

Subject: "The Skepticism of Skepticism and the Logic of Faith" (John 20:24-29)

Faith and logic are considered to be two opposing terms. "Faith" with regard to religious belief is to accept a spiritual claim as true, even without proof. Faith recognizes that certain things in life can't be demonstrated, that certain details of life can't be verified. Logic is defined as "reasoning conducted or assessed according to strict principles of validity." Both faith and logic are deemed opposites, as if to say that there is no faith in logic and there is no logic in faith. There is faith in logic, because one must assume certain foundational truths to think correctly. If you don't believe that a penny is equal to 1 cent, then you'll wrongly infer that 1000 pennies is equal to \$50 instead of \$10; try getting away with that kind of erroneous thinking in the grocery store, or while paying your electric bill.

But what many often overlook is that, just as there is faith to logic, there is also logic to faith. There is a logic of faith that says that "I believe something to be true because of all the other things I know about such and such an event or thing." Do you have a best friend? How long have you been with that best friend? If you've had a friendship that now spans over a decade, then you understand what it means to hold to the logic of faith: you believe (see, you have faith) that this person is trustworthy because, logically, you've assessed the evidence of kind deeds, crying shoulders, and time and energy they've given you to share in your life over the last decade. Faith doesn't just say, "I believe you though I have no reason to"; rather, it says, "Based on what I know about you and I have verified to be true, I can make a positive assessment and have faith that it is accurate."

In our text today, John 20, we find the disciples talking with Thomas, the one disciple of the eleven (Judas excepted, of course) who was absent when Jesus came and manifested Himself to the disciples. After three days in the grave, Jesus had risen, and it is now that He appears to His

disciples. But Thomas was absent, according to verse 24 when it says that Thomas “was not with them when Jesus came.” Thomas didn’t see Jesus appear to them, nor did he see Jesus with his own eyes, so Thomas, called the Twin because he was a Twin (though the name of his twin is unknown), was full of doubt. The disciples said to Thomas in verse 25, “we have seen the Lord.”

Let’s imagine for a little while what that conversation must have been like:

Disciples: “Thomas, we’re so glad you’re here. Man, you’re never gonna believe this!”

Thomas: “What is it?”

Disciples: “Thomas, Jesus, our Lord, has risen from the dead. He’s alive! He’s ALIVE!”

Thomas: “What?”

Disciples: “Yes, He’s alive! He’s risen from the dead! It may seem crazy, but our eyes have actually seen the Lord! He let us see the nail scars in His hands and feet, and the piercing in His side. We were there when it happened. We don’t know how it’s happened that He is alive and back from the dead, but we can’t deny what we’ve seen. We really saw Him.”

At this point, can’t you just see the looks on their faces as they recount to Thomas all that they had seen? Can’t you see them in your mind looking at Thomas with excited eyes? They were likely hoping that Thomas would agree, that he would be as excited as they were, that he would start jumping up and down with them, the disciples hugging each other as they ponder that their Master, Teacher, and Lord who had died was now alive. They couldn’t explain how it happened, but they were just excited that He was alive and no longer dead.

The disciples who saw Jesus appear to them had logic: John 20:20 says that “He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” They didn’t believe from the outset that Jesus would die and rise, but when they saw His hands and feet and side, they couldn’t deny what they saw with their eyes. We use the expression “My eyes are playing tricks on me,” but there comes a point at which we can’t deny what we see. Not everything we see plays tricks on us.

The disciples were skeptics at first; they didn’t believe that Jesus had risen, but when He showed His hands and side, the text says in John 20:20 that “THEN the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord,” the word “then” revealing that it was only AFTER Jesus had shown them His physical marks of torture that they believed it was Him. Prior to this physical revelation, the disciples likely believed He was someone else, or something else such as an apparition, altogether.

But Thomas didn’t see Jesus. He didn’t have the eyesight observation the other disciples did. And because he didn’t see Jesus, he didn’t believe that Jesus had risen --- though the disciples, not believing He’d ever rise, told him so. Now think about this: why would the disciples have told Thomas a lie? Well, they wouldn’t have, but Thomas, the spotlight skeptic in today’s text, had his own idea. He wasn’t there to see it, so for him, the claim wasn’t true. Notice that he said in verse 25, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

The disciples in verse 20, excluding Thomas, needed only to see the Lord’s nail scars and pierced side. After seeing the Lord, they believed. Here, though, Thomas has a skepticism unlike any of the rest of the group: he not only desires to “see” the nail scars in Jesus’ hands, but he needed to actually touch Jesus’ nail-scarred hands and pierced side. Unless Thomas

could see AND touch Jesus, not just SEE Jesus, Thomas wouldn't believe. We always say that "seeing is believing," but for Thomas, "seeing and touching was believing."

