANDLE ALL OUR DOUBTS AND ALL OUR QUESTIONS.

THE THIRD POINT IS THAT SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT STRUGGLING WITH GOD MEANS WE LACK FAITH, BUT THAT’S NOT TRUE, EITHER! STRUGGLING WITH GOD IS A SURE SIGN THAT WE TRULY HAVE FAITH. IF WE NEVER STRUGGLE, OUR FAITH WILL NEVER GROW. I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL’S FAITH GREW AS A RESULT OF GOD’S REFUSAL TO REMOVE THE THORN FROM HIS FLESH.

IN HEBREWS, CHAPTER 11, THE WRITER EXTOLS THOSE HEROES WHO LIVED “BY FAITH”. SOME SUCCEEDED AND LIVED, WHILE OTHERS WERE PUT TO DEATH. I WOULD SUSPECT THAT EACH OF THEM HAD SERIOUS DOUBTS AS THEY FACED THEIR PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCE. BUT THE COMMON THREAD BETWEEN EACH OF THESE MEN AND WOMEN WAS THAT REGARDLESS OF THEIR SITUATION, THEY “KEPT ON BELIEVING.” THEY WERE FAITHFUL TO GOD AND THAT WAS PLEASING TO HIM. VERSE 6 OF THIS CHAPTER TELLS US THAT “WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD!”

SINCE ACCEPTING JESUS IN THE YEAR 2000, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I HAVE NOT HAD TO FACE ANY TRULY DEVASTATING EVENTS — THOSE THAT WOULD CAUSE ME TO QUESTION WHAT I BELIEVE. CONSEQUENTLY, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO PUT MYSELF IN THE SHOES OF THOSE WHO HAVE. MANY TIMES, I AM AT A LOSS FOR WORDS THAT COULD TRULY BE OF COMFORT TO THOSE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING GREAT DISTRESS.

BUT I HAVE ALSO MINISTERED TO THOSE WHO “KEPT ON BELIEVING, NO MATTER WHAT!” AND I AM BLOWN AWAY BY THEIR ABILITY TO PUT ASIDE THEIR DOUBT AND MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH. WOW! IT SEEMS PRETTY CLEAR TO ME THAT THESE PEOPLE RELY ON THE WORDS OF JOHN, CHAPTER 6 AND VERSES 28-29: “THEREFORE THEY (THE DISCIPLES) SAID TO HIM (JESUS), “WHAT SHALL WE DO, SO THAT WE MAY WORK THE WORKS OF GOD?”

JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM, “THIS IS THE WORK OF GOD, THAT YOU BELIEVE IN HIM WHOM HE HAS SENT.”

NOTICE THE WORD, “WORK”! WORK IS HARD, AND JESUS SAID THAT IT IS WORK TO BELIEVE. FINDING IT HARD TO KEEP BELIEVING DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE DON’T BELIEVE. IT MEANS THAT BELIEVING IS HARDLY EVER AN EASY, ENJOYABLE, PASSIVE ACTIVITY FOR US.

IN THE MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES, WE FIND THAT WE CONSTANTLY HAVE TO COME AGAINST DOUBTS — THE WORLD’S LIES AND THE DEVIL’S ACCUSATIONS!

WE OFTEN HAVE TO LET GO OF OUR ILLUSIONS (AND DELUSIONS) AND EVALUATE AND REFUTE INCORRECT FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS. SOMETIMES IT IS A SHEER, TEETH-CLENCHED ACT OF THE WILL FOR US TO KEEP HOLDING ON AND MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH, OBEDIENCE AND IN THE POWER OF CHRIST. SOMETIMES WE FIND OURSELVES JUST SHUTTING DOWN UNTIL WE ARE READY (HUMBLED ENOUGH) TO DO BUSINESS WITH GOD AGAIN AND SEEK HIS FACE AND COUNSEL.

ON TOP OF ALL THAT, EVERY VICTORY SEEMS TO BE FOLLOWED UP WITH A MORE CHALLENGING SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES. FOR MANY, IT SEEMS LIKE IT NEVER ENDS AND WE GET WEARY AND HAVE TO FIGHT DISCOURAGEMENT ALL THE TIME.

AS I SAID EARLIER, I HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANY SITUATIONS THAT WOULD CAUSE ME TO QUESTION MY FAITH. THEREFORE, IT IS NOT HARD FOR ME TO “KEEP ON BELIEVING, NO MATTER WHAT!” I DO, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR STRENGTH IN THE EVENT THAT SOMETHING DOES HAPPEN. AND I’M OKAY WITH THAT NOW – BECAUSE I THINK THAT, MESSY AS IT OFTEN IS, SCRIPTURE AFFIRMS THAT I AM DOING WHAT I’M SUPPOSED TO BE DOING. I AM DOING, WHAT IS FOR ME, PERSONALLY, THE HARD WORK OF BELIEVING. I AM WORKING OUT MY SALVATION “WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.”

