

Freedom Series

7. Freedom from Doubt

Up until July we were looking at a series of themes on the subject of Spiritual Freedom. In the Bible people are described as being slaves - being in bonds. Tied up and unable to understand and appreciate the ways of God. When we became Christians, God freed us from those things and enabled us by His Holy Spirit to understand the truths of God and freed us to serve and worship Him. But so easily can we slip back into our own chains and find ourselves even coming to the point of doubting that we believe.

It doesn't help that we are bombarded by words from those who would pour cold water upon our faith and say that we are stupid.

It's intellectual suicide!

When you die you rot!

Yuri Gagarin - I have been in the heavens and not seen God

You can't believe a whole load of superstitious nonsense

It's a fairy story

It gets even worse when people who sound as though they are knowledgeable start to speak these things. Then we see TV programs that mock and rubbish us. Maybe as we considered in the evening last week, there are people who maybe make our life difficult because we believe - maybe its a partner, a parent, a son or daughter or a close friend or work colleague. And we start to ask ourselves - is what we believed really true. Can it be trusted? Is what we believed really true?

Yet for those of us who are Christians, it isn't a story made up by somebody or an irrational belief. That's what the world would have us believe. Yet the Christian faith is not based on a story - a piece of fiction - but on real people that lived in this world and that had a real experience of a living God. And if things really did happen, then we should be able to recognise facts. We've got to hold on to that.

But sometimes we Christians doubt don't we? Maybe we come to a low point in our lives. We become sick, or something awful happens in our lives. And we say "Where is God in this?" And we feel far from Him.

But let's be in no doubt this morning that Jesus is FACT. Yes fact. Jesus was a real man, He lived a real life and had a real death. Secular historians of the time affirm that and also how His disciples claimed that he rose again from the dead.

Years ago they said that the Bible was rubbish because it suggested that the universe started at some point in the past. Then they discovered that it did. They said that the story of Adam and Eve was nonsense then came DNA studies that show that the human race all descend from a single male and single female.

I was watching a programme last Sunday evening called "Did Jesus die" As usual the writers of the program were trying to pour cold water on the gospel story by suggesting how modern scholars were doubting the Bible, particularly the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection. Actually, none of the information in it was new - in fact it was the same hackneyed old objections to the truth of the death and resurrection stories that have been floating around for a considerable length of time and most have long since been discredited.

And have you ever noticed how selective they are in what scriptures they choose to make their point. One of the things that they stated was that Jesus was not on the cross long enough to have died as most victims hung for days before dying. Therefore they doubted that Jesus had died - just swooned. Hadn't they read John's gospel? The soldiers found that He was dead, but to make sure one stabbed Him with His spear. Blood and water gushed out. Roman soldiers were good at killing people and making sure they were dead.

In fact, all secular contemporary accounts from Jewish and Roman sources in the first century state that Jesus was crucified and died.

But the incident that makes the whole of the Christian faith stand and falls is the resurrection. That's what proves Christianity is true. As Paul says

If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it-if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ - sheer fabrications if there's no resurrection (15-17 - The Message)

Strong stuff. But true. When we realise there is a risen Christ, we understand that everything else is true. Professor Josh McDowell who has written and lectured on this subject for about the last 30 years has said this of the resurrection has said this about it:

After more than 700 hours of studying this subject, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted on the minds of human beings - or it is the most remarkable fact of history.

And it's critical to the Christian faith as we just read from Paul. The claim is huge. Three days after Jesus' death, His tomb was found empty and His disciples began to claim that He had risen from the dead and met them many times (over 500 on one occasion) before ascending into heaven. It was on

this basis that Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and remains to this day the world's dominant religion.

The resurrection is a foundation claim of the Christian faith - without it the whole thing crumbles. What's interesting, is that the disciples persistently made this claim within the lifetimes of men and women who could refute the claim.

In fact, no-one at that time denied that Jesus tomb was empty. The disciples said - He is risen, the Jews said that the disciples stole the body.

The funny thing was, that grave robbing of a tomb that had been sealed with Ceasar's seal was a capital offence. Yet despite the disciples being in custody several times for different charges and their claiming the resurrection on almost all the occasions, they were never charged with that offence.

Those same disciple were the eyewitness sources of all four gospels - the written accounts - yet there are no contemporary historic refutations of them. Most Jewish and Roman commentaries of the time simply repeat the claims without comment.

Most objections to the resurrection came in later centuries - long after the event. Now I don't have time this morning to deal with all the evidences of the resurrection. Maybe one day I'll do a repeat of the presentation I did on Easter Sunday one day. What I'll say is this, as the centuries have gone on, rather than disprove the truth of the Bible or the truth of the resurrection, it only concludes that the Bible is true.

REAL PROOF: THE DISCIPLES' LIVES

But studying this kind of stuff has other implications. It isn't just a case of trying to prove that something that is claimed as historic actually happened. Because if Jesus really did die and He really did rise again then He is who He said He was - the Eternal Son of God.

His influence was life changing. In Holiday Club we studied Paul or Saul of Tarsus as he was known. We read how he described himself. The least of the apostles because he persecuted the church.

What changed him from being a persecutor to Christ - an encounter with the risen Christ.

What turned a group of Galilean fishermen into bold apostles. They certainly wouldn't have gone to their deaths for a lie.

What makes countless men and women still trust in a living Christ? An encounter with Him. There's a history of transformed lives as people realise that Jesus died to bring forgiveness for their sins, and a relationship with the living God.

And this living Christ gives His Spirit to make that difference in our lives. I don't just testify of a living risen Jesus Christ from trying to prove history - but because I've proved Him in my life and in the works of transformation and power I've seen in my life and other people's lives.

Maybe you've been a Christian for a long time and sometimes as you look at your life and see all the disappointments and difficulties, words like these seem a pipe dream.

But this morning, that risen Lord Jesus Christ wants to bring afresh His transforming power and presence into your life. He wants to bring back that joy of knowing Him. The joy of life, the joy of assurance of eternal life and the joy of an eternal hope.

Maybe you've never trusted Jesus. Perhaps this is new to you. perhaps you've heard it all before. I'm not asking you to believe fairy tales this morning. History tells us that all this is no fairy tale. It's true. And if it's true, then there is a question mark on your life this morning. That same Jesus who died and rose again is the same Jesus who wants to bring you that forgiveness from sins - which separate you from God - and bring you into God's family and give you a new perspective on life and eternity. But the choice is yours. "We don't forget you have the choice". That choice is yours and available right now.

You can trust God right now by faith through prayer. Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. If you have never trusted Christ, you can do so right now.

The prayer I prayed is: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and trust You as my Saviour. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. Thank You that I can trust You."

