

The misfortune of unbelief – 03/04/2016

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:24-25)

Beloved in the Lord,

Faith brings with it many blessings. The reverse is also true. Unbelief is full of misfortune. In our reading today we read about Thomas, one of the Twelve disciples. We are not told why he was not there on Easter evening when Jesus appeared to the others in the Upper Room, but, for whatever reason, he wasn't there. The Upper Room had become a place of refuge for the disciples. It was where they had celebrated the Passover with Jesus, and where Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper. They met there behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jews.

We can imagine what it was like. Thomas turns up and the disciples are no longer sad, they are ecstatic. They are laughing, smiling, full of excitement. Thomas, Thomas, we saw Him. He is alive. He was here. He even ate with us. It's true, He is alive.

Thomas couldn't believe it. It can't be. It seems like a fairy tale to him. He said: *"Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (Jn.20:25)*

The excitement and witness of the others was not enough for Thomas. He wanted to see for himself. This meant that he had to live in his misery, while the others were happy. No matter how much he wanted to believe them, he couldn't shake the doubts that kept harassing him. He saw Jesus crucified. He saw the spear go into His side and saw the blood and water run out. He saw that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He was dead and that was that. He didn't know why the disciples were saying that He is alive. Maybe they had seen a ghost. He needed concrete evidence, concrete proof.

Praise God for His mercy and love. Eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper Room. This time Thomas was there. The door was locked, but suddenly Jesus appeared and said *"Peace be with You."* Then Jesus looked lovingly at Thomas and said to him:

*"Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:27-29)*

There are a number of things I would like to point out. The first one is that in His grace and love, Jesus comes to Thomas. He knew what Thomas had said, and He knew his doubts, and so Jesus appeared to him. Jesus addressed his doubts directly. Jesus knew what Thomas had

said, and so He said to him: ***“Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”***

This tells us that God knows our every doubt and fear and He comes to us to meet us where we are. But we must notice also that Jesus gently chides Thomas and tells him that he would have had a greater blessing if he had believed without seeing. Thomas could have felt that peace and joy he now felt eight days earlier, had he believed the others. You see unbelief always robs us of joy and peace.

That makes me wonder, how much of God’s goodness and blessing do we miss out on simply because of our lack of faith and trust in Him? How much of a burden do we bear everyday because of our unbelief? How much stress do we endure because of unbelief?

By definition faith is: ***“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. “ (Hebrews 11:1)***

In order to experience blessing we must have faith. We cannot see Jesus, yet we believe in Him, and we are blessed as a result. Our faith is not some pie in the sky, fairy tale, hoping for something good. No it is based solely on the solid Truth of the Word of Almighty God. We believe because the Bible says so.

If and when we experience doubts, we need to read the Bible. We will soon find that all throughout, God is faithful and true. God always does what He promises without fail. Hebrews chapter 11 is often called the hall of faith. There we have an overview of some of the people God blessed because of their faith. We read about people like: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. We read about them:

“³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection;” (Hebrews 11:33-35)

God’s Word – The Bible is packed full of stories that testify to the blessings of faith and the misfortune of unbelief. We need to be reading God’s Word regularly, we need to meditate upon it and fill our hearts and mind with it. We need to see that what God has done for others in the past, He will do for us. He doesn’t change.

In order for us to have strong faith, and to prevent us from the misfortune of unbelief, what must we do? The answer is in the next chapter of Hebrews, chapter 12.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

The author to the letter to the Hebrews compares life with an endurance race. In order to finish well, we must keep the faith, not lose heart. Our faith wanes when we lose our focus on Jesus. That is why it is of vital importance that we are connected closely to Him. That is why we must read His Word every day. We need to spend time in prayer every day,

Remember that we face an enemy who never gives up. Satan works night and day trying to rob us of our blessing, by causing us to doubt God and His Word. We need to resist and stand strong. We need to use the Sword of the Spirit, which is The Word of God. When doubts assail us, we need to drive them away with God's Word. When we are tempted to sin, we need to fight the temptation with God's Word.

If you have an intelligent parrot at home, it will repeat sayings that it regularly hears. It listens to what you say and then mimics it. The more it hears the same saying the more it is etched in its mind and the more likely it is to repeat it.

We are a bit like a parrot. We tend to repeat things we hear. If we are filling our mind and heart with worldly things that we receive from the TV, radio, internet and magazines then our conversation will be soulish, worldly and our faith will be weak, because worldly attitudes are not Godly.

However, if we immerse ourselves in God's Word, then our faith grows and we are blessed and are a blessing to others, because we are Godly.

Our Lord is alive. He desires to live in and through us. Where He dwells, there is great blessing. It is described beautifully in the first half of Psalm 1:

"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

Nor stand in the path of sinners,

Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

² But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

And in His law he meditates day and night.

³ He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season

And its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1:1-3)

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.