

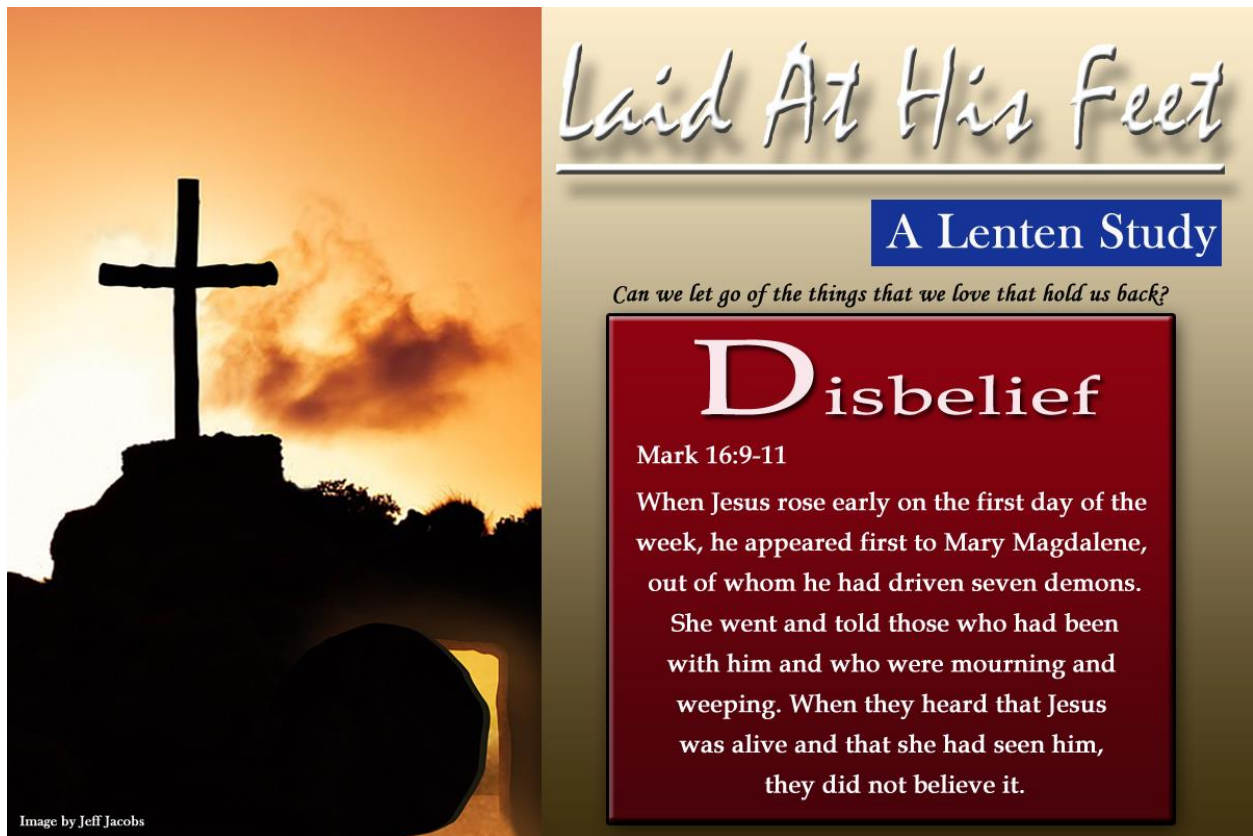
April 17, 2022 (Easter) – Disbelief

Mark 16:9-11

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10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.

11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.



Laid At His Feet

A Lenten Study

Can we let go of the things that we love that hold us back?

Disbelief

Mark 16:9-11

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Image by Jeff Jacobs

I Can't Believe

Elevation Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1qBg9jtwb4>

FACING DISBELIEF

I want to believe
That the air is there.
I reach out to grasp a breeze
But my hand returns...
Empty.
The wind whispers in my ear
And speaks my name,
But I cannot taste or see it
The air itself...
Says nothing.
The smells of life
On flightless wings
Waft through nothing
And engage my senses
I am resolute when I say
The air's not there
I cannot,
Will not.
Shall not...
Believe.
To do so contradicts
My modest mind.
And yet,
The air is there
Amidst my disbelief
And not dependent
On my repentance
Or even my existence.

I was not there
To see Him
Hanging In the air

Jesus bled and died for me.
I was not there
To help him bare
The pain of Calvary
I did not see
The blood He shed
I did not hear His gasping moans
Or watch him cringe
When they placed
A crown of thorns
Upon His head,
A sham as they sought
To end His breath.
I was not when He gasped His last
"It is finished."
Nor was I there
To see temple veil
Torn asunder
As the thunder cried
And my savior died.
I did not see him
Placed within the tomb
Nor watch them roll
The stone in place
Sealed with the wax
Of my own disgrace.
Nor was I there
On Easter morn
When the stone rolled back.
My Lord reborn.
I was not there.

