

Hard Knocks (1): Help My Unbelief

(John 20:24-29)

I. Introduction

- A. Hebrews gives us the classic working definition of faith (**Heb 11:1**, NET)
1. The problem with this definition is that it has two conflicting parts
 - a. **First**, faith is “*being sure*” and “*convinced*” (*thus it leads us to act*)
 - b. **Second**, must be in something we “*hope for*” and “*do not see*”
 - 1) To live by faith is to live your life according to what isn’t seen
 - 2) Paul tells us, “*Hope that is seen is no hope at all*” (**Rom 8:24**)
 2. The problem is, we live in world/culture where “*Seeing is believing*”
 - a. In one sense, we all come from Missouri... the “*Show Me State*”
 - b. Maybe the national motto should really be “*Show me the money!*”
- B. While faith must transcend our senses, our senses give reason to believe
1. The fact that we or anything exists at all demands there be a *Creator*
 - a. The design and complexity we see in universe points to a *Designer*
 - b. Our “*sense of oughtness*” or conscience points to ultimate morality
 2. But if there’re reasons to believe, there’s also reasons for us to doubt
 3. Life causes us to crash into the dissonance between faith and sight
 - a. We **believe** God is in control; we **see** a world out of control
 - b. We **believe** that God is love; we **see** a hostile, unloving world
 - c. We **believe** God is for weak; we **see** powerful run roughshod
 - d. We **believe** God cares for us; we **see** struggle, hardship & pain
- C. Our new series is called “*Hard Knocks: When Life Bumps into Faith*”
1. We learn about God in church, but we live in a world of hard knocks
 - a. Sometimes life refuses to follow the Sunday School script
 - b. Sometimes hard knocks of life conspire to overwhelm our faith
 - 1) Where will faith go when facing guilt, shame or inadequacy?
 - 2) Where do we go when we’re opposed, discouraged or hurting?
 2. We’ll talk about that, but we begin with the hard knock of doubt.

II. Help My Unbelief

A. Wait! You mean Christians sometimes entertain some doubt? *Yes!*

1. Baptized believers wrestle with nagging uncertainty? *Certainly!*

a. People who come to church might struggle with doubt? *Of course*

b. Can believers question God's goodness, power, love or existence?

2. Paul often talks about a weak faith as opposed to a strong faith

a. What is a weak faith? It's faith that is new, unschooled, uncertain

1) Why can we trust God despite the hard knocks we go through?

2) Often it's because we've seen God come through in the past

3) But what if we haven't? What if this hard knock is different?

b. But it is also saving faith! We're saved by faith, not by strong faith

c. The opposite of faith is NOT doubt; is certainty (**2 Cor 4:18, 5:7**)

1) Faith by its nature is focused in spiritual world that is unseen

2) Faith in the *spiritual* things must exist in *physical* amid doubt

3. Last week we saw the healing of a demon possessed boy (**Mark 9**)

a. The "rest of the story" (didn't look at) was that Jesus cast it out

1) Father's faith in Jesus wasn't exactly rock solid (**Mk 9:21-22**)

2) The exchange between them defines faith for us (**Mk 9:23-24**)

b. That is all at times, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief*"

c. Jesus heals this boy because of a weak and flawed faith of father

B. Who better to give testimony on faith-n-doubt than "*Doubting Thomas*"
(*Thomas is mentioned three times in the gospels... except for lists of apostles*)

1. **First**, there's the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from dead (**John 11**)

a. Word comes Lazarus is sick; Jesus waits 3 days to go to Bethany

b. Apostles don't like this plan; people there want to kill him (**11:8**)

1) Jesus says Lazarus is "*asleep*"; they must "*wake him*" (**11:11**)

2) They don't get it, so Jesus tells them that Lazarus has died

c. Thomas speaks up and no one would call him "doubting" (**11:16**)

d. Thomas is willing to follow Jesus to death if that is what he wants

2. **Second**, there is story of Jesus preparing the apostles for his death
 - a. This farewell beautiful speech tells them he will leave (**Jn 14:1-3**)
 - 1) They should know what he is talking about, but they don't
 - 2) Jesus assures them that, "*You know where I'm going*" (**14:4**)
 - b. He's where Thomas is ready for his second close-up (**John 14:5**)
 - 1) Thomas is saying, "*Say where you're going and we're there!*"
 - 2) Thomas has already said he is ready to follow Jesus to death!
 - c. Again, no one would accuse him here of being "*Doubting Thomas*"
3. **Third**, he refuses to believe report of resurrection (**John 20:24-25a**)
 - a. The others "*told him*" ("*kept telling him*") that they had seen Jesus
 - b. He wasn't buying it; he'd need to see it with own eyes (**20:25b**)
 - 1) Was he suspicious because of what Jesus said (**Matt 24:23**)
 - 2) Or was he by nature suspicious when it came to hard knocks?
 - 3) He watched Jesus die; that's a pretty hard knocks to overcome
4. So we him "*Doubting Thomas.*" He'd once been "*Faithful Thomas*"
 - a. A life of hard knocks will often make it more difficult to believe
 - b. Thomas stumbles, but recovers nicely (**Reading: John 20:26-28**)
 - 1) **Irony**: Great statement of faith in NT is "*Doubting Thomas*"
 - 2) And it comes right after the doubt from which we get his name
5. Not only CAN faith and doubt exist together— they must! (**SONG**)

III. What to Do If You Struggle with Doubts

- A. **First**, focus on the part of faith that matters—*story of the cross*
 1. What is causing your doubt might not be at the center of faith
 - a. Are you struggling with the age of the earth and evolution?
 - b. Do you struggle with how God can condemn the ignorant lost?
 - c. Do you struggle with why God allows bad things to happen?
 2. Those are all serious questions, but they are not THE question
 - a. The question, "*What does cross say of God's love/holiness?*"
 - b. Keep first things first; that gives you the space to struggle

B. **Second**, run toward other people of faith, not away from them

1. Don't hide doubts and struggles from your brothers and sisters
 - a. OK, maybe confessing your struggle in Bible class isn't best
 - b. Bible class in college where exchange student raised his hand
Is it OK for a Christian to participate in war? I ask because back home during our civil war, I chopped off a man's head with a machete
2. We want Denbigh to be a safe place for strugglers to safely struggle
 - a. Some of brothers and sisters may have struggled with same thing
 - b. The strong are to help bear with the failings or doubts of the weak

C. **Third**, accept and embrace your doubt with open, honest questions

1. You cannot maintain faith by blindly embracing the orthodox
 - a. You cannot be faithful by simply denying your doubts
 - b. You have to face them in some way and give them to God
2. There is Alice and White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*
 - a. Queen tells Alice that she is 101 years, 5 months and day old
 - 1) Alice can't believe that, "*one can't believe impossible things*"
 - 2) The Queen then gives us a definition of what is not faith—
'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'
 - b. Believing and pretending to believe are very different things

IV. Conclusion

A. Jesus uses Thomas as an object lesson to teach us about faith (**20:29**)

1. If we're going to believe in Jesus, our eyes will try to deceive us
2. We will be distracted by difficulties, tests, trials and hard knocks
 - a. Clouds of circumstance and condition may obscure truth from us
 - b. God is there above the clouds; and faith still saves us even if weak

B. The old hymn we sing as we close may mislead us just a little bit

1. I don't think that the point us that "we'll understand it all by and by"
2. Point is those times we're being tempted and tried... won't matter!