Thomas was a skeptic. He already found the idea of Jesus' resurrection and bodily appearance to the disciples ridiculous and imaginary because Jesus had died. In his mind, who dies and rises again? No human had ever done that before, especially not their master. Sure, He could raise Lazarus from the dead, but Lazarus would die again; Jesus, though? Raised? To live forever? It was preposterous. It didn't fit with human observation. Human observation was reliable, and it told Thomas that humans die and are no more. Resurrection was, to use an anachronistic phrase that only we would be familiar with, "something you see in the movies." It didn't happen in real life. Sure, it was a hope, but it was an unrealistic one that didn't have the weight of human observation.

I can hear Thomas' reply to his fellow disciples: "Look, Jesus is dead. I know we're all hurting over it, but c'mon, no human rises from the dead after what Jesus went through. No one comes back from the dead. We all want it to be so, but no matter what you think you saw, I have to evaluate it for myself. And unless I see and touch Jesus, I'm not buying any of it."

Thomas had two problems here: first, he needed more than sight to verify that Jesus was alive. Perhaps the disciples had told him that Jesus appeared in the room, though the doors were locked "for fear of the Jews," we're told in John 20:19, so he believed Jesus to be an apparition. And maybe if we were in Thomas' shoes, we would've done the same thing. I'm not trying to knock Thomas, but what I'm saying is that Thomas's skepticism was unhealthy because not only was it beyond that of all the rest of the disciples, but also because it didn't match the past three years he'd spent with His Lord.

SKIP THIS SECTION: Take your parents, for example. They tell you that they got married and that they are husband and wife, and you see their rings on their fingers, the love in their eyes, and the home they've made together. And you believe it. But what about if they didn't get married and are only fooling you into believing they are? You'd say, "Well, I trust my parents. They're reliable and they care about me, and I don't think they'd lie to me." But, if you've never actually seen the marriage certificate, how do you know? And, even if you've seen the marriage certificate, marriage certificates can still be photoshopped and manipulated. Go online and google "fake degrees," and you'll see what I'm talking about.

SKIP THIS SECTION: Anyone can fool anybody with a piece of paper; paper doesn't mean much. The signatures on that piece of paper? They could've been forged, or the people who signed could've been paid under the table to say they witnessed a marriage that never happened. And yet, you'd believe it if you merely saw the piece of paper say "marriage certificate." It may not in fact be a real marriage certificate, and you may actually see the fake nature of it up-close, but you wouldn't assume it at first. And if your parents were credible when they said they were married, that would be enough to convince you they were married without any further investigation.

The disciples saw Jesus, and that was enough. Not for Thomas. For Thomas, he couldn't believe Jesus had risen because He promised He would; Jesus had to show Himself, and then, after showing Himself, Thomas had to feel His nail scars and His pierced side as further, irrefutable proof.

But I must say this here: there is a skepticism to skepticism. Atheism as a belief (and it is a belief, mind you) says that the starting point by which to examine all things is the position of a skeptic, to be skeptical: that is, one doubts everything, sets the bar high to near impossible for any evidence to pass it, and then takes what little "pickins" are left as evidence. But why

isn't this position criticized? Why is it that so many atheists are worse than Thomas in their skepticism? Why is it that one must be skeptical first, then believing last? Why not be believing first, or why not just believe altogether?

SKIP THIS SECTION: And yet, before we criticize Thomas, we have to stop and take a look at the sad history of the church that has involved people who are too quick to believe whatever they're told, without question. Remember when the church believed the earth was flat, until believing scientist Galileo Galilei concluded that the earth was round? And look at the most recent Me Too campaign: how many times has the church believed that those within its walls were lying about sexual assault, trusting the word of church elders over pew members who really were telling the truth about the elders? We've been too willing to ignore the problems at the expense of hurting members who have been violated and have yet to be believed. We've treated innocent victims as the Pharisees treated the woman caught in the act of adultery: so willing to "stone" the woman with false accusations and assaults but turn a blind eye to the men who are guilty and should be removed from their positions PRONTO.