I was not there
When the angel spoke

**“He is not here.
He is risen,
Freed from the prison
Of death!”
I was not there
When He met His friends
Holes in hands
His flesh torn side
Giving proof of what
Had been His life,
Like a knife splitting
Unbelief from truth.
I was not there
On the road
To listen and learn
As He returned
To teach
I was not there.
I simply was not there.**

**And yet,
Just like the air
There is within me
The opportunity
To face my disbelief
And reconcile
My mortal mind
To eternal truths.
God loves me
Christ died for me
The Spirit leads me
Just as I am.
Christ is there
Amidst my disbelief**

**He does not live
Because I believe
I believe
Because He lives.**

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Spoken from the cross in reference to the people who had nailed his hands and feet in place, after a tortuous journey through the streets of Jerusalem. He had been spat on, humiliated, mocked, and beaten. His blood pooled beneath the cross as they positioned Him between two thieves. Even after all that had been done to Him, His concern was for the souls of those who were carrying out the orders they had been given, even as they continued to mock Him. “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen one.”

And just when one might see that things could not get any worse, Jesus, the Son of Man/Son of God realizes that He is alone as his followers hide in terror, afraid for their lives. He was deserted by the very people He was sent to save. I have held the hand of too many people as they passed, and I pray that someone is there to hold mine when I pass. But Jesus was alone as His life blood drained from His body. He turned to the one solid connection in His earthly life, His father. Only to realize that even his Father, His source of all that He was, had also turned away and hid His eyes, unable to bare the sight as His son took upon Him the sins of the entire world.

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

No one has ever been more alone in their last moments than Jesus Christ as He gave up His last breath and cried,

“It is finished.”

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

The work of His ministry on earth was done as He completed this last task, the ultimate gift of grace and love to a world unaware of what He had accomplished with His dying breath. A world that would too quickly forget those last moments as they took Him from the cross and placed Him in a borrowed tomb. They then stood by and watched as a stone was rolled in place and sealed to prevent the body from being stolen. A tomb that was guarded by soldiers to prevent someone from removing the body and claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Even as the tomb was sealed, what few followers had gone to the gravesite, left Jesus there in total acceptance of what had passed. Just like Jesus had said,

“It is finished.”

Nothing more to be said. It’s all over. Finished. Done. Let’s find a place to hide before they come for us, too. If He was the Messiah, the Son of God, like He said, He certainly had an odd way of showing it. This should never have happened. Come on! We saw Him heal the sick! We saw Him cure Leprosy! We saw Him feed 5000+ men, women, and children with a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish. He raised Lazarus from the dead! We saw it! We believed! We believed Him when He talked about God, heaven, and a new covenant. He washed our feet! Do you hear me? He washed our feet. There has never been and will never be anyone like Him. We believed!!!

“It is finished.”

We believed... until we didn't. He died. He didn't even lift a finger to prevent it. He didn't stop them when they spat on Him, beat Him, humiliated Him, and nailed Him to a criminal's cross. If He truly was who He said He was, then why? How could this happen? If He couldn't save Himself, then why didn't God save Him? Where was that army of angels when He needed them most? I guess, it just wasn't true. Let's hide because if He couldn't protect Himself, He certainly can't protect us.

Disbelief. What an odd day to face this element of core baggage attached to our soul. Easter Sunday. The most hallowed day in the life of a Christian and the most significant day in the life of the church. A day filled with pageantry, celebration, steeped in mystery and wonder. A day when believers cry out "He is risen! He is risen, indeed!" A day that Christians celebrate Christ's victory over death to bring us into a new covenantal relationship with the Creator of the universe. A day that has developed into a mashup of Biblical truths and obscure traditions where the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God gets intertwined with the Easter Bunny, candy, baby chicks, decorated eggs, and Easter egg hunts. A day that many non-Christians find confusing, but a lot of fun. Kind of like Christmas.

The Christian community has not done a very good job at tying the facts and the traditions together, and most atheists would argue that there are no facts at all. On that, they would be wrong. There are plenty of secular records and accounts that Jesus of Nazareth lived, that He was a Jew, and that He was

executed by the Roman Government at the behest of the Jewish leaders. There are many religions and historical documents that refer to the life of Jesus.

However, when it comes to the resurrection, we don't have as much support. So many things are questioned. There just isn't a vast amount of documentation regarding the resurrection. Even with artifacts associated with Easter, like the Shroud of Turin, the authenticity is hotly debated. So yes, while the life of Jesus Christ as a man is not really disputed, and easy to accept, the belief in Jesus as the Son of God takes faith to accept. Often it boils down to whether one sets out to disprove the Holy Nature of Christ and the existence of God the Father and God the Spirit, or to prove to oneself that such is not only possible but engageable.

