

Crisis of Faith

“Isn’t Faith Irrational?”

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Series Intro

Having a “crisis of faith” is what I most often hear it called.

It's those moments or seasons in life where we just aren't so sure anymore. There are questions and doubts that seem overwhelming. Where faith seems unrealistic. God seems distant. And we are at a bit of a precipice.

Maybe for some of you you've been there, where you're wondering if you will continue to follow Jesus. Maybe you're not a Christian and you are examining the claims that Jesus makes and right now is something of a crisis of faith for you as you're deciding if what you believe about Jesus is true or not.

I've had a lot of conversations like this with people over the years and there are some patterns that begin to be exposed. We often have very similar questions or at least types of questions. It's often very similar life circumstances that press us into these moments or seasons. What's interesting is a lot of our questions and circumstances that bring those up are actual questions and circumstances and issues that people experienced when Jesus was alive on the earth. And we get examples in Jesus's ministry of him interacting with people regarding these issues.

- Things like suffering and questioning God's goodness.
- Things like life not turning out the way we wanted.
- Even things like believing the incredible claim that a man came back from the dead.

For this series, we are looking at specific encounters that Jesus has with people as they are deciding whether they will follow Jesus or walk away. And we're going to get insight into the questions, issues, circumstances that these people were dealing with as we see how Jesus engages them.

Sermon Intro

Here is our question, our doubt for today - Isn't' faith irrational?

Today we will have a look at two people who had difficulty believing the claims that a man rose from the dead. Their logical, rational understanding of the world made them skeptical.

John 20

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Mary's assumption isn't that Jesus resurrected even though he predicted that He would many times. Her assumption was somebody took him. That's why she's weeping. Sometimes we

think intellectual doubts are new, because we are so smart now. Back then people were dumb and believed whatever anyone told them. . 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

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24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Our question for today is “Isn't it irrational to believe?”

The answer is “No, not really. For a few reasons.”

Faith in Jesus is not more or less rational, necessarily, than how you are already living your life... because

****Everyone bases their life on a combination of reason and belief****

You actually cannot live your life by reason alone. You also must believe some things. Things that cannot be tested or proven. There is no escaping this reality. Everyone builds their life on a mixture of reason and belief. Everyone. I'm not talking about God yet, and belief in God or even more specifically following Jesus as God. In order to live your life, you will operate with a combination of reason and belief. There is no such thing as a life lived without belief.

No one can demonstrably prove the primary things human beings base their lives on, whether we are talking about the existence of God or the importance of human rights and equality.

- You cannot prove that there is a right way or a wrong way to treat people. Yet you have to treat people a certain way.
- Thomas Nagel (professor of philosophy at NYU) recently wrote that the thoroughly materialistic view of nature can't account for human consciousness, cognition and moral values.
- Nietzsche argued that the humanistic values of most secular people, such as the importance of the individual, human rights and responsibility for the poor, have no place in a completely materialistic universe. He even accused people holding humanistic values as being “covert Christians” because it required a leap of faith to hold to them.
- Science cannot tell us the right or wrong way to spend our time.
- You cannot prove that your senses are trustworthy. You might be hooked up to the matrix right now. (“What are the Odds We Are Living in a Computer Simulation?” New Yorker)

In other words, you will have to build your life on a combination of reason and belief. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, you are already doing it. You will need to think through what makes the most sense of

what we know about nature, history, and our experiences, and then build your life on it out of reason and belief. Belief that cannot be “proven.”

And what we must do with Jesus and the claims of Christianity, is exactly that. We must bring the same process into it. Examine the claims, see if they fit with what we know and have explanatory power, and then decide if we will respond by placing our belief and faith in Jesus by following him.

So, there is nothing more or less inherently rational about following Jesus...because everyone lives their life based on a combination of reason and belief. **Christianity, despite what you may have been told, invites you to apply your reason towards belief.**

Which brings us back to John 20 and the Resurrection: the truthfulness of the resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. If it's true then it all is, if it isn't true then none of it is. So that's where to start your investigation. If it's true then it all is, if it isn't true then none of it is.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead then we are still in our sins and Christians are to be pitied above all other men. Our faith cannot even be useful if it isn't true.

Because the claim is that in dying and rising, Jesus was paying for and forgiving and defeating sin. So that God no longer holds our sin against us. We can be reconciled to God through our faith in Jesus. If Jesus didn't really die and rise from the dead, then we can't be saved by grace and therefore Christianity is false and it cannot even be useful to you.

If Jesus didn't resurrect, then he was just a nice guy with some interesting teachings who eventually died like everyone else, but his death wasn't all that important. But if Jesus did resurrect, then we really are made right and then we must seriously consider his claims that He is God, we must consider His power over the natural universe, we have to make room in our minds for the existence of the supernatural and miracles, we have to consider His teachings are more than nice suggestions but actually have authoritative weight on our lives.

Let me give you a few reasons to believe Jesus resurrected:

1- Accounts of Jesus' resurrection are too counterproductive to have been lies.