SKIP THIS SECTION: What about Pastors and preachers in pulpits all across America? When I was a seminary student, I heard a lot of people say, "I'm a Calvinist because so and so is a Calvinist and I believe God picks people to be saved, not that everyone can be saved," or, "I believe that women are not made for leadership positions in the church because so and so said women aren't to lead." These same individuals read no one outside of their favorite theologians and wouldn't even consider a different opinion. They were too willing to believe what they wanted to believe, so when someone agrees with them in writing, they run off with only one perspective. It's called being "short-sighted," but many Christians are like that today.

The church has been guilty of believing a number of things without questioning them, but Thomas was the exact opposite side of the coin. He was skeptical of Jesus, the one that he'd walked with for three years, the one he'd eaten with and experienced life with for three years. He had seen enough to believe Jesus, but here he doesn't believe in His resurrection. He has to see Jesus to believe it all, otherwise, he'd remain a skeptic. Well, Jesus doesn't disappoint.

After eight days, we're told in John 20:26, we're told that Jesus appears again to the disciples: "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'" The disciples were again shut inside with the doors locked, we presume, and Jesus appears to them again. This time, though, the text says that "Thomas was with them." Thomas isn't out of place this time; he's with the disciples, perhaps hoping that he'll get to see Jesus for himself to decide if He's truly risen from the dead or not.

And this time, Jesus appears and directly addresses Thomas, Jesus being one who knows the thoughts of every man. In verse 27, He says to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." Remember, Thomas has said that he had to put his fingers into Jesus' nail scars and side in order to believe Jesus had risen, so the Lord tells him, "Go ahead and touch me, touch my hands and my side, if you must."

The Lord wanted him to experience and see the truth up-close, for himself. Thomas desired to verify Jesus' resurrection for himself, and the Lord meets Thomas' doubt with verification, proof that He was Jesus and He had risen. The Lord didn't have to do this, but He does. The same Lord that lets Thomas see the nail scars and the piercing in His side is the same Lord that confirmed for Gideon that he had been called of God by way of four signs in Judges 6: First, Gideon told the Angel of the Lord, God

Himself, to show that He was God by giving a sign; the Lord gave a sign to Gideon by touching the meat and the unleavened bread Gideon prepared. The rock consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Gideon asked for two more signs, one that the fleece would be wet and the ground dry, and then, that the fleece would be dry and the ground wet. The Lord gave Gideon the signs he requested.

You see, Gideon in the Old Testament is a lot like Thomas in the New Testament: he has doubts and the Lord gives signs to move him to faith. The Lord shows Thomas His nail scars and pierced side to move him to faith.

The Lord was gracious to confirm before Thomas that He had risen, but Thomas didn't need the signs; he had been with Jesus, was chosen by Jesus, had seen Jesus' miracles, heard His sermons about the kingdom of God, and had seen Jesus demonstrate His power over sickness, disease, illness, and even demons. The Gospel of Mark is full of Jesus' miracles involving casting out demons. The demons knew who Jesus was, trembled at the thought that He had come to earth to torment them before the end (for, yes, they know that they will be tormented), but Jesus would tell them to "shut up, and come out of him," the demons obeying His word.

After all of these miracles, as if these weren't enough, the Lord even raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11. At every turn, Jesus demonstrated His power over all of life, and even death, so it shouldn't have been a big surprise to Thomas that Jesus rose from the dead, but it was. It was a big surprise to Thomas because He had doubts that clouded what he knew about Jesus. Thomas could've slept in the tomb with Jesus' body for three days, and he would've still doubted.

Jesus tells Thomas, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing," after Thomas sees the nail scars and the side piercing and puts his hand in Jesus' side. Thomas had to see the physical marks to believe it to be true, but Jesus

gets Thomas to the end of his doubt to see the evidence and choose to believe what is staring him in the face. And after seeing the physical scars and the piercing in Jesus' side, Thomas cries out in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!" He realizes that it is Jesus, that Jesus is both his Lord and his God, that Jesus is God, that only God could rise again from the dead without the help of other humans. See, Lazarus rose again from the dead, but he needed Jesus to call him out of the tomb; with Jesus, He didn't need the voice of another to call Him forth; He came forth, aided only by God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Here in verse 28, we see Thomas come to the end of his doubt: at some point, when presented with the evidence, he had to choose to believe it or continue to doubt as he had earlier with the disciples, who wouldn't have told him a lie to get his hopes up. But, since he needed reassurance it was Jesus and that He had risen, the Lord provides it. And then, once confronted with the evidence, Thomas came to the end of his doubt and the beginning of his faith.