I know that it sounds so worldly when we talk that way, but we have to remember that the world is populated by worldly people and in order to reach them, we have to be able to speak their language. If we do not understand why someone would choose not to believe in God or Jesus Christ, we will find it most difficult to explain to them who God is and the relevance of Jesus Christ to both ourselves and the entire human race. "I feel the presence of God," just doesn't cut it with most non-believers. They think in tangibles, not unknowns. It is difficult for them to believe in something that cannot be quantified by their own reality.

As hard as it is for me to say, since the church has done such a poor job of explaining both the religious and secular nature of Easter, most unbelievers fail to see any point in Easter at all. But isn't it fun to hide eggs for the kids as long

as we don't bring up the subject of the cross, Jesus, redemption, or the Resurrection. I find the joy being sucked right out of me when I see the Easter Bunny given more credibility than Jesus Christ. But, heh, you can hold a brightly colored plastic egg filled with candy in your hand, while you can't even see Jesus. It brings me to tears as I seek solace in this day for the life, death, and resurrection of my Lord and still have to contend with the secular nature of this Holy Day. I have watched as the idea of Easter has devolved into something almost unrecognizable. As Christians, we cannot let that happen.

I want to be very clear when I say this. I am not against the Easter Bunny or Easter egg hunts. I just think we would all benefit from being a lot clearer concerning what the celebration is all about. Just as so many people leave Christ out of Christmas, they also leave Christ out of Easter. We are who we are because He is who He is.

The problem we face as Christians is that it is relatively easy to allow the secular nature of Easter to become a buffer between us and our own self-reflection. I've told you before, self-reflection is hard. It takes guts and a prolonged desire to reach inside our soul and take a good look at what is going on, find and remove those things that are gumming up the works. Just like God the Father had to look away from His Son as Jesus took the sins of the world into his spirit, we don't want to look at the quagmire that resides in our soul. It's hard. It is the hardest thing for any Christian to do.

We can see the challenge for what it is and choose to just let sleeping dogs lie, allow ourselves the luxury of continuing to believe things that have never

been substantiated. Things we are told from the pulpit or in Sunday School. Values that hold little commonality with the Bible or our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Or we can take on the challenge and dig deep, searching to see if what we believe is based on our true-life experience, our relationship with Christ, and our faith in the Creation of all that is by our precious God. And if something does not hold up under that scrutiny, we need to take a scalpel to it and remove it from the core of our souls like a cancer.

One of those objects to explore is our disbelief. Every last one of us has had to have a face-to-face with this monster, this virus in our soul. Every last one of us struggles with disbelief or questions our own belief system at different times of our life. It's normal. It's expected. It often occurs when we face hardships. When someone close to us passes. When we lose our job. When our car dies. When our finances tumble out of control. When we get sick or disabled. If our foundational belief system is built on the sand of humanity's limited understanding, then what solace we find will not last for long. Our faith must be built on the rock of Christ Jesus in order for it to stand against the harsh times we face.

Not everything spoken by a preacher is fact. Not everything spoken by a Sunday School teacher is truth. If what is being said or taught does not point to God, our Creator and to His Son, Jesus Christ, then we seriously need to consider removing it from our core. Those things sow seeds of disbelief in our hearts and will turn into weeds if we allow them to continue to dig their roots into

our faith. I challenge you in this way, if you ever hear me point to me, rather than Jesus, if I give credit to myself rather than God, I fully expect for you to speak up and remind me of who is really in charge. My goal is to serve Jesus by serving you.

There is nothing wrong with disbelief as long as we do not allow it to overcome our belief. Disbelief is very much what allows us to look at our core through a microscope and change what is needed or remove contaminants.

But how do we know we need to use that microscope. It's really quite simple. If I say, "He is risen," and we reply, "He is risen indeed!" Are we saying it with conviction? Do we truly believe that on that first Easter morn, the ground shook and Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that the stone was rolled away, that the guards ran in fear, that Mary met Him and talked with Him, that the women saw an angel who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is risen, just as He said."

When Jesus appeared to Thomas, he said,

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Do we count ourselves among those? Are we blessed because we have not seen and still believe? Have we allowed our personal relationship with Jesus to become dominant in our core enough that when we doubt, it is quickly washed away out of our system? Have we taken our disbelief and laid it at the foot of the cross never to pick it up again?

9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.

10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.

11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Mark 16:9-11

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Put a gun to my head, I am I am not ashamed. Just as I believe that Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High God, died on a cross two thousand years ago, to remove my sins and give me a right relationship with my Creator, I also believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that He rose again on the third day, defeating death, bringing glory to the Father, and enabling me to shine in His service. To be His hands and feet in this world.

“He is risen. He is risen, indeed!”

I love you all

AMEN

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