

Oak Mountain Informer

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Dealing With Doubt

Do you ever wonder if the things you claim to believe are true? Are there ever any doubts in your mind about the things we read in the Bible? Do you ever think that you might be wrong about these things? Do you ever think, "Maybe the critics are right. Maybe these are just stories and legends that are not to be taken literally." It certainly would not be unusual if some of us did have these thoughts. After all, the Bible contains stories about some rather exceptional events.

Are we to believe that a man was actually swallowed by a fish and stayed alive for three days until the fish spit him out on dry land? According to the Bible that is what happened to Jonah.

Are we to believe that God warned a man named Noah of a coming flood that would destroy the world and that Noah was told by God to take two of every kind of animal into a boat so that they might be saved? Isn't the flood story in the Bible just the Hebrew version of the flood stories we find in many ancient cultures? If we believe the Bible, we don't believe that this is simply an ancient legend. We believe it to be fact.

Are we to believe that people were created by God, that a man was created out of dust and a woman from his rib? Are we to believe that moral guilt came upon them because they ate some fruit? These things don't fit modern thinking, but they are related as fact in the Bible

These are only a few of the stories in the Bible that seem incredible to many people. It may be that at times we ourselves wonder if they really happened or not. What are we to think of ourselves when we have these kinds of questions? Are we weak? Have we denied the faith? Are we less than we should be?

"Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

Certainly we want to reach a point where no doubts of any kind will ever arise in our minds. We want to develop that "conviction of things hoped for" that the New Testament speaks of (Hebrews 11:1). But in the meantime, perhaps we will be encouraged to know that we are not the first to have these questions occasionally.

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent some of his disciples to ask about Jesus. Now, John had been pointing people to Christ for some time. He was the voice crying in the wilderness preparing the people for the coming Messiah. He called Jesus "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He also said of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). But on this occasion, when he was in prison, separated from Christ and no doubt wondering what his fate would be, he asked, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" (Matthew 11:1-3).

Perhaps "doubt" is too strong a word to describe what John was thinking, but he certainly had questions about Jesus at this point. Just as we sometimes have questions about the things we believe. There is one important difference between us and John, however.

When some people have questions about their faith they do nothing about it. They allow those questions to linger without attempting to resolve them. In fact, it seems that some take pride in raising questions that have no apparent answer. They like to be seen as intellectuals who probe the deep mysteries of God.

Notice, however, that this was not the approach

of John. When he had questions, he sought a definite answer. He didn't spend his time speculating about the nature of the Christ. He didn't debate with his disciples about what the Christ might be like. He sent some of his disciples to find the answer. Jesus gave him convincing evidence that He was indeed the Expected One, and that John need not look for another.

If we would do as John did when we have questions about our faith, then those questions would pose only momentary problems for us. That is, if, when we have questions about what we believe, we will search for answers until we find them, then our faith will not be harmed. In fact, we may come away from our search with stronger faith than we had in the beginning. Honest questions, more often than not, can be solved by honest searching.

In the final analysis, disciples of Jesus believe in

what Jesus did and taught. We don't believe because we can always prove to our own satisfaction and the satisfaction of every skeptic that what the Bible says is true. That would be walking by sight. We *believe* it because we believe Jesus.

Jesus said that Jonah was in the belly of the fish (Matthew 12:40). *Jesus* said that there was a flood in Noah's day (Matthew 24:37-39). *Jesus* said that God created the first man and woman in the beginning (Matthew 19:4-5). To deny that these things actually occurred is to deny the words of Jesus. If we are disciples of His, how can we deny what He taught?

No one would say that it is wrong to raise questions about what the Bible teaches. But we must not allow those questions to develop into unbelief. Do what John did. Build your confidence, increase your faith by finding answers. And at the end of the day, trust Jesus and walk by faith in Him.

Getting The Cart Before The Horse

When we say that someone has the cart before the horse we mean that he has things out of order. For example, when a child wants to eat his dessert first, he has the cart before the horse. This seems to occur in religious matters rather frequently these days.

It is not unusual to hear preaching which appeals to people to become Christians because of the blessings they will receive in Christ. "Come to Christ," the preacher says, "and you will have the peace that passes understanding." Or, "If you accept Christ, He will break your addiction." Or, "Christ is the answer to your marital and financial difficulties."

There is an element of truth in these statements. God does bless His people with peace (Philippians 4:6-7). He will give us strength to overcome the sin in our lives (Matthew 6:13). Good Christians make good husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33). And, if Christ doesn't altogether solve our financial woes, He gives us a new perspective from which to view material things (Hebrews 13:5-6).

But to appeal to people on this basis seems to be putting the cart before the horse. All of these things are matters of *this* life. Our primary objective in being Christians is to come to know God and have fellowship with Him through eternity (John 17:4). We can do that whether things in this life are what we want them to be or not. In fact, we may suffer through a less than perfect marriage, financial hardship, or some other "thorn in the flesh" in this life as we prepare for the next.

Apostolic preaching focused on forgiveness of sin and commitment to Christ. There are many blessings in this life which will accrue to the Christian, but these are secondary to our sins being covered by the blood of Jesus. Let's be sure that our appeal is a spiritual one, not a worldly one.

May 30, 2004

Attendance
AM Worship: 205
PM Worship: 161

Wednesday Evening: 174

Our Goal:
Every member
at every
service!