We must all get to the end of our doubt and the beginning of faith. After all, one can doubt anything. One can be skeptical of anything. This is why, in the same way that we criticize faith, we should be just as skeptical of skepticism: why should we approach the world, God, the mysteries of life, with an understanding that says, "If I can't see it, I can't believe it"? Why not approach the world with the perspective that, "If there's no irrefutable evidence to the contrary, then I am compelled to believe?"

We approach the world with critical eyes that doubt faith because faith seems too easy to us. For atheists, faith is seen as an intellectual cop-out: as Richard Dawkins has said in his book *The God Delusion*, one has faith when he or she is too lazy to work through the research and the effort. In other words, faith for Richard Dawkins is an easy "get out of work free card" that he believes Christians use to prevent themselves from having to ask themselves hard questions, or think through the complicated nature of the

resurrection and the existence of God. But what Richard Dawkins and atheists don't understand is that we don't use faith to get out of logic; rather, we use faith because there is a logic to faith, there is a logic of faith.

Faith's logic says that, though I can't see everything, I can make the best case of the evidence I'm presented with and live with it. Atheists think this is foolish nonsense, but is this not what scientists do everyday? Atheists have to admit that there's very little scientific evidence to conclude that life began on its own without a Creator because, well, none of us, including atheists, were there when life began on earth, when light dawned, when the Big Bang happened. Yes, there was a Big Bang: God said "Let there be light," and BAM --- light shined out of darkness. Scientists weren't there, so they have to take it by faith that life began without a Creator. In normal scientific experiments, they have to believe certain things are true in order to conduct experimentation. So, if they have to live by faith in the science laboratory, then why can't Christians live their lives by faith outside of it?

Atheism today, like Thomas, lives by the same idea, that one must see Jesus in order to believe He exists or that He rose from the dead. The unfortunate part for atheism, however, is that the evidence in favor of God's existence and Jesus' resurrection stares us in the face all the time.

First, let's tackle the dead body, or rather, the absence thereof, because atheists like to focus on this claim. Jesus died; this has been attested to by historians, and according to Scripture, even the Roman guards, Joseph of Arimathea (the Pharisee who gave Jesus his own tomb hewn out of a rock, we're told), Nicodemus, and the women who followed him. He was placed in a tomb, and yet, three days later, He appears to the disciples. John tells us that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, according to John 19:38-42, wrapped Jesus' body in a linen cloth and then laid Him in the tomb.

Matthew's Gospel says that Pilate had Roman soldiers to guard the tomb so that Jesus' body wouldn't be stolen; so then, how is it that Jesus' body "was stolen," as atheists claim? If the Roman guards were placed at the

tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing His body, how would the disciples have been strong enough to fend off the Roman soldiers? And what about the body? If there is no body, and He died and was placed in a tomb (and His body was in the tomb for three days), how did it turn up missing?

After 2,000 years, the body of Jesus still hasn't been found. Now, we've found the bodies of all sorts of historical figures; why then, have we not found the body of Jesus if the disciples stole His body? The apostles have been dead for over 1,000 years now, and we know where their bodies are; why have we yet to find Jesus' body, with all the technological advancements and archaeological achievements of our society? Is Jesus' body THAT famous, that someone would rather keep the body hidden and continue to propagate what atheists believe is a "myth," a hoax, a scam, rather than bring the body to light and put an end to the faith of millions of Christians?

And then, there is the testimony of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-6 that Jesus was seen by 512 witnesses (not counting Peter), some of which have died but "of whom the greater part remain to the present." Why would Paul have referred the Corinthians to these witnesses that were still alive if he didn't want them to check and confirm that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and appeared to them face to face? Could over 500 people be that hallucinatory that they would've believed an apparition was Jesus when they had seen Jesus and been around Jesus for three years?

This is when atheists usually chime in and say, "But no one has ever risen from the dead." Well, Lazarus died and came back, and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and called him forth. So, if the Lord can raise Lazarus, then resurrection is possible for humanity. Then, there are all the medical reports of patients dying, their heartbeats turning into one long line on the EKG machine, only for them to come back and suddenly start breathing as the doctor was about to call their death minute. How do we

explain all those who died on the table, but walked out of the hospital with breath in their bodies? If they died, then no resuscitation attempts would be successful -- and yet, they've been able to come back from the hands of death. How does one explain these medical testimonies?

Then, there's the argument that Jesus is just a man, that He was nothing more than a holy man or perhaps a prophet. Well, He does bear some similarity to the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus asked the disciples at one point, "Who do men say that I am?", to which the disciples replied that some considered Jesus to be one of the prophets, perhaps Elijah or even John the Baptist, or some other prophet resurrected from the dead. And yet, how many of the prophets ever said they were divine?