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO RECENTLY WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER OF THE BRAIN AND HAS BEEN TOLD THAT THE LORD WILL BRING HIM HOME IN FOUR MONTHS TO A YEAR. IN THE MIDST OF THIS STORM, HE CONTINUES TO BELIEVE AND TOTALLY RELIES ON THE PROMISES OF GOD. HE HAS THE PEACE OF GOD, DESPITE HIS CONDITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE SOME I HAVE KNOWN THAT HAVE BLAMED GOD FOR THEIR CIRCUMSTANCE AND HAVE LOST THEIR FAITH, COMPLETELY.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE LORD HAS WIRED DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENTLY. SOME PEOPLE STRUGGLE GREATLY OR REPEATEDLY WHILE OTHERS, LIKE MY FRIEND, SEEM TO HAVE NO TROUBLE BELIEVING EVEN IN THE WORST OF TIMES. FOR MOST OF US, I SUPPOSE THAT WE FALL SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE.

THAT LEADS TO ME SAY THAT WE NEEDN’T FEEL BAD IF OUR EXPERIENCE DOESN’T MATCH UP TO SOMEONE ELSE’S. AND I’M GLAD WE CAN TALK OPENLY ABOUT OUR STRUGGLES TO BELIEVE. IT’S HEALTHY TO AIR THIS OUT AND TO GIVE EACH OTHER SOME GRACE IN THIS REGARD, KNOWING THAT WE’RE NOT ALL THE SAME AND OUR FAITH EXPERIENCES ARE NOT THE SAME (NOR SHOULD THEY BE).

BUT MANY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE WITH DOUBT AND THEN FEEL GUILTY. IT IS TO THOSE BELIEVERS THAT MY WORDS ARE DIRECTED.

TO GET A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE, LET'S FOCUS ON ONE MAN, JOHN THE BAPTIST, WHO DOUBTED AND HOW JESUS DEALT WITH THAT DOUBT.

DO YOU RECALL THE OCCASION WHEN HEROD THREW JOHN THE BAPTIST IN JAIL BECAUSE JOHN DARED TO REBUKE HIM FOR HIS GROSS SEXUAL SIN? NO DOUBT CONFUSED AND FRUSTRATED BY HIS INCARCERATION, JOHN SENT MESSENGERS TO JESUS WITH A VERY PERTINENT QUESTION: "ARE YOU THE ONE WHO WAS TO COME, OR SHOULD WE EXPECT SOMEONE ELSE?" (MATTHEW 11:2-3). THAT'S A POWERFUL QUESTION IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT. AND IT MAY BE TROUBLING TO SOME PEOPLE TO THINK THAT JOHN HAS COME TO A POINT OF SUCH DEEP DOUBT. HAVING READ A FEW OF THE COMMENTARIES ON THIS PASSAGE, I AM STRUCK BY HOW MANY OF THEM CLEARLY FEEL UNEASY WITH JOHN'S DOUBT. THEY SEEM TO WANT TO SIMPLY EXPLAIN IT AWAY. ON ONE LEVEL, I CAN UNDERSTAND THEIR DISCOMFORT.

AFTER ALL, WE KNOW THAT JOHN HAD MADE ONE OF THE EARLIEST PUBLIC CONFESSIONS OF JESUS WHEN HE CRIED OUT, "LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!"(JOHN 1:29). THEN HE SAID, "I HAVE SEEN AND I TESTIFY THAT THIS IS THE SON OF GOD" (V. 34). MAKE NO MISTAKE! JOHN KNEW WHO JESUS WAS. HOW COULD A MAN WHO WAS SO CERTAIN ABOUT JESUS, NOW HARBOR SUCH DOUBT? THE TEXT DOES NOT PROVIDE AN EXACT ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION, BUT I THINK I KNOW, AT LEAST, PART OF THE ANSWER.

