BIG PROBLEMS? BIGGER GOD!
Part 15: The Problem of Doubt

INTRO— I will be brutally honest—I have doubts. I am seminary trained with an earned doctorate. Since 1974, I have given myself to reading, studying, thinking and teaching about God—and I still have doubts. My conclusion? As long as you have faith you will have doubts. Lee Strobel . . .

One great biblical example of turning honest doubt into deeper faith is one of Christ's closest followers and disciple, THOMAS, perhaps history's most famous doubter—and rightly understood, sadly mislabeled if look at the totality of his life (unlike Peter who denied and Judas who betrayed). Only John provides information on Thomas, but only mentioned 3 times: *First* Jn. 11:6-16, where v.16 is great affirmation of faith. Thomas the courageous! *Next*, Jn. 14:1-5, when he is a curious seeker, not having it all figured out. *Lastly*, Jn. 20:19-29 (Read it). What a confession. Thomas honestly doubted and in time his faith was deepened.

TRUTHS ABOUT DOUBT:

1. *Doubt is both human and normal.* Only humans ask "Why?" Only humans seek to find understanding and meaning. We ask questions and when answers do not come we get doubtful, especially so, in the aftermath of great pain. I believe this is normal and human. Many doubters in Bible: Sarah, David, spies, Solomon, Gideon, Jeremiah, disciples, John the Baptist to name a few. Famous Christians also doubted: Graham, Luther, and Mother Teresa all wrestled. Most honest Christians do. Jude 22
2. *Doubt is different from unbelief.* Scripture harshly judges unbelief (Heb. 3:12). Some contrasts: Doubt asks honest questions; unbelief refuses to hear answers. Doubt is a respected friend of faith; unbelief is faith's enemy. Doubt creates an opportunity for deeper faith; unbelief is opposite of faith. Doubts are hard miles on a good journey; unbelief refuses to go any further. I am an honest doubter (like Thomas), not an unbeliever. Doubt is a ? Unbelief is an !
3. *Doubt impacted by the silence of God*. Three doubt buckets: Why doesn't God give us more proof? Why doesn't God give us a better product? Why does God allow suffering and evil? You'd think God would promote Himself better.
4. *Doubt coexists with faith.* As long as we have faith, we will also have doubts. Thomas did—look at Bethany incident (Jn. 11:16) and Upper Room encounter (Jn. 14:4-5). Why do we feel there are two groups? Is it not reasonable that all who have faith also have some doubt?

ILLUS— ordering fast food . . . Medical tests . . . Getting married . . .

QUOTE— Michael Novak writes…

5. *Doubt often grows in isolation (Jn. 20:24).* Where was Thomas? Discouraged, doubtful, alone. Darkness and aloneness feed our doubts. Questions come and grow larger, more ominous, and more hopeless. Remember John the Baptist (Matt. 11:2). Did Thomas' doubts grow because he isolated himself? My deepest doubts come when I'm alone. All need faith community, especially doubters. If doubt is allowed to remain alone, it can degrade into skepticism, cynicism, and rebellion.
6. *Doubt seeks evidence (v.25).* Honest doubt never turns away from facts, wherever they lead. Look at Thomas. His doubt caused him to relentlessly pursue truth. When his fellow disciples told him what they'd experienced, he recited every doubter's creed, "I'll believe it when I see!" He wanted to personally experience the faith and evidence. "Why is it that we fail to confront our doubts?" Deep down we're afraid doubt might win!
7. *Doubt doesn't cause God to abandon us (vv. 26-27).* How did Jesus handle Thomas' doubts? Was He offended? Did He scold or rebuke—No, He came to him. Jesus met Thomas at the very point of his questions and doubts. God never abandons honest doubt. He comes to us.
8. *Doubt can deepen faith (vv. 27-28)*. How can doubt deepen our faith?
   - *makes faith possible*—Is it possible that doubt can be one of life's unwelcome gifts, that in the right circumstance actually produces faith? In some measure my faith has been more intellectual and academic. Now, in addition it is deeper through painful, personal experience.
   - *keeps faith humble*—My doubts constantly remind me of our nagging detail we can forget—I am not God!
   - *keeps faith growing*—If we're honest and keep searching through our doubts, it is likely faith will be strengthened. Doubt areas in our lives are some of the greatest potential growth areas in our lives.

QUOTE— F. Beuchner…

Look at Thomas' great declaration (v. 28). Surely, not the words of a doubter!

CONC— John 20 was a defining moment in Thomas' faith journey. For Peter, it came shortly after this at a fish fry. For me, it was February 13, 2008. Will honesty of my doubts—even answers to some or all—dissipate my pain and grief? Probably not. Will I still ask "Why"? Probably so. BUT, what God has supplied and is supplying is enough. God is good. In the end with both doubt and faith present in my life, I want to reach out with Thomas to a resurrected Savior & Lord and declare, "My Lord and my God!" Let's say that together.