

“Easter - Hope for the Skeptic”

Romans 10: 9



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The strange twist of Easter is that while we gather to worship and sing, there's a skeptic lurking inside each of us that struggles to truly believe. Even in our doubt, however, we long to see and recognize our one true Hope.

We can be honest, right? I mean most of you know me really well and know that I am very honest. I have been following Jesus now for 23 years and Faith is hard. I have seen Christ do incredible things in my life, yet at the same time, when it comes to issues of faith, without disrespect to anyone, I'm often the one who rides the short bus. Do any of you struggle with these same kinds of faith issues? I have been reading this verse in Romans 10:9, "If we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord..." That's the easy part. It's easy to say, "Well, I believe in this Jesus thing." But here's the part that

really troubled me: "And if we believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved."

This incredible event, the resurrection, took place, but the disciples, the dudes who hung out with Jesus for three years, had trouble recognizing the resurrected Lord. Did you notice that? Time and time again they were clouded in doubt, so they didn't recognize Jesus when he appeared to them. In the Greek, the original language in which the New Testament was written, it means that their eyes were locked. It's like you have no peripheral vision so you fail to recognize the spiritual realm around you.

Here's a question I ask myself and I don't think I'm alone on this issue. What is it that causes these faith restrictions in our lives? A while back I heard a man and his wife telling a story about some eyesight problems he was having; things were a bit blurry. He said suddenly one day he woke up and as he looked around it was as if his eyes changed overnight. Now the guy was in his 80's so I just assumed it was a part of the aging process. He continued that their son came over one afternoon and as this man was telling him about his eyes his son started to laugh. His son reached over, quickly yanked the glasses from the old man's head and exclaimed, "You're wearing mom's glasses!" Your vision is going to be blurred if you're wearing the wrong glasses. Early on in life we were given secular-view glasses. We were immersed in skepticism that teaches the sharp division between fact and faith, between that which is real and that which is religion. We learn every day to depend on those things that are fact.

What is fact compared to faith? Fact views everything through the lens of science. These are the glasses you and I have been handed. If you can see it with your physical eyes, if you can measure it or weigh it, or if you can see it and prove it in a laboratory of science, you can trust it. It is universal and applies to everyone.

On the other hand, faith is based on personal values and beliefs. It's abstract and you can't see it, measure it or weigh it. And because it appears to each of us in different ways at different times, it is personal and therefore doesn't affect everyone equally. When we sit here and ask why we struggle with faith, look at the glasses we see through. All of our economic systems, our political system and education systems are set up

as if God is not a factor. There are even churches out there where God is not a real factor, they just all feel good together. So, there is a huge cultural attempt to discount any supernatural event like the resurrection; because if the resurrection really happened it would confirm that Jesus was who he said he was - the risen Lord of the universe. It would confirm that Jesus was God, and that would make him absolute. We live in a world of relativity. Nobody can make the absolute claim that they are The Way, The Truth and The Life, and that no one comes to the Father but through them, unless the resurrection is true.

A secular worldview equates anything that is supernatural as being superstition and is always trying to look for some kind of rational explanation. Is it any wonder we struggle with faith? When I'm looking through these secular glasses, then the way of the cross is just totally incomprehensible. You can't get it. "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer?" I want you to notice that word suffer. We don't like that word. Secular culture doesn't understand suffering; it doesn't understand the cross. Living with a secular worldview is like living in the Magic Kingdom at Disney World. People work all year to go to the Magic Kingdom where everyday is a parade and every night is the 4th of July. When I live in the Magic Kingdom please don't talk to me about suffering. I want a happy life and please don't bother me with the details, I want it fast, cheap, convenient and right now. The journey of the cross is none of the above. Jesus told a wealthy community leader by the name of Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, unless you change your glasses, you are never going to see the activity of God. You are never going to see the kingdom of God."

Some folks come to church just at Easter and Christmas and this message might not be very appealing to you and that's ok but I really have to apologize because if you don't want to change your life then you could have slept in this morning. However, if you want to have the best life you could ever imagine and change your life in ways you could *never* imagine then listen up because I am talking to you. I am talking to those who seek the One who has defied the arrogance of rationality and risen from the dead. Here's what Jesus said, "If any of you aren't playing around and you really want to be my disciple, then here's what it takes: you have to deny yourself and take up the cross and follow me. For whoever wants to play the Magic Kingdom game, whoever saves their life for themselves, will eventually lose their life. But if you are willing to lose your life for my sake in the kingdom of God, you are going to find it."

I live with people who are changing lives and it is hard work. Faith is not the absence of doubt. We have all kinds of doubt. Faith is the commitment to act on Jesus' command, to act on Jesus' directive. When you make the commitment to get up and go where Jesus is going and do what Jesus is doing, you're in the presence of the resurrected Jesus. In the past 23 years, in spite of all of my doubt, uncertainties and questions, in spite of not knowing or fully understanding who Jesus was or is, or who God really was or is, or how this ghost who is Holy, Jesus and God lives in us, I made and continue to make the commitment to follow Jesus no matter what. I decided, in spite of what everyone else around me was doing, to follow Jesus wherever he was going, and to do whatever Jesus was doing for the rest of my life. Since that day I have cut off all means of retreat. When you set sail for the new world you explode the docks. When you arrive in the new world you burn the boats. I am convinced that most of you in this community of faith sitting in this room has made the commitment to leave the Magic Kingdom and follow Jesus in the kingdom of the cross.

That same decision presents itself to each of us now. Do you want to know Jesus? It's not going to happen by just sitting in church meetings. It's only going to happen when you bring your garbage, your junk, your doubts and your skepticism and you get up and commit yourself to go where Jesus is going and to do what Jesus is doing. I want us to bow our heads in prayer right now. If that is where you are, then let my words be your words.

If you prayed that prayer with me, realize that you can't do this by yourself. Did you notice in the story

that the disciples' eyes weren't opened and they didn't recognize Jesus until they brought Jesus into their house? When Jesus sat down and they invaded each other's personal space, they really saw Jesus. You have to become involved in a community of believers and we would love to have you be a part of this community but please find one somewhere; because you have to be involved and share personal space with other vital Christians to recognize Jesus. Jesus broke the bread with his followers, not through a television set, but sitting with them and he was recognized. Having faith and living in a community of faith is hard work and if all you ever do is come and sit in a group like this, you are never going to recognize Jesus because Jesus shows himself in the shared personal space of community – We cook some mean hotdogs, hamburgers and Cajun gumbo around here. Our kids run and play together. They spill drinks and blow things up together. We work together, deliver cars to airports, learn together, fix each others homes together, take food to one another, cry and laugh together and we recognize Jesus together.

Romans 10:9, "If we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord...And if we believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved." Today I want you to know it is ok to have questions. It is ok to not fully understand. But you have to believe Jesus was God. He died for you to live. And you have to believe in the resurrection and that he lives and reigns forever.

Look around you and look at your family here today. I look at you and I believe; I see what is going on in our lives and I believe; I look at these plans for a new community of faith and I believe; I look at my own family, my wife and my daughter and I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead so that I may be saved. What about you today?

Pastor: Christ is Risen!

Disciples: Christ is Risen, Indeed!

Pastor: Christ is Risen!

Disciples: Christ is Risen, Indeed!

AMEN