IN MY MINISTRY TO THOSE IN THE HOMELESS AND RESCUE MISSIONS, I HAVE COUNSELED BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED BOTH SOFT AND HARD TIME IN JAIL AND PRISON. I MUST CONFESS THAT UNTIL I STARTED HEARING THEIR STORIES, I KNEW VERY LITTLE ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE IN PRISON. MY HEART HAS BEEN DEEPLY MOVED BY THE ACCOUNTS OF THE HOPELESSNESS MOST OF THEM FELT. NO PLACE ON EARTH SEEMS MORE CORROSIVE TO FAITH THAN PRISON. NO PLACE ON EARTH IS DARKER AND MORE HOPELESS THAN A PRISON CELL. ONE PERSON TOLD ME THAT "BEING IN PRISON IS LIKE BEING DEAD — NO ONE WANTS ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU." ANOTHER PERSON DESCRIBED PRISON AS "BEING SATAN'S PLAYGROUND."

IT IS NO WONDER THAT JOHN LANGUISHED IN PRISON, NOT KNOWING WHEN, OR IF, HE WOULD EVER BE RELEASED! HE BEGAN TO WONDER, WHICH THEN TURNED TO DOUBT.

HE AT LEAST KNEW ENOUGH TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION AND ASKED HIS MESSENGERS TO ASK JESUS: "ARE YOU THE ONE SENT FROM HEAVEN, OR IS THERE SOMEONE ELSE WHO WILL BE OUR SAVIOR? ARE YOU REALLY THE PROMISED MESSIAH?" THE ANSWER OUR LORD GIVES IS VERY INSTRUCTIVE. HE DOES NOT REBUKE JOHN OR PUT HIM DOWN. HE SIMPLY GIVES JOHN THE EVIDENCE HE NEEDS IN ORDER TO REGAIN HIS FAITH.

"GO BACK, HE SAID TO THE MESSENGERS, AND TELL JOHN WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND HEARD." (LUKE 7:22A). AND THEN JESUS LISTS SIX MIRACLES THAT WERE SEEN AND HEARD BY THE MESSENGERS AS PROOF OF PRECISELY WHO HE IS! NOTICE THAT HE DIDN'T SAY: "TELL JOHN THAT I AM THE FULFILLMENT OF THE MESSIANIC PROMISES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT." THAT IS TRUE, BUT HE DIDN'T SAY THAT! NOR DID JESUS INSTRUCT THEM TO TELL JOHN THAT "I CAN WALK ON WATER." WHICH ALSO TRUE, BUT HE DIDN'T SAY THAT EITHER. JESUS ESSENTIALLY SAID, "GO BACK AND TELL JOHN THAT IN MY NAME, PEOPLES LIVES ARE CHANGED."

BY THIS DIALOGUE, JESUS IS REVEALING TO US THAT WHAT WE DO DEFINES WHO WE ARE AND NOT WHAT WE SAY. OUR ACTIONS CAN EITHER VALIDATE OR REPUDIATE THE WORDS WE SPEAK.

WHILE ALL OF THIS WAS HAPPENING, JOHN IS STILL IN PRISON AND HE IS STILL WRESTLING WITH HIS DOUBTS, LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY AND WAS STILL UNSURE ABOUT JESUS — HE HASN'T HEARD THE ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION, AS YET!

I THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH JOHN HAD DOUBTS ABOUT JESUS, JESUS NEVER HAD ANY DOUBTS ABOUT JOHN. WHY? BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT UNDERNEATH THOSE DOUBTS THERE WAS GENUINE FAITH.

FOR MANY, INCLUDING MYSELF, DEEP DOUBT IS OFTEN THE PRELUDE TO AN EVEN DEEPER FAITH. IT IS A WONDERFUL TRUTH THAT THE GREATEST DOUBTERS OFTEN BECOME THE STRONGEST BELIEVERS. AND HONEST DOUBTS — ONCE RESOLVED — OFTEN BECOME THE BEDROCK OF AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT “NO TRUTH IS SO STRONGLY BELIEVED AS THAT WHICH YOU ONCE DOUBTED.” I CAN TESTIFY TO THAT AND PROBABLY MANY OF YOU COULD, AS WELL!

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT WHILE DOUBT, UNTO ITSELF, IS NOT SINFUL —IT CAN BE DANGEROUS! BUT IT CAN ALSO BE A SPUR TO ENORMOUS SPIRITUAL GROWTH. IT'S WHAT WE DO WITH OUR DOUBT THAT MATTERS. HERE ARE FIVE SUGGESTIONS THAT CAN HELP US TO HANDLE OUR DOUBT WHEN IT REARS ITS UGLY HEAD.

FIRST, WE MUST “ADMIT OUR DOUBTS AND ASK FOR HELP.” THAT'S WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST DID. LISTEN, GOD IS NOT FRAGILE. HE CAN HANDLE OUR DOUBTS, OUR FEARS, OUR WORRIES AND ALL OUR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS. HE'S A BIG GOD! HE RUNS THE UNIVERSE WITHOUT ANY HELP. OUR DOUBTS WON'T UPSET HIM.