John 20

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned in Luke 8 as having been formerly demonized. Jesus casts seven demons from her. This is not a high standing woman. She would have been a marginalized, social outcast.

Mary Magdalene is named as the first eyewitness of the risen Christ, and other women are mentioned as the earliest eyewitnesses in the other gospels, too. This was a time in which the testimony of women was not admissible evidence in courts because of their low social status. The early pagan critics of Christianity latched onto this and dismissed the Resurrection because of this. One example is from a second century man named Celsus who ridiculed Christianity as the word of “hysterical females.”

The first person that Mary Magdalene goes to get is Peter, who at this point has just denied Jesus out of cowardice.

If the early church leaders made up this story of Jesus rising from the dead, they were the some of the worst liars ever. The story they told was entirely counterproductive to getting people to believe them. People thought they were ridiculous. They got made fun of because of this. They were beaten because of this.

In a shame and honor culture, you do not make up the stories that are in here about Peter being a coward. You do not depict Jesus dying and screaming out that God has deserted him. You don't have your first eyewitnesses be women whose testimony would be discredited.

I don't know how much you know about human nature, but people don't lie to make their situation worse. They lie because they believe the lie will benefit them more than the truth.

If you are going to tell a lie to gain power then you make up a lie that will get you that power.

2- Eye witness accounts were too early to have been falsified

John 20

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Just to make sure you are noticing this... Just like Mary, this news of a risen messiah didn't fit Thomas's worldview. "Messiahs don't die humiliating deaths and dead men don't rise." The truth is, Christianity always ruins peoples' prior worldview, no matter who they are.

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Right. This man shows up in a room in spite of locked doors and says "peace be with you." If you're in a room by yourself and someone appears, I'm not sure that peace is what you'd feel.

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus does something to put Thomas into a separate category. He makes him an eye witness. And the gospel accounts spread during the lifetimes of Thomas and many other eyewitnesses.

All four of the gospels are written during the lifetime of eyewitnesses. "P52" is a papyrus scrap of John 18 that was found in Egypt. In John Rylands museum in the UK was dated 100 to 130AD.

John could not have been written any later than 85 or 90AD. And John was the last gospel to be written. A non-Christian scholar, Carsten Peter Thiede even claims that he has dated a fragment of Matthew to about 60 AD.

Not enough time had passed for legends to have arisen.

1 Corinthians 15

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

This news of Jesus resurrection spread during the lifetime of people who could have refuted it. The people who were present for the events could have brought a halt to whole movement by saying “I was there and it didn’t happen like that.”

Constantine making changes...copies quickly began to spread. Multiple languages. Church fathers’ quotations recreate over 95% of NT. For Constantine to make changes he would have to find every copy, in every language, and change every written sermon from early church fathers.

In other words, they were recorded too early to have been falsified then, and they spread so quickly they could not have been falsified later.

3- Eye witnesses were willing to die for their accounts.

Church tradition says that Thomas went on to die by getting speared to death in India for preaching the gospel. Every single apostle ended up being killed because of their testimony except John, who was left to die on an island.

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.” - Chuck Colson

People don’t die for what they know is a lie. And these guys would’ve known if they were making it up. People will die for things that are not true, but not if they know it’s not true.

The question that must be asked is “What is the best explanation for the data that we have?” Knowing that the stories about Jesus were counterproductive, arose within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses, and cost the witnesses their lives...what is the better explanation for the data? It certainly is not unreasonable or irrational to conclude that the most plausible explanation is that the resurrection happened.

Conclusion

Now, with all of that said...reason alone is not enough to base your life on. You will have to step into belief at some point. Reason is necessary but ultimately insufficient.

I love that in these interactions, we get a picture of how Jesus responds to people in the midst of struggling with reasons, belief and doubt. Maybe that’s where you’re at today. Maybe you’re stuck with how hard it seems to believe in Jesus despite any reasons you hear.

I know stories of people who have been flat out rejected from the church because of their doubts. BUT that’s *not* what Jesus does with Mary and Thomas. He warmly moves toward them. He engages and reassures them.

And the same thing happens to both Mary and Thomas

14 she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

Jesus was physically standing right in front of her. And she can't see Him. Until what?

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." Jesus call her by name. When Jesus calls your name, you can run but you cannot hide.

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

It's a lacking translation. Adding "oni" to the end of Rabbi personalizes it. It's not just teacher. It's My teacher. It's personalized.

27 Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Again, not "the God". but "My God." Thomas sees the wounds that were for him. Wounds that were for us. That we could be made right with God, forgiven, made God's family.

For Mary and Thomas, it's no longer just about external reasons to believe in Jesus, all the reasons they have come alive with personal belief. Because Jesus has become "theirs".

Your mind needs to be convinced. You need explanations and arguments for the truth of the Bible. They are necessary. But not sufficient. Because the goal is not to just believe the right things but for Jesus to brought into your life as a living presence that reorients your heart.

Just like he responds to Thomas and Mary in their doubt, Jesus responds to us in the same way. He moves towards us, calls us by name, and invites us to look at his wounds that can make us right with God.