

The Power of Doubt, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. X2050403
1 Peter 1:3-9 and John 20:19-31
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There is great power in doubt. I like play pool: billiards. I don't get to play much anymore, but when I was a youth I played lot. I was pretty good, too. There is an amazing thing about lining up shot when playing pool. I can feel whether I am going to make it or not. Making a billiard shot is forty percent skill and twenty percent luck. The remaining forty percent is confidence in making the shot. If I doubt I can make it, then by golly, I will not make it.

Doubt has great power. We can doubt our skills and abilities. Doubt can impair our judgment when driving car. If a salesperson doubts the goals she has set for her self, she probably will not reach them. Doubt can affect the way we perform in sports. Doubting our children can ruin them. When we label them with doubt and suspicion, they lose confidence in themselves. When we think they cannot succeed, they frequently cannot. If we doubt a child's integrity, he will prove that he cannot be trusted.

Doubt becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Doubt takes away our confidence. On that first Easter evening there was doubt. It was after Mary Magdalene told the disciples the news that the tomb was empty and that she had seen Jesus. All the disciples were there except Thomas. This story is the source of the phrase "Doubting Thomas." The doors were locked because of doubt: doubt that they were safe. There was doubt about Mary's story, and that she had talked with Jesus.

Into this atmosphere of doubt and fear came Jesus. The disciples saw and believed. But where was Thomas on that Sunday evening? Was he off somewhere sulking? Was he retracing Jesus' steps? Was he inspecting the empty tomb? Was he packing his bags to leave town? Perhaps Thomas was braver than others. He was out in the streets where danger lurked– the danger of running into those who crucified Jesus. We don't know where he was, but we know where he wasn't: he wasn't in the room with the other disciples.

Later, the other disciples told Thomas they had seen the risen Jesus. Thomas said, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe it."¹ Thomas's words were, "I *will* not believe it." This was saying, "I choose not to believe it!" This appears to be more than doubt. This appears to be an issue of stubbornness.

Some are skeptical and doubt but may be open to new knowledge. Others are just plain stubborn and will not accept new facts or new evidence, no matter what it is.

It is easy to doubt everything. Bertrand Russell in *Preface to Science and Method* quoted Jules Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), "To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection." This story of Thomas is a request for us Christians to reflect: to think about and to ponder. It is better for us to accept a middle course: don't accept things blindly, but don't stubbornly doubt everything either. Jesus words to Thomas were, "stop doubting and believe."²

The other disciples had it easier. Thy had been there in room the week before. They had seen the risen Jesus together. Their fellowship and support was enough to overcome their grieving and doubt.

Thomas came back that second Sunday evening. He had not left town in sorrow and

¹John 20:25

²John 20:27

loneliness. This is a reflection of the importance of the fellowship to him. Thomas did not trust his friends' words enough to believe, but he did trust his fellowship with them enough to remain a part of that fellowship and to come back the next Sunday evening.

We may not accept and believe everything we hear from our fellow church members. Indeed we should not, but I hope that fellowship means enough to us to remain involved, to come back Sunday after Sunday and let Christ himself confront us in the faith.

Jesus' words were, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."³ This account was written by John to give First Century believers the strength to keep the faith. They did not have the benefit of seeing Jesus or of witnessing the resurrection.

Doubt is both positive and negative. We should not believe everything we see and hear. There are some sources that cannot be trusted. God is not looking for gullibility. God is not interested in selling us swampland in Florida or the Brooklyn Bridge to place over it. Reasoning is a source of doubt and can be the source of belief. This is verified by great writers. Miguel de Unamuno said, "Faith which does not doubt is dead faith."⁴ Alfred, Lord Tennyson said, "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds."⁵

Faith is made up of large parts of curiosity, inquisitiveness, hope, and risk. We have to be willing to look seriously at matters of the meaning of life. Like a cat, we check out all angles. We must sniff and snoop until we get answers that satisfy. We have to want to believe. We hope that there is a God and there is order to universe. Such inquisitiveness and hope is risk.

The reliability of the witness makes difference. Thomas had been with these disciples for three years. He knew them and trusted them. He knew they would not be trying to put him on, so, because of his trust, he came back the next Sunday. We should not trust just anyone. We would be too susceptible to advertisers and con artists.

In some respects, we modern people are as primitive as those who need to have miracles in order to believe. Yet, if God gave us miracles right now, they would not get us to believe. We have seen too much magic. We are too skeptical for miracles to prove anything to us. We must have a need to believe. We are like Thomas. We are skeptical, but we are here to learn more.

Note that Thomas did not have to touch Jesus. He believed because of Jesus' word.

Jesus did not appear just to make the disciples feel good. He gave them an assignment to spread the gospel to others. John's account of the bestowing of the Holy Spirit on Disciples is an empowerment to do God's will.

Doubt is powerful, yes. Because we do not know the future, we doubt. Doubt can immobilize us. But, as a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, so does faith. At night, when we are in the dark woods, a flashlight cannot show us our goal, such as our tent. The flashlight can light our path. We take the first steps into the lighted area. As we do, the light moves with us. It can pierce farther ahead into the darkness. We take another step and so on, until with the light of a little flashlight, we have reached our goal.

St. Francis of Assisi prayed, "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith."

³John 20:29

⁴Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity*

⁵ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam"