

## How Can Doubt Be Overcome?

*“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48)*

### The Context of John 4:48

In the fourth chapter of John we read of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. The woman was impressed with a number of things which the Lord had said, but perhaps more so with his answer concerning worship. John 4:24 states, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Her concept of the Messiah was no doubt imperfect, but it was still superior to the militaristic character the Jews ascribed to Him. She accepted what Jesus said, but only the Prophet could give a truly authoritative answer. Perhaps her unspoken questions would be, “Are you that Prophet?” Although she may have been half-convinced about His identity, Jesus now removed all her uncertainty that He was, indeed, the One for whom she had been looking.

John 4:28-30: “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”

Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” The impact upon this woman was profound. To this woman, Jesus was no longer simply a Jew (v.9) or even a prophet (v.19); He must be the Messiah! She relates an exaggerated account of what had occurred and asks, “Can this be the Christ?” with such enthusiasm that the people decide to investigate for themselves.

Skipping on to verse 40, it would seem difficult to conceive a more unlikely place for a Jewish rabbi to find receptive ears, but Jesus' treatment of the woman and her testimony had broken down the wall of prejudice. Upon their insistence, Jesus favored them with a two day ministry resulting in one of the richest harvests of His entire preaching career. And that was exactly what Jesus was talking to His disciples about in verses 31-39.

Many others, in addition to those who believed the woman, accepted Jesus' teaching. Some had believed, based on what the woman said, but their faith was confirmed and strengthened by hearing Jesus speak. So, without performing so much as one miracle, they were convinced that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah – the Savior of the world. What a contrast to the response in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, during His Galilean ministry, when He performed so many miracles, but saw such little repentance (Matthew 11:20-24).

We need to keep in mind the great response Jesus received in Samaria. After two days with the Samaritans in Sychar, Jesus continued his trip to Galilee, where He will not find the same response. The Galileans initially welcomed Him, but most rejected Him later when He refused to conform to their image of a Messiah (John 6:66). His rejection in Nazareth was almost immediate; it took a little longer for the other Galileans, but, in fact, it was ultimately the attitude of the entire nation (1:11). Jesus was not surprised by such a reaction.

The Galileans were happy to follow Jesus for the physical benefits He could bestow, but their fever was short-lived when they began to see the true nature of the Messianic kingdom. This was the basis upon which they later rejected Him.

In John 4:46, Jesus went to Cana when He first returned to Galilee. The “nobleman” was, without doubt, a Jew and one of the king’s officers – an official who was attached to the court of Herod Antipas. The news of Jesus’ miracles at the Passover had probably spread all over Galilee, which led the nobleman to seek Him out and beg him with an urgency that only a frightened father can feel, to come to Capernaum and heal his terminally-ill son. Here is where our text comes in. Remember His encounter in Samaria, where people were willing to believe on Him simply because of His words, without one miracle being done? Then among His own people, He finds those who would not even believe the miracles. We read in verse 48, “Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

Jesus spoke to the nobleman, but the plural pronoun “ye” indicates He was addressing the whole crowd. Signs were miracles which had meaning. Wonders, on the other hand, were things which defy explanation – supernatural acts at which men could only wonder. The miracles of the New Testament were never just wonders; they were the signs, or credentials, that the one who performed them acted by the authority and approval of God.

When Jesus said, “...ye will not believe” it translates into the idea that there was no hope in them believing, unless He performed signs and wonders. Jesus wanted men to believe in Him because His character and words furnished all the evidence they needed (20:29), but the people insisted that their faith be reinforced with miracles. Even then, their faith was so shallow, that some refused to believe, even though they beheld His mighty works (15:24). Jesus had just come from Sychar, where those upon whom the Jews looked with such contempt, had believed on no more credentials than the words He spoke, but such faith was a rarity in Israel.

The nobleman did not seek to defend himself, nor did he want to discuss the nature of faith. He did want his son to be healed and knew that Jesus was the only hope. He begged Jesus to come to Capernaum before it was too late and provide a cure. But Jesus simply told the man to go home because his son lived. And in the nobleman’s quick and willing response, he showed the quality of his faith.

The man was obviously delayed on his way home. It was the following day when the servants met him with the news that his son was well. After enquiring at what time the boy “got better,” the slaves replied, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” That was the precise time when Jesus had told him that his son lived. This confirmation only deepened the man’s faith, and when his household learned what had happened, they also believed in Jesus as One who was sent from God. The man’s doubt (at least that which Jesus mentioned in verse 48) was overcome when He trusted Jesus and did what Jesus told him to do.

### **WHY ARE PEOPLE LIVING WITH DOUBT?**

When the apostle Paul was on a ship bound for Rome, “Euroclydon” hits them hard, which is what I understand every mariner does not want to get caught in. They are the kind of winds that have

sent many a ship to the bottom of the sea. After a number of days fighting the elements, they threw off all the lading and tackling, and even some of the food, after they got through eating a little, it then makes a marvelous statement beginning in Acts 27:20-25. Luke records his own eyewitness account of what takes place.

“And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

I like that! And that is exactly the idea of trusting God. I mean, when you believe, really believe, that what God said, it's going to be just exactly what He said it would be. And you just don't entertain any doubt that it's going to be any other wise! That, my friends, is how you overcome doubt – FAITH.

We're wrestling around today in the body of Christ with a great dichotomy. We have people who are going to church, reading their Bibles and confessing their belief in the Lord, and surely to some extent they do, going out into the world and living like worldly people. They are not living like Christians who operate on trust and faith. They are filled with doubt, scared to death that the world's going to be blown to pieces with a nuclear bomb, and they can't seem to have any peace in life or joy. Nothing is going right, everything is bad, and these people die early in life plagued with all kinds of doubt. And yet you ask them, “Is Christ on the throne? Is He ruling all nations for the church to accomplish her worldwide mission of evangelism?” Their answer is “Yes, oh yes.” But they just don't act like it! And that is exactly the dichotomy! We have people who believe one thing they say, and act differently another! Yes, these people are plagued with doubt!

One of the reasons why young people in the body of Christ are not happy, filled with the desire to obey the Lord, and have the power to say “no” to self and “yes” to God on a continual basis is because they don't trust Him! They, too, are filled with doubt. And it may be that they have pretty good teachers from us older people who don't do a whole lot better sometimes.

### HOW CAN WE OVERCOME DOUBT?

There is one answer to the question, “How can we overcome doubt?” and that answer is – FAITH! We will look at a definition, or description of faith, and then in our next section we will point out three things about faith that will help us overcome doubt.

**WHAT IS FAITH?** Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as, Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. What is faith? It's so evident that something is over there that, as far as you are concerned, you have no doubt about it. Why? God is there and Christ is there and alive, and I'm going there. And those who doubt that are not paying attention to the

overwhelming evidences. The evidence we have for Christ is overwhelming. The evidence we have that God will do what He says He will, is in the historically confirmed documents, the Bible!

Now, what's faith? It isn't what you feel. Faith is what you're convinced is over there, whether you feel like it is or not. If we wait for a feeling to operate on what I know I ought to do, then I'm probably waiting on what may be some direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Maybe I'm waiting for Him to push me, or I'm waiting for a feeling, and I'll interpret that as special guidance of the Spirit saying, "Now's the time!" Don't wait for that, it isn't how the Holy Spirit works today. God doesn't talk to us like that today. He speaks to us through His word (Hebrews 1:1,2).

When we look at the subject of faith, we're seeing something that is dynamite as it works to move men to their obedience to the Lord. Show me a person who doesn't obey the Lord, and I'll show you a person who doesn't believe in the Lord. Paul said that in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Show me a person who's obeying the Lord and I'll show you a person that believes. Show me a person who's not obeying the Lord, and I'll show you a person who is not a believer! Ask a person, "Do you believe Jesus is Lord?" And their answer might be "Of course I do." Then ask, "Do you believe that the Bible is the word of God?" Again their answer, "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He tells you the truth in His word?" "Why sure I do." "Do you believe that the Lord will give you the more abundant life like He said He would do?" "Of course I do." Then ask them, "Why are you living in this world full of doubts and fears? Why are you living like a worldly person?" Because, you don't believe He told you the truth. You don't believe He will give you the more abundant life. That's why you're trying to find it in all the things money can buy. You don't trust God, whom you say you believe in! That's all there is to it. If you really believed, you would obey Him!

### **THREE THINGS ABOUT FAITH THAT WILL HELP US OVERCOME DOUBT.**

**FAITH MUST HAVE THE RIGHT OBJECT.** Our object is not always the right object. And when we act, it must be on the basis of faith. Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Faith must be there, but faith must have the right object. And sometimes the reason we are filled with doubts and fears, not believing God is going to save us like He promised, is because the object of our faith is ourselves, or our works, or how good we are. When that is the object of our faith, we are just not certain we have done enough, and if we can't get enough done then we're afraid we're going to lose out on heaven. This discourages us and fills us with doubts, we begin to think that we can't hold out, so we might as well go out into the world and enjoy it while we can. Have you ever known anyone like that?

