

## **WE LIVE BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT**

Written by Don Shultz (March 24, 2015)

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Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Have you ever had a moment when you doubted the Word of God? How in the world is this person who is dead going to come back to life again, you wonder, as you go to the funeral. I know what the Bible says, but really, how does that even work? Have you ever doubted?

I look at my father who is aging, who is slowing way down in the last few years. It's weird to watch him because I know I'm looking at myself down the road. He's slowing down, and according to the Bible, someday he will be in his twenties again, or something like that. Risen from the dead. Full of energy. Full of health. I look at my dad and I wonder; is that really true? Have you ever doubted?

Your prayer goes unanswered, and you doubt that God exists. You suffer, or a loved one suffers, and you doubt that God is good.

Today we're going to talk about doubt. We all struggle with doubt sometimes. We cover it up because we don't want people to look down on us like we are weak. If someone knows that I am doubting they're going to think I'm a bad Christian, and so we cover it up.

But you do doubt sometimes. I do. Let's look at how Jesus deals with our doubts. How Jesus forgives us. How Jesus helps us to live by faith and not by sight.

The poster-boy for doubt in the Bible is Thomas. "Doubting Thomas." And it's easy for us Christians living on this side of the story to look down on Thomas like he is somehow less intelligent, less religious, or less Christian, than you or I. But I don't think that's accurate. Stand in the shoes of Thomas this morning. Perhaps you and I are more like him than we would like to admit.

Thomas missed it on Easter Sunday night when Jesus appeared to his disciples. We don't know where he was or what he was doing, but he missed it. Later, the disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" What the

disciples saw wasn't some vision or dream. It wasn't wishful thinking. Against everything they had ever seen or experienced in their lives, this man Jesus who was executed many times over by the Roman government, was now standing in the middle of them. And just in case they had any doubts that this was real, and I'm sure they did, Jesus showed them his hands and his side. Against all logic, against all science, Jesus was alive. And when the disciples saw Thomas, they told him, "We have seen the Lord."

What would you have thought if you were Thomas. Would you have believed? Remember, Thomas saw what happened to Jesus. For those of you who watched the "Passion of the Christ" years ago. That very bloody violent portrayal of the death of Jesus. Thomas saw that live! And it hurt to see Jesus die like that. And when you're hurting, it's hard to believe: "Unless I see," Thomas said. "Unless I touch." I won't believe it.

Have you ever doubted like Thomas? Have you ever been asked to walk by faith and not by sight? Your loved one dies, and that hurts. And now you're supposed to believe that he or she is going to rise from the dead? You feel pain in your life. You're confused. You're worried and upset and you don't know how things are going to work out for you. You're supposed to believe that Jesus is God and that he loves you and that he is watching over your life. Have you ever doubted?

I need proof, you say, like Thomas. I need a sign from God. You pray and pray and don't get the answers you are hoping for. You want God to show you something. To prove to you that God is real.

But God wants us to walk by faith, and not by sight. Faith is believing in something or someone that goes against everything that makes sense. As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ was a human being, through and through, just like you, and that Jesus was God, through and through, the opposite of you. I can't explain that to you. But that's faith.

And this Jesus, who was God and human. Publicly died on a cross and was buried. Just as dead and buried as the people we have seen in our life that are dead and buried. But then Jesus physically came to life again. I can't explain it to you. But that's faith.

And the death and resurrection of Jesus this is what gives us the forgiveness of sins. This death and resurrection gives us hope when we see a loved one die. When we think of our own deaths. I can't explain it to you. But that's faith. We walk by faith, and not by sight.

Look at how Jesus helps Thomas. A week after Easter, Jesus appeared again and this time, Thomas was with them. You would think that Jesus would have condemned Thomas for his stubborn lack of faith. But Jesus was very patient, very gracious. Jesus gives in to Thomas' demands. Touch my hands, Jesus said to Thomas. Look at me with your eyes. Stop doubting, and believe.

Stop doubting, Jesus said. Doubting [comes from the brokenness inside us]. It's not taking God at God's Word. Jesus tells Thomas to stop it. Jesus tells you and me to stop it too. And Jesus comes to us in mercy and grace and forgives us and invites us to believe.

Thomas responded with one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible, "My Lord and my God."

I do not think Jesus will appear to you on this side of heaven, like he did for Thomas. Although Jesus could do whatever he wants. Today, we live by faith, and not by sight.

"Because you have seen me, you have believed," Jesus said to Thomas. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." That's you. And that's me too. It's not easy to believe when everything in the world tells you the opposite. It's not easy to believe when you've been hurt by the troubles of this world. When you're in pain and you're afraid of the future and your prayers aren't immediately answered the way you want.

But the followers of Jesus, there's something inside of them, something inside of you. It's faith. You believe, even though you don't see. You don't hear. You have no proof. You have nothing. Except the Word of God. And that, according to God, is all you need to believe. That's why God gave us the Bible. "These are written, the Apostle John says," that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Today you come forward for the Lord's Supper. You live by faith, not by sight. You come up here, and all you see is bread and wine. That's all you taste, but you believe that there's something else here, there's the body and blood of Jesus. You believe that there's more than just people at the communion rail. There's God, and it's not just the pastor saying that you're forgiven, it's God.

You can look up into the blue sky and believe that there's something behind all that. That there's a real heaven with a real God and real angels. You believe that because you live by faith and not by sight.

You go to a funeral, and you stand in line like everybody else. And you see the dead body in the coffin, but you believe that God will raise that person from the dead. The eyes will blink again. The mouth will laugh again. That person will physically live again someday, just as much alive as all the people behind you who are standing in line at the funeral. You live by faith and not by sight.

You look at the world differently. You look at people differently. You even look at unanswered prayers differently. You look at life and death differently, because you believe in Jesus Christ, who has died and who has risen from the dead. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. **Amen.**