

“Do You Believe?”

By Bill Marianes¹

I understand death. I’ve seen it. I buried a goldfish that my daughter really loved but which died notwithstanding her great love. I have buried a father, two in-laws, grandparents and best friends, all of whom I have loved very much. Death is all around us and it’s touched all of us. It’s about all the evening news likes to talk about. I get death. And I know it will one day get me.

What I have trouble with sometimes is resurrection. I haven’t seen it. I don’t actually know anyone who came back from the dead. My daughter’s goldfish is still buried in our back yard. The physical remnants of loved-ones are scattered in cemeteries all over this country and in Greece. So is resurrection real? Am I the only person who sometimes has doubts? I got to wondering, so I decided to do some research. That’s what lawyers do.

In his outstanding book, America Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us, Harvard researcher Robert Putman presents the amazing fact that with respect to Americans: “Eighty percent are absolutely sure that there is a God.” And yet he reports that only “sixty percent are absolutely sure that there is a heaven, although fewer (52%) have this level of certainty about life after death” Which led to his conclusion that: “the vast majority of Americans also believe in God, but Americans are less sure about life beyond the grave.”

Well maybe it is just a modern American thing. Perhaps it is that secular humanist, anti-Christian epidemic that seems to be overtaking our “One nation under God.” So I decided to research the best “believers” I could find who lived in a different time and place. Christ’s Apostles.

Among the most faithful men of all times who gave up everything to follow our Lord and ultimately died executing his final instructions to “...make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19). For several years, almost every day of their lives, they walked with Christ, they ate with Christ, they were directly taught by Christ, and they saw miracle after miracle He performed. Indeed, right before the triumphant entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem (on the day we now celebrate as Palm Sunday), they saw what had to be the ultimate proof of his divinity and the promise of resurrection.

Four days after the death of a dear friend of our Lord (according to John 11:5), Christ brings Lazarus back from the dead and clearly says: “***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.***” (John 11:25) It can’t get any clearer than that, can it? Christ makes resurrection definitive, undeniable, and the Disciples (and others) see it with their own eyes. No witness can possibly have any more doubts about resurrection, right? Well, not so fast. Just a few days later, these very saintly and devout Disciples actually did doubt.

I couldn’t believe it. They saw with their own eyes, and yet they doubted. Could that be true? Now I am no theologian or Biblical scholar, but it seemed to this simple country lawyer that again, research was called for. I encourage you to seek proper guidance from a Theologian or scholar. But I just had to see for myself. So I looked at what the Apostles told us in their very own words in the Gospels they wrote. And I found it easily. They didn’t attempt to hide their lack of faith or disbelief in an effort to make themselves somehow sound better or more courageous. They were honest and just told us the truth. They doubted.

These holiest of holy men repeatedly heard our Lord describe resurrection, and they saw him demonstrate it with his friend Lazarus (and others). Yet once they witnessed Christ's death on the cross, that perhaps devilish doubt overcame them. Not once, or just one of them. But they all confessed it to us, their descendants.

In Mark 16:11-13 we learn, first hand, what happened when Christ appeared to his faithful after his death and resurrection: "*And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, **they did not believe.***" (emphasis added) *After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, **but they did not believe them either.***" (emphasis added)

As Matthew describes the Lord's appearance in giving the Disciples their Great Commission, he acknowledges that when the 11 disciples saw our Lord: "...*they worshiped Him; **but some doubted.***" (Matthew 28:17) (emphasis added). And the Apostle Luke also acknowledges that they did not believe in Luke 24:11.

What in the world is going on? It appears that there was an epidemic of disbelief from those closest to our Lord. Those who saw Him, and heard Him, and professed to believe in Him. Yet all the eye witnesses, and the most faithful, publicly confess to us that they had their doubts about resurrection. I don't know about you, but this made me feel a little better when I sometimes have my doubts about things. It's like they knew we might sometimes need to be encouraged when we suffer our own occasional disbelief.