TELL HIM OF OUR DOUBTS, CRY OUT AND ASK FOR HIS HELP. AND DON'T FIGHT THE BATTLE ALONE. WE MUST GO TO A CHRISTIAN FRIEND, A PASTOR, AN ELDER, A DEACON, ANYONE WITH A STRONG FAITH AND GODLY INSIGHT AND ASK THEM TO WALK WITH US AS WE HONESTLY FACE OUR DOUBTS.

THIS SECOND SUGGESTION MIGHT SOUND STRANGE, BUT IT WORKS! GO TO SOMEONE WHO YOU KNOW THAT HAS GREAT FAITH AND “BORROW” SOME OF THEIRS. IN OTHER WORDS, SEEK COUNSEL FROM THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AND THROUGH FAITH, FOUND SHALOM SHABBAT — PEACE AND REST!

THE NEXT SUGGESTION IS A TOUGHIE, BUT IT IS CRITICAL — “ACT ON YOUR FAITH, NOT YOUR DOUBTS.”

THAT'S WHAT NOAH DID WHEN HE BUILT THE ARK. THAT'S WHAT ABRAHAM DID WHEN HE LEFT UR OF THE CHALDEES. THAT'S WHAT ABRAHAM DID WHEN HE OFFERED-UP ISAAC. THAT'S WHAT MOSES DID WHEN HE MARCHED THROUGH THE RED SEA ON DRY GROUND. THAT'S WHAT DAVID DID WHEN HE FACED GOLIATH. THAT'S WHAT JOSHUA DID WHEN HE MARCHED AROUND JERICHO. AND THAT'S WHAT DANIEL DID WHEN HE WAS THROWN INTO THE LION'S DEN.

DON'T YOU THINK THAT ALL THESE GREAT HEROES OF THE FAITH HAD THEIR DOUBTS? OF COURSE THEY DID. THEY DIDN'T KNOW, IN ADVANCE, HOW EVERYTHING WAS GOING TO WORK OUT. BUT THEY TOOK A DEEP BREATH, DECIDED TO TRUST GOD AND THEY ACTED ON THEIR FAITH AND NOT ON THEIR DOUBTS.

DO THE SAME THING AND YOUR FAITH WILL CONTINUALLY GROW STRONGER AS YOU SEE GOD MANIFESTING HIMSELF, MORE AND MORE, IN YOUR LIFE.

THE COROLLARY TO “ACTING ON YOUR FAITH AND NOT ON YOUR DOUBTS” IS THE FOURTH THOUGHT — “DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS AND NOT YOUR FAITH.”

THIS SIMPLY MEANS THAT YOU SHOULD NOT CAST AWAY YOUR FAITH SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU ARE IN THE DEEP VALLEY OF DARKNESS. ALL OF US WALK INTO THAT VALLEY FROM TIME TO TIME AND SOME OF US SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME THERE. BUT WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THAT VALLEY, WHERE ALL IS UNCERTAIN AND YOU ARE SORELY TEMPTED TO GIVE IN TO YOUR DOUBTS, FEARS AND WORRIES, REMEMBER THESE TWO WORDS — “KEEP WALKING” — JUST “KEEP WALKING”. NOTHING IS GAINED BY CAMPING OUT IN THE VALLEY OF DARKNESS. THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO KEEP ON WALKING. EVERY STEP FORWARD IS A WAY TO “DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS” AND SOON ENOUGH, THE LIGHT WILL SHINE AGAIN. IN THE NIV, DAVID SAYS IN PSALM 23: “EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.” NOTICE THE WORD “THROUGH”. “THROUGH” SAYS THAT WE ENTER THE VALLEY FROM ONE SIDE AND EXIT, THE OTHER. DAVID KNEW, BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH, THAT GOD WOULD NOT ALLOW HIM TO BE HELD CAPTIVE IN THE VALLEY OF DARKNESS. AND NOR WILL HE ALLOW YOU! AMEN?

THIS FINAL HINT IS FOR ME, THE MOST IMPORTANT! WE MUST “KEEP GOING BACK TO WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE.”

LISTEN TO WHAT PAUL RELATES TO US AFTER CONSIDERING THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS LIFE, AND THE PERILS AND TRIBULATIONS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST. HE CONCLUDES ROMANS CHAPTER 8 BY TRIUMPHANTLY DECLARING, “FOR I AM CONVINCED.” AND HE PROCLAIMS THAT NOTHING IN THE UNIVERSE “CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS, OUR LORD.” AND IN 2 TIMOTHY 1:12, HE SAYS, “I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED.”

