

When Faith and Reality Meet

1 Cor. 15:1-8 and John 20:29-31; Lk. 16:27-31

Introduction

Scoffers of Christianity often make a false dichotomy between faith and reason. For them, what is reasonable is also provable. Proof is considered to be something that is subjected to scrutiny, whether scientific or academic. While proponents of Christianity like us would not be offended by the notion of requiring evidence and proof for what we believe, faith is often regarded as neither scientific nor academic. For the scoffer, faith is not proof at all. It is merely sentiment wrapped up in hopeful aspirations. It is not evidential. It is speculative.

The claims of Christianity, what we base our faith upon, are represented as propositions. This is how the Apostle Paul articulated his beliefs and admonished other Christians to rest their confidence on the same. Christ died for our sins. Proposition. He was buried. Proposition. He rose again the third day. Proposition. He was seen. Proposition.

In fact, the Apostle Paul adds the refrain, “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and John notes of his Gospel that its contents stand “written” as propositional truth with the intent of providing a credible basis for belief (Jn. 20:30-31). In fact, for John, there is no evidential difference between the claim of Jesus standing directly before Thomas and the written record of his Word resting in your lap (see 1 Jn. 5:11 as the written record of an experienced faith; also 1 Jn. 1:1-4).

Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus in part to demonstrate that his Word is sufficient evidence to convince the sinner than the appearance of one raised from the dead (Lk.16:27-31).

When we use the word “proposition” with reference to truths recorded in the Bible, we’re stating that what is recorded in the Bible represents something akin to unimpeachable court testimony given by God. These statements (propositions, truths) are capable of being believed (or for that matter, denied). God is the expert witness whose testimony is trustworthy.

Therefore, when God pins the hopes of deliverance from sin on the reality of a living Savior, it is demanded (required) of faith to search for its object (the living Lord Jesus) whose existence is guaranteed by the Word of God (Rev. 1:8, 11, 17-18; 22:7, 12-13, 16-17, 20).

For faith to be effective in bringing salvation to the sinner, it must meet the Savior face-to-face. Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ based upon the biblical record have done so because faith and reality have met; the living Lord Jesus Christ has been found by the searching heart!

So, we shall explore for a few moments, the notion of Jesus’ words to Thomas regarding those who have not seen and have believed (Jn. 20:29). That is, as Thomas’ belief was credibly based on seeing the living Lord Jesus, can those claiming to believe in the same risen Lord do so without seeing and still justify their belief as resting on equally valid evidence? Thomas’ faith met the reality of the living Lord Jesus face-to-face. Our faith must meet the same reality in order to experience deliverance from sin, or what Thomas exclaimed as a “My Lord and my God” experience (Jn. 20:28).

1. Do modern day sinners believe in Jesus in the same sense as those who witnessed the resurrection appearances?

- a) At first glance, no pun intended, we would answer “no.” For that matter, the Lord seems to imply a negative response based on his saying to Thomas: “Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed.”
- b) The fact is belief that results in salvation must have the living Lord Jesus as its object. How one arrives at this is the heart of the issue. For Thomas and the others who saw

the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus and believed him to be the Savior of the world, their Savior; they did so based upon the credible evidence of being eye witness.

- c) This is what propelled the disciples from behind locked doors into the open markets and distant villages proclaiming the reality of the risen Lord! (Acts 2:37; 4:20; 5:30-32).
- d) In Acts 20:21, Paul described the manner of salvation as “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was not a call to merely assent to the message about Jesus, that is, to agree that it is factual. It was an actual call to direct one’s faith toward the reality that saves, the living Lord Jesus Christ.
- e) It is not the facts about Jesus that saves. It is Jesus (Acts 16:30-31). What is truly amazing is that the recipients of the gospel message delivered by the early disciples could not see Jesus with their physical eyes. Faith does not require physical sight to be valid (see 2 Cor. 5:7).
- f) This does not imply that faith is merely wishful thinking or hopeful aspiration. Why? Because faith is validated when it meets the reality it longs for. Saving faith longs for the living Lord Jesus. The gospel message is the “God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). It is the message of a crucified Savior who died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
- g) By the preaching of the gospel, God opens the eyes of faith to see the living Lord Jesus as our only hope (see 2 Cor. 4:3-6). The effect on faith is the same, whether the reality of Jesus is received as Thomas or through the gospel witness; the living Jesus sets faith aflame.
- h) The same is true of the written Word (see Rom. 10:17). It is the means of birthing us into the family of God, which is another way of saying that faith has met the living Lord Jesus (see 1 Pet. 1:23 and 2 Tim. 3:15-17).
- i) Consider the superiority of the Word of God to eyewitness experience that can often be convoluted (see 2 Pet. 1:19-21). So, the answer is a resounding “yes.” Sinners today believe as sinners who witness the resurrected Lord first-hand.
- j) “My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed. I trust the ever-living One; his wounds for me shall plead. Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt; a sinful soul I come to him, he’ll never cast me out. My heart is leaning on the Word, the living Word of God, salvation by my Savior’s name, [and] salvation through His blood. need no other argument. I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me.” (Eliza Hewitt, 1891).
- k) With Job we may confidently say, “I know my redeemer lives!” (Job 19:25).

