

“What Does It Take to Believe?” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 2 April 27, 2025

- I. **John 20:28-29** – ²⁸Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
- II. **Are you a skeptic?**
 - a. In today’s world, it seems more important than ever that we use critical thinking to determine whether something is true or not.
 - i. Technology and artificial intelligence can now create or manipulate videos, copy voices, and even have conversations with us just like a normal human being.
 - ii. We all receive emails that claim we were charged for something; however, it’s just a scammer fishing for our information.
 - iii. Even events we never questioned are now part of conspiracy theories... like NASA’s trips to the moon.
 - b. It is a good idea to step back and question whatever information comes your way... and the rise of social media and electronic communication makes it even more important.
 - i. Perhaps you’ve seen someone repost something on Facebook or elsewhere that has a long list of facts and figures about our government, a controversial person, or some issue.
 1. All the percentages, facts, and figures may have little or no truth, but because someone took the time to make it look official, we assume it’s legitimate and send it to our friends.
 2. The difficulty is fact checking what you decide to pass along, which means you have a healthy skepticism – not just blind faith in everything you read or see.
 - c. So, in a world of misleading information, deception, conspiracy theories, and partial truths... why should we believe God and the Bible, or believe in Jesus Christ?
 - i. Thomas struggled to believe Jesus rose from the dead... how can we be so confident in Jesus’ death and resurrection without having the benefit of seeing it firsthand?
 - d. When given the historical evidence, the eyewitness accounts, and the Old Testament prophecies that came true... even critical thinkers and skeptics are persuaded to believe that the Bible and account of Jesus is true.
- III. **Historical evidence backs up the truth found in the Scriptures.**
 - a. When we went on a trip through the Holy Land, our guide used his Bible as the main resource to show us around.
 - i. The first drive we took was around 80 miles from the airport of Tel Aviv to the Sea of Galilee... and all along the way our guide would point out the places the Bible records.

- ii. Our guide would point in one direction and tell us that Peter healed a man in that city... or that is the road to the coast where Paul's trial got him sent to Rome... or that is Megiddo, an ancient place where the Judges, Deborah and Barak fought against Sisera's army (Judges 5:19), and King Solomon fortified it (1 Kings 9:15), and King Josiah died (2 Kings 23:29) by the hand of Pharaoh of Egypt... or that is Mount Carmel where Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal... or there are the cities of Nazareth... or Cana... or Capernaum.
- iii. All along the way, the Bible is the guide to these ancient cities and places, and when archeologists go to work, they continue to find evidence backing up the claims in the Scriptures.
- b. Walking through the ruins of these places becomes a walk through the Bible, and no other ancient book contains so much historical accuracy.
 - i. Seeing these places firsthand should remove much of the skepticism that the Bible is inaccurate... or is just made up of fairytales.
- c. So, not only is the Bible historically accurate, it is also a massive witness testimony.

IV. **The Gospels and New Testament are eyewitness testimony.**

- a. Beginning with the first disciples, Jesus called a group of people who would walk along with Him through His earthly journey and be His witnesses.
- b. I often ask, "How important is eyewitness testimony?"
 - i. Eyewitnesses can identify suspects... testify in court... and ultimately sway a jury to convict or acquit a defendant.
 - ii. In some cases, eyewitness testimony can be key to a death penalty.
- c. I've used this example before, but Charles Colson was convicted for his role in the Watergate scandal as an assistant to President Richard Nixon... and he became a Christian and great defender of the faith after taking the time to really study the Scriptures.
 - i. When people challenged him by saying the accounts of Jesus rising from the dead could have been a hoax... he always told the story of Watergate.
 - ii. Watergate involved a conspiracy of the closest aides to the president of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president.
 - 1. However, one of them, John Dean, turned state's evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, "to save his own skin"—
 - 2. It took only two weeks for one guy to save his own skin... and the entire cover up fell apart as everyone else tried to avoid going to prison.
 - 3. Now, the fact is that those men were only facing embarrassment, or perhaps prison...nobody's life was at stake.
 - iii. But what about the disciples?

1. Twelve simple men from simple backgrounds weren't just facing some embarrassment or jailtime... they faced beatings, stonings, torture, and horrible executions.
 2. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead.
 3. Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned... That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities?
 4. None did.... Men will give their lives for something they believe to be true; they will never give their lives for something they know to be false.¹
- d. The New Testament is all about the eyewitness testimony and firsthand experiences with the resurrected Lord, and more than 500 people saw Jesus for themselves. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)
 - e. Not only is the Bible historically accurate and backed up by eyewitnesses who gave their lives for its truth... it is also has many prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus.

V. **The Bible is full of prophecies that came true.**

- a. As we read in Isaiah on Good Friday, the "Suffering Servant" was a prophecy about Jesus that came true.
- b. We see the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Micah 5:2 as the Savior would be born in Bethlehem.
- c. In fact, there are over 300 prophecies from the Psalms and Prophets in the Old Testament about Jesus that were recorded as being fulfilled in the Gospels.
- d. All along the way, God was using the writers of the Old Testament to point to Jesus as the Messiah who would come into the world as a baby in Bethlehem, die for our sins, and rise again in glory to save us all.

VI. **The final part of the equation is beyond the evidence... it's about God.**

- a. You see, all this powerful evidence strengthens and fortifies a simple gift... our faith.
- b. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord came to us because He loved us and chose us first... and He blessed us with the gift of faith that is a simple trust in Him.
 - i. I know that many people seek proof – but God provides it with history, eyewitnesses, and fulfilled prophecy – and the capacity to believe it all by grace through faith.
- c. The truth is that Jesus really did come to into the world as a little baby, grow up to fulfill prophecies all over the Holy Land, and ultimately die for our sins and rise from the dead to give us forgiveness.
- d. The evidence for the truth of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is extensive... through historical facts, eyewitness testimonies, and fulfilled

prophecies... but the greatest gift we receive is not the proof, but the faith to believe in Him... a gift bestowed upon us by God's grace, so that we may confidently declare with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" without having seen. Amen

¹ Source: Charles Colson, *BreakPoint Online Commentaries* (4-29-02)