Which of the prophets of old ever said that they had been given life in their hands to do with it as they will? Which of the prophets ever said they would give eternal life to whomever they choose? None. So, Jesus isn't "just" one of the prophets because He made claims no prophet has ever made. Those claims consist of His divinity, that He is divine, that He is God, that He has the right to give and take life, that He laid down His life for the sins of the world, that He came from God and was returning to God, that He was the bread of life, that whoever eats and drinks His flesh (that is, believes in Him) would live forever.

There are many other claims atheists make, and many other responses they have, but, like Thomas, atheists have to see it to believe it (else they don't). And yet, to the atheist today, I say the following: If you have to see it to believe it, then it's not faith. Abraham was told that in his old age, he'd bear a son; the Scriptures say that Abraham believed he would have a son from his own loins, though his body was practically dead in terms of reproduction. He didn't believe WHEN Isaac was born, or AFTER Sarah became pregnant, but rather, BEFORE there was a sign of pregnancy or the birth of Isaac. So, if you're going to come to Jesus and be saved, you must believe that He exists. Faith is the condition for salvation, and only

those who believe will enter God's Heaven. If you have to see Jesus to believe in Jesus, then you don't believe in Him.

What God demands of us is faith, a belief in Him based on what we do know, our experiences, the world around us. He wants us to believe in Him because we see the sun shining, we feel the breeze on our face and hair, we feel the rain falling, we hear the thunder rolling, we hear the rooster crowing and the birds chirping each morning. He wants us to believe in Him because we see the sun, moon, and stars, and we know that someone had to make these natural phenomena; they didn't just create themselves. He wants us to believe in Him because our human intellect is unlike anything else in creation, and we know that it had to come from someone other than a human or an animal (it had to come from an Intelligent Being of greater quality than ourselves).

We have enough proof around us: the birds, flowers, wind, sun, trees, moon, stars, clouds, thunder and lightning, rain, grass, and crops. Our natural world, with all its flora and fauna, attests to the fact that someone greater, someone bigger than you and I made the world and all we see. And that same Person made you and me, and all of humanity is accountable to Him because He is humanity's Creator. The atheist, like the Christian or the religious person, is created by the same Lord, even if the atheist never acknowledges Him.

Finally, Jesus addresses Thomas as he has now seen the nail scars and pierced side and believes: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." These words to Thomas in John 20:29 indicate that Jesus places greater priority on those who believe but have not seen Jesus appear, those who have not seen His nail scars and pierced side. While Thomas did get to see these things, and the disciples saw them, too, we live in a world today where we've never laid eyes on Jesus in our midst, never looked upon Him as we would look upon another person. We weren't there, over 2000 years

ago, when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples together when the doors of the building or room were shut. And yet, while we were not there, Jesus has us in mind when He blesses those who have not seen Him, yet believe Him. Here, our Lord puts great blessing upon faith over sight.

This is the crux of the problem for atheists. They want to play the role of Thomas in our culture and demand that we show very strict and rigid evidence that will convince them of Jesus' resurrection and deity, but Jesus says that it's easy to believe something when the evidence is staring you in the face. Life with the Lord is about trust, and trust must be in place even when some things are a mystery, hazy, or just not clear. Atheists who don't believe in Jesus but need all the facts in place will never believe in Jesus. Not even the scientific fossil record has all the fossils in place (there are considerable gaps), and yet atheists still believe in the tale spun by evolution. If they can believe evolution with its fossil gaps, then why not believe in Jesus, though there is an evidential gap between the time of Thomas and the disciples and our own?

Atheists don't mind affirming a faith to logic, but they struggle with affirming that there's a logic to faith. It's the logic to faith, however, that carries with it the weight of eternal life. When the rich man lifted up his eyes in Hell, he requested that Abraham send back a prophet to his brothers to warn them about Hell fire; Abraham told him that, if his brothers didn't believe the Law and the Prophets, then they wouldn't believe a prophet. The same can be said for atheists: if the missing body, the sealing of the tomb by the Roman guards, the observations of Jesus' body being wrapped in burial linens, the nail scars in His hands and feet, His pierced side, the disciples' grief over the death of their Master, Teacher, and Thomas' own confession after being trapped in skepticism aren't enough to move them to faith, then nothing will --- not even a second bodily return to earth by Jesus for their benefit.