The object of our faith is not ourselves, not our works, not our obedience. The object of our faith and trust is Jesus. The object of our faith is Christ's work at Calvary. The object of our faith is Jesus, as our SIN OFFERING (Hebrews 2:9). The object of our faith is Jesus, as our PROPITIATION (Romans 3:24). The object of our faith is Jesus, as our HIGH PRIEST (Hebrews 2:17). The object of our faith is Jesus, as our ADVOCATE (1 John 2:1). If you come to the last day, before the judgment bar of God and you don't have Jesus as your plea, you don't have a

prayer! That's why you can't be saved by any other way than Jesus. He is the only thing that God provided for us to be saved. Now, who is the object of your faith? Now what is, but who is? People who trust in themselves, or their works, are not ever certain they've done enough. They are filled with doubts and fears. They are question marks about their eternal salvation. They are miserable, and they are constantly wondering whether or not, when Jesus comes, they are going to heaven. They have bad dreams. They don't understand the joy of Christianity. Who do you trust in? What's the object of your faith? Is it Christ, or is it yourself? If your trust is in yourself, then your life will be filled with doubts, always wondering if you have done enough. On the other hand, if your trust is in Jesus and His finished work at Calvary, then your life will be filled with hope, joy and peace.

**FAITH MUST OBEY.** That is obvious, for James cries out by the Spirit of God, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). Remember Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Now, who diligently seeks the Lord with a once-a-week church service? Hebrews, the eleventh chapter, proves that one cannot be saved by a faith without seeking. The faith that seeks is the faith that saves! Then the inspired writer gives example after example of the faith these Christians needed when this inspired man wrote that epistle. Hebrews 11:4, Abel is an example of acceptable faith. Hebrews 11:7, Noah is an example of a faith that moved and prepared what God commanded. Abraham shows us the kind of faith that offers what God says to offer, and the way He says to offer. Joshua and the Israelites are an example of a faith that trusts God to do what He says He will do, when we do what He commands us to do. Why do you think that is recorded? Romans 15:4 answers, it's to give us comfort, to make us understand the word of God, and to realize that, the kind of faith that saves, not just obeys, but it trusts God to do what He said He would. Faith obeys and trusts, and that removes doubts!

**FAITH MUST HAVE AN INTENT.** Is it possible that a man could hear that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died so that our sins might be forgiven, and still be lost? Yes! It takes a faith whose obedience is an expression of our confidence and trust that God will do what He said He would. Trust that God will save us through the shed blood of His Son. It has to do with intent! Suppose a man does what God asks him to do (he goes through the motions), but he doesn't have any intention of trusting the Lord to save him. Will the Lord save him? No! He won't save them anymore than if those men marched around the walls of Jericho all the time God commanded them to, but expressed absolutely no confidence that He would do what He said He would (maybe they were forced to march), the walls would still be standing.

Faith must have an intent, to obey God, trusting Him to do what He said He would! Therefore, every act of obedience, from repentance and baptism, at which point we're ushered into saving grace, to the last act of obedience upon the face of the earth of the faithful covenant child of God, there must be the expression of our trust in Jesus to do what He said He would do!

What about the intent concerning the command to be baptized? Baptism is an expression of our confidence that Jesus will do what He said He would, when we do what He commands us to do. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16). Do you believe that when you are baptized He will give you the remission

of your sins? Someone says, “Well, no. I’m already saved. I was saved the other day when I prayed. But I want to be baptized because Jesus asked me to be.” Well, you won’t receive the forgiveness of your sins by praying, and you won’t receive the forgiveness of your sins now because you are not trusting Jesus to do what He said He would do. Just like the Ephesians in Acts 19, they had to be baptized again, this time they trusted in Jesus to save them. You have to be baptized in order to express your trust in Jesus to: save you (Mark 16:16); add you to His church (Acts 2:47); to put you into His body (1 Corinthians 12:12); to put Him on (Galatians 3:27); cut off the sins of the flesh (Colossians 2:12); have you saved (1 Peter 3:21). Now, if you believe that intellectually, because that is what the Bible says, then, will you trust Him to do it by obedience of faith. You can free yourself from all doubts by trusting Jesus to do what He says He will do.

### CONCLUSION

Paul stood before frightened, doubting men and said, “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25). And we reach out to you today with the same words – Be of good cheer, it’s going to be exactly what God says it’s going to be, and you don’t need to doubt Him for one minute. Maybe your doubts have caused you to live that terrible human dichotomy we mentioned earlier, where you say you believe in God, but you just don’t trust Him. Renounce that. Turn to Him, put your trust in Him, knowing He will do exactly what He said He would do, and free yourself from a doubtful and worried mind. Get in tune with God who created you, and wants to re-create you, save you, and take you home.

The key to overcoming your doubts and fears is to trust in Jesus. Let Him save you today!