

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017. Text: (Acts 2:14a, 22-32) John 20:24-end**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

- Jesus’ words after Thomas cries out in belief “My Lord and My God” after his doubts were calmed in seeing, feeling– experiencing - the Risen Christ Jesus

So for us there is utter blessing if we deal with our doubts and experience the Risen Christ Jesus.

## **FACING DOUBT**

Have you ever heard of Charles Templeton ?

... probably not, he was a pretty obscure commentator and novelist ...

You have, of course heard of Billy Graham

... a man whose preaching and teaching has been of immeasurable benefit to thousands, probably millions of people around the world,

... a man described as “one of the most admired men in the world”

➤ It could have been the other way round

... it might have been Charles Templeton who was the world renowned evangelist and Billy Graham who few have heard of ...

In the 1940’s the two men were close friends, both church leaders with Charles Templeton founding a church that soon had over 1200 members ...

But Charles Templeton became beset by doubts... he said: “My reason had begun to challenge and sometimes rebut the central beliefs of the Christian faith”

... he resigned his ministry and went on to write books with such titles as “Farewell to God: My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith”

... but did he actually reject the Christian faith ? .... We’ll come back to that

Billy Graham, meanwhile, was understandably disturbed, wobbled, by his friend’s loss of faith

... for days, weeks Billy Graham pondered and prayed, and then in a heavy-hearted walk in the moonlit San Bernardino Mountains, everything came to a climax

.. he sank to his knees and cried, “Father, I am going to accept ... by faith ! I’m going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts.”

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

... blessed are those who have faith ...blessed are those who overcome their doubts and commit their lives in faith, and experience the Risen Jesus..

## WHAT'S GOING ON IN DOUBT / "HOLDING BACK"

It is, of course fine to doubt

... if you have not doubted the claims of Christian faith, you've probably not understood it or the demands it makes of you

But it is limiting and damaging to remain in doubt. Doubt can make us live a "half-life", avoiding commitment

*It can help to know that everyone has faith in something,  
... faith means what we trust in, build our lives on*

*and, just as everyone has faith in something,  
there must be doubt about all world views*

*... doubt, questioning is integral to what it means to be human*

Look at the different "faith positions" that people consciously or unconsciously adopt:-

... The agnostic says I cannot know if there is a god or not. I can make up my own way through this life, not really knowing what it's for. This is faith

... The atheist says I believe we are random, meaningless accidental molecules in an infinity of space; there is no meaning. This is faith

... the theist says there is a god but I'm not quite sure who he or she or it is. This is faith.

In the lack of any meaningful sense of God, the agnostic, atheist and theist are likely to be unmoved in their being, probably worshipping Mammon.

➤ *All such positions must be open to doubt... I wonder if Richard Dawkins, author of the "God Delusion" wakes up in the night, wondering if there is a god ?!*

.. The Christian faith ? The Christian says I am moved and stirred by the life of Jesus Christ;

I put my faith in Him ... I will work through any intellectual questions or doubts, I will follow Him, build my life on Him

## THE GOD WE BELIEVE IN – CHRIST JESUS

Why, though, be moved and stirred by Jesus Christ ? Why put your faith, build your life in Him ?

"in your hearts revere Christ as Lord," says St Peter, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15)

When we understand the reasons for Christian faith, when we know the reason for "the hope we have"

... and, preferably find people asking us why we have this hope, we can deal with doubt

➤ There are **intellectual, academic reasons** for believing Christian faith and **experiential, emotional reasons**

... Christian faith is true and it works

And, fundamentally, there is Jesus Himself, - His being, His present Resurrected self by the Holy Spirit, as the reason for putting faith in Him

## **INTELLECTUAL/ACADEMIC REASONS**

In the “Intellectual/Academic” reasons for Christian faith, there are all of the general arguments for the existence of God

... not least the atheist faith that we are random, meaningless accidents, seems pretty daft

.. there is much reading you could do, many sermons that could be preached on the academic reasons for belief in God

And, then there is the specific historical evidence that Jesus Christ was Son of God, God Incarnate

- The historic reliability of the accounts in the gospels.
- The “ring of truth” that the Scriptures, the Bible generally speak with
- The evidence for the Resurrection
- Jesus’ extraordinary impact on history and culture

... again more readings and sermons there ... or come to the Alpha Course .. Introduction 3<sup>rd</sup> May, course starting 17<sup>th</sup> May