And the synonym for doubt, Thomas, had his disbelief forever documented in John 20:24-29. To this day, we call one who lacks belief a "doubting Thomas." The Apostle John tells us that Thomas would confess his belief only after our Lord let him reach out and touch the unthinkable injuries Christ suffered during His crucifixion. And in that precious and amazing moment, it's as if Christ speaks to all of us in this day and time: "*Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.'*" (John 20:29)

There it is my brothers and sisters. A clear path to receiving our Lord's blessings. The simple act of belief. Belief in His resurrection. Not because we are like the over 500 hundred live witnesses who saw a resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 15:5-8), including the Apostle Peter (called Cephas in Holy Scripture), the other Apostles, James, and St. Paul who chronicles Christ's appearance after his death on the cross. We receive the promise that resurrection will be our fate, if only we have faith.

And Hebrews 11:1 teaches us what faith is. "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" So we come full circle. I haven't seen a human resurrection. Neither probably have you. And yet we are given a test of faith. What can we use to pass that test? How about a promise from our Lord?

We hear such a promise in one of the many times our Lord promised us life after death. In John 13:36 when Simon Peter asks Christ: "*Lord, where are you going?*" *Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow Me afterward.'*"

So why do we have doubts? Why do at least 48% of us believe there is NOTHING after this life? And what can we do to learn to have faith? Now this is an important question each of us has to answer for ourselves. It's perhaps one of the most critical questions to which we must seek our own

answers. But if we answer that “we believe,” our lives must change. No longer can we merely focus on the 50, 60, 70, 80 years we will have on this earth. We have to focus on a much larger objective and a longer period. All of eternity.

Perhaps at this point you’re wondering if I will share a secret formula or hidden pathway to belief. I will not. I can’t. That’s for you to prayerfully seek and find for yourself. However, I confess to you, that I do believe. I know resurrection to be the truth. How, you ask? How can you know and believe that which you have not seen?

I have never seen subatomic particles, but I believe they exist. So I started to make a list of things I believe in but have never seen. My list included sound, earthquakes, Mount Everest, energy, dreams, dinosaurs, emotions, the past, electrons, the Holy Spirit, the bottom of the ocean, that ALL people have good in them, cancer cells, gut feelings, my ability to lose the 20 pounds I have been losing for the last 20 years, very unsuccessfully. OK, I admit, that last one may not actually exist given my significant and well-chronicled inadequacies.

I believe that if you prayerfully reflect on this you will discover many things in which you believe that you have not seen. These are all proofs that you have faith. Anyone who has ever flown in an airplane or driven a car understands faith. You trust that the other person in control of these multi-ton, fuel-filled projectiles will either stay out of your way or land it, and you, safely.

But I also realized I have seen so many miracles in my own life that should help me with this faith journey. I have seen the miracle of the births of my two amazing daughters. I have seen the miracle of a sunset (the death of a day), followed by the resurrection of the sunrise on the next day. I have seen people sacrifice significantly and willingly without seeking a return on this earth. Can anything else explain our parents or those who “serve and protect” us every day. What about the love that we have all experienced, perhaps even when we didn’t always deserve it.

How about you? What miracles have you seen in your life?

Blind people do not physically see as we who have been given the blessing of sight do. And yet they are full of beliefs and will tell you that they believe that they see things sometimes more clearly than we sighted people do. In some respects, blindness can be both a physical phenomenon and a spiritual one. It can also be a self-inflicted wound as it was for the Apostles and those who saw our Lord suffer and did not believe, that is, until they saw him after his resurrection.

So do you believe in a resurrected Lord? Can you accept the word of holy eyewitnesses: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James and hundreds of others who saw and believed and shared their seeing and believing so that we who inherited these stories might also believe. If you do believe and call yourself a Christian, what are you doing with your life to demonstrate that belief? How are you living today, so that you can prepare yourself for the eternal life we have all been promised.

When you discover WHY you are here on this earth, and what your Lord has called you to do, you prove you believe and have faith. When you figure out how to take the many gifts he has given you and deploy them for His greater glory and to help prepare you for theosis and salvation, you prove you believe and have faith. When you decide that every day you have left on this earth you will actually live your stewardship calling, you prove you believe and have faith. And when you believe and have faith, you actually become a steward of our Lord’s gifts to you.

It is to that purpose that I have decided to dedicate the remainder of my life as a stewardship calling evangelist. What's your purpose? What's your why? What's your stewardship calling? And most importantly, what are you doing, every day, to prepare a "good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ?"

I pray that you believe and have faith and become a living icon of Christ's presence every day. May God bless you on your journey as you discover and live your stewardship calling. My prayer for you is that you "SOTPAETJ" (stay on The Path and enjoy the journey).

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