KEEP IN MIND THAT THERE ARE: SOME THINGS WE THINK, SOME THINGS WE HOPE AND SOME THINGS WE KNOW. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, WE MUST KEEP GOING BACK TO WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE. REMEMBER WHAT JESUS SAID IN JOHN 8:32: “THEN YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.” AND THEN HE PROMISED: “SO IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE, YOU WILL BE FREE INDEED” — FREE FROM THE FEARS AND WORRIES THAT DOUBT CREATES IN OUR WAY OF THINKING AND ACTING.

I ADMIT THAT I DO NOT HAVE TOTAL CERTAINTY ABOUT ALL THE DETAILS OF THEOLOGY. IN A SENSE, MY KNOWLEDGE IS BOTH GREATER AND SMALLER THAN IT WAS WHEN I CAME TO KNOW JESUS IN THE YEAR 2000 AT 57 YEARS OF AGE. BUT WHAT I KNOW, I KNOW THAT I REALLY KNOW THAT I KNOW! AND I HAVE A HANDFUL OF CONVICTIONS THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN — GOD IS GOOD, JESUS IS LORD, THE BIBLE IS TRUE, LIFE IS SHORT, EVERY DAY IS A GIFT, PEOPLE MATTER MORE THAN THINGS, FAME IS FLEETING, THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME AND TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS ARE ALLOWED IN OUR LIVES FOR A PURPOSE FOR WHICH WE USUALLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND.

AND AT THE CORE OF MY FAITH IS AN UNSHAKABLE BELIEF IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. HE’S GOD AND I’M NOT. AND AREN’T YOU GLAD THAT I’M NOT? BECAUSE IF I WERE, YOU WOULD BE IN A LOT OF TROUBLE! AMEN?

HE IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL THE DETAILS OF MY LIFE AND I CAN TRUST HIM COMPLETELY, EVEN WHEN THOSE DETAILS SEEM TO BE SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL.

SO WHAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE FOR DEALING WITH DOUBT?

BORROWING A "TEXAS HOLD-EM" HIGH STAKES POKER TERM, THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE MUST BE "ALL IN"!

LET ME ILLUSTRATE. IN EVERY GAME OF HIGH-STAKES POKER, THERE COMES A DEFINING MOMENT THAT SEPARATES THE WINNERS FROM THE LOSERS. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN THAT MOMENT WILL COME BECAUSE IT'S UP TO THE INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS.

THERE IS AN INSTANT WHEN A PLAYER SAYS TWO WORDS—"ALL IN." GOING "ALL IN" MEANS THAT HE IS RISKING EVERYTHING HE'S GOT ON JUST ONE HAND. IF HE WINS, HE WINS IT ALL. BUT IF HE LOSES, HE LOSES IT ALL. THE SKILLED PLAYER KNOWS THAT HE CAN'T WIN A TOURNAMENT UNLESS HE IS WILLING TO GO "ALL IN" AT SOME POINT — IT'S A MATTER OF PICKING THE RIGHT TIME TO MAKE HIS MOVE.

IT'S THAT WAY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ALSO. YOU CAN'T HOLD ON TO YOUR CARDS FOREVER. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE A STAND. THIRTEEN YEARS AGO I WENT "ALL IN" ON JESUS — "ALL IN" THAT HE IS TRULY GOD AND THE SON OF GOD; THAT HE DIED ON THE CROSS FOR MY SINS; THAT HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY; THAT HE IS THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE AND THAT SOMEDAY HE WILL TAKE ME TO BE WITH HIM. GOING "ALL IN" WAS MY PLAN "A" AND YOU KNOW WHAT, THERE ISN'T A PLAN "B"! I AM BASING MY EVERLASTING LIFE TOTALLY ON JESUS! ARE YOU?

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO REMIND YOU THAT WE ARE TO "FEAR NOT" AND THAT HE NEVER TURNS AN HONEST DOUBTER AWAY — NEVER! COME TO HIM WITH YOUR DOUBTS, YOUR SKEPTICISM, YOUR UNBELIEF, YOUR HARD QUESTIONS AND YOUR UNCERTAINTIES.

GOD WELCOMES YOUR HARDEST QUESTIONS. AGAIN, REMEMBER THAT DOUBT IS NOT A SIN. IT'S WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR DOUBT THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

DON'T LET YOUR DOUBTS KEEP YOU FROM JESUS. COME TO HIM, JUST AS YOU ARE—AND BRING YOUR DOUBTS WITH YOU. HE WILL NOT TURN YOU AWAY.

AMEN?