

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 336

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 20:24-31

Topic: Thomas Believes

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John 20:24-31 MKJV But Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I shall see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. (26) And after eight days the disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace to you! (27) Then He said to Thomas, Reach your finger here and behold My hands; and reach your hand here and thrust *it* into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing. (28) And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God! (29) Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed *are* they who have not seen and have believed. (30) And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. (31) But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.

Thomas is both one of the more loyal and complex disciples. Thomas was the only one prepared to die with Christ in John 11:15,16, and yet he seems to have found the death of Jesus intolerable and overwhelming. He went deep into grief, isolated himself and refused to rekindle his hopes that had been so terribly crushed – even when the others told Thomas about the resurrection. Easton's Bible Dictionary has Thomas, Matthew and James as sons of Alphaeus and thus brothers - which might explain Matthew's phrase 'some doubted' (Matthew 28:17) as referring to his twin brother – without using his name.

Jesus gave Thomas a chance to believe 'without seeing' and thus of inheriting a greater blessing (John 20:29), but even after a week he was still adamant in his unbelief. So Jesus gave Thomas the evidence that he needed to believe – and Thomas gave the greatest statement of faith in the whole NT "My Lord and My God".

It is not wrong to need solid evidence before making a major change of belief system such as believing that someone could rise from the dead. God leads us to a reasonable and verifiable faith and does not ask us to believe myths and fairy stories. Therefore the Bible is full of history and other readily verifiable information.

Thomas was not asked to have "blind faith" or to believe in a fairy story but rather to trust the witness of the other apostles who he knew well. As I mentioned the other day this is known as inter-subjective testability and means that an event that can be tested by a number of people – such as the 500 that saw Jesus alive (1 Corinthians 15:5,6) is deemed far more credible than one that cannot pass such a test.

In the normal course of life we cannot test everything ourselves and we have to rely on the word of others – such as teachers and textbooks and panels of experts. Thus all education relies on trust in the veracity of the teacher. For instance I think I first heard about the massive Amazon River when I was in grade three. I believed that the Amazon River existed and was the biggest river in the world because my teacher said so. My teacher in turn probably trusted an atlas or a textbook, which in turn was probably compiled by an expert who in turn may have relied on someone in Brazil who has actually seen the Amazon River.

To this day I have no absolute first-hand proof of the existence of the Amazon River, but despite this I believe that it exists because I have faith in atlases and experts who tell me it exists. Now this applies to countless other facts that I have learned in the course of my education. Thus all education, indeed all civilization and culture, depends on inter-subjective testability – on being able to trust the verifiable testimony of a number of reliable witnesses.

Even when we come up with a doctrinal conclusion we should ask: “Does this fit reality? Can this be tested and verified by a number of reliable witnesses?” For instance if we say concluded that: “All truly spiritual people speak in tongues” and went out to test that proposition, we would be in for a shock as Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Bill Bright and Charles Haddon Spurgeon and many others failed to fit the theory. Such a theory would fail to fit the test of reality. The prosperity gospel and many other theories would also crash in a heap if a little reality testing was done, and this would be a good thing.

None of us have seen Jesus’ hands and side, so we have to trust the witness of the apostles and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as well the ample historical evidence such as Morrison’s “Who Moved The Stone” or the works of Josh McDowell. God works with the available evidence to help us to believe.

John wrote his gospel, as an eye-witness account of a credible witness, so that we might have sufficient data to believe but even John admits it was only a sufficient account not an exhaustive account. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.”

God rarely provides us with absolute proof for our faith, but He always provides sufficient and adequate proof based on the written testimony of a number of reliable and credible eyewitnesses. This testimony is first of all found in the Gospels and Acts.

Where there is no such evidence (by a number of reliable eyewitnesses) we are not required to believe. We are not required to believe in a flat-earth or in televangelists

or in conspiracy theories. However we are required to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. (Romans 10; 9,10).

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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