## **EXPERIENTIAL/EMOTIONAL REASONS**

Academic/intellectual reasons for faith are good and necessary but these ideas/facts can seem cold, removed

.. I guess that was how Thomas felt in the gospel reading

– you are telling me that Jesus has Risen, but unless I see and feel, unless I *experience*, it doesn’t mean anything

Thank God then, that Christian faith is affirmed in our experience ... Christian faith makes **emotional sense**

..Think about the world as it is and what happens when we believe in Christ, pray, worship, and see verification of Christian faith

- Is there a god who magics away all of the world’s/our problems ? Clearly not – and Christian faith never claims there is.
- Do extraordinary things, miracles sometimes occur ? Surely all of the time .. I know it has in our family’s life

.. Jesus taught and demonstrated miracles, as “signs” of another world beyond this one.

- Does it feel like there is always hope whatever the situation ? Can I find strength in all difficulties and problems ?

Does it feel like there is a benign force – love, creativity – at work bringing new life ?

When I pray does it feel like I see answers ?

- The Christian faith tells us that God is the God of Love, of Resurrection, entering into the world's pain and suffering, bringing transformation
- Does it feel like, at the core of all of the world's problems is sin – failure to love ?

And that we need a restored humanity, loved, forgiven, blessed, that can build a better future for all

- This message is, of course, at the heart of Christian faith  
– forgiveness, new life in Jesus' death and resurrection, His Kingdom to come with a restored humanity ... a Revolution
- Does it feel right when Jesus taught and lived that there is a fundamental choice to be made between God and Mammon ?

... there are essential choices to be made about how we should live....

- Does it feel essential to have churches of people who meet and encourage one another ?

The Christian faith tells us that God has given the Church a special role in bringing His Kingdom

- Is there a presence that fills me and the place where I am when I pray and worship ?

Do I feel much more emotionally alive as I practice Christian faith ?

The Christian faith tells us of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who indeed manifests Himself in prayer and worship, filling us with fruits of peace, hope, love, joy, gentleness and self-control

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The Christian faith of 2000 years goes on making extraordinary emotional sense in how we experience life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...

## **BACK TO JESUS CHRIST**

There are absolutely cogent intellectual/academic reasons and profound emotional/experiential reasons for having Christian faith

.. but yet more persuasive than even these arguments, why to have faith in Jesus Christ is simply the person of Jesus Himself

...Charles Templeton was interviewed when he was 83 years old, shortly before he died, by Lee Strobel of Willow Creek Church

... Charles Templeton had recently produced another anti-Christian faith book

.. Lee Strobel asked Charles Templeton about how he lost his faith, and then later asked, “Would you *like* to believe ?”

...Templeton replied “Of course ! If I could, I would. I’m 83 years old .. I’m dying for goodness sake !”

- Later Strobel asked, “How do you assess Jesus ?”  
.. Templeton replied (Pg 17 “*The Case for faith*”)

“He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I’ve ever encountered in my life or in my readings. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world”

Strobel records being taken aback and says “You sound like you really care about him”

Templeton replies: “Well, yes, he’s the most important thing in my life ....I...I...I.. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say .. I *adore* him !”

Strobel: “You say that with some emotion”

Templeton: “Well, yes. Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Yes ... yes. And tough ! Just look at Jesus. He castigated people. He was angry... He had a righteous anger..He cared for the oppressed and the exploited. There’s no question he had the highest moral standard, the least duplicity, the greatest compassion of any human being in history. There have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is Jesus.”

Strobel: And so the world would do well to emulate him

Templeton: “Oh my goodness, yes ... Uh... but...no.. he’s the most .... In my view he is the most important human being who has ever existed..”

Strobel records Templeton then uttered words he never expected to hear from him: “And if I may put it this way... (voice cracking) ...*I ... miss .. him!*”

“With that”, says Strobel, “tears flooded his eyes”..

It seems on reading that account that Charles Templeton allowed his intellectual doubts to deny his emotional response

... and yet, of course, truth is to be found in our emotional self as much or more than in our intellect ...

## CONCLUSION

And so for each of us ? How will we live ?

.. Everyone has to choose, all have faith ... agnostic, atheist, theist, Christian

....to have faith and to doubt is part of what it is to be human

- The richest life is promised to those who have faith – whilst dealing with doubt – in the Christ Jesus

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