2. What did those who witnessed Jesus alive believe?

- a) This is an interesting question. The two travelers on the road to Emmaus were joined by the risen Lord Jesus, but their eyes were restrained (by doubt) and they did not recognize them (Lk. 24:14-16). It was not until their eyes were opened that they recognized him, faith met reality and they proclaimed the good news to the others (Lk. 24:34).
- b) Mary Magdalene visited the tomb under the cover of darkness early that first Easter morning (Jn. 19:1). She sobbed at the discovery of the Lord’s body being gone (Jn. 19:13). Instead, two angels were sitting where the Lord’s body should have been. Despairing, she turned and saw a figure she presumed was the gardener (Jn. 19:15). It

was only when he spoke her name that she recognized him, faith met reality, and she left proclaiming word of her risen Lord (Jn. 19:18).

- c) It seems that those who witnessed Jesus alive after his death had the marked disadvantage of believing what their eyes had seen regarding his death, but not what their ears had heard concerning his resurrection (Matt. 16:21). In this way their eyes were shrouded by what their minds assumed (he was dead). In other words, we seldom see what we're not looking for! Only faith, having met the reality of the living Lord Jesus produced the effect of a jet propulsion engine! (Matt. 20:18; Lk. 24:34).
- d) What have you been looking for? A religion? A set of moral principles to produce a life that is pleasing to God? A Savior that is factual, appealing to the mind, but not a living reality? Have you met the living Lord Jesus? This is who your faith is longing to meet (2 Tim. 1:12). Is Jesus merely a fact to you, or is he the factor of your life?
- e) "We knew he was dead. It is finished, he said. We had watched as his life ebbed away. Then we all stood around 'till the guards took him down. Joseph begged for his body that day. It was late afternoon when we got to the tomb [and] wrapped his body and sealed up the grave. So I know how you feel. His death was so real. But please listen and hear what I say. I've just seen Jesus. I tell you he's alive. I've just seen Jesus, our precious lord alive. And I knew, he really saw me too. As if till now, I'd never lived. All that I'd done before won't matter anymore. I've just seen Jesus. And I'll never be the same again. It was his voice she first heard. Those kind gentle words, asking what was her reason for tears. And I sobbed in despair, 'My lord is not there.' He said, child! It is I, I am here!' I've just seen Jesus. I tell you he's alive. I've just seen Jesus, our precious lord alive. And I knew, he really saw me too. As if till now, I'd never lived. All that I'd done before won't matter anymore. I've just seen Jesus. And I'll never be the same again." (Sandi Patti)

3. What evidence is there that faith, having met the reality of the living Lord Jesus impacted the lives of the early disciples?

- a) One of the primary evidences is the obvious change in the character of the disciples. Formerly they had been cowardly and covert, but now the mission of their living Lord was a greater personal reality than any danger that might come from the opposition, Acts 7:59; 8:4; 12:1-2; 14:21-22; 16:22; 17:6; 18:9; 20:24; 26:12-23.
- b) Another evidence of having their faith set aflame by the reality of the living Lord Jesus is their boldness to proclaim what had personally experienced (they literally could not refrain). They became the first fruit of the proverbial "city on the hill that cannot be hid" (see Matt. 5:14), Acts 4:20; 5:29; 7:1-60 (vv. 51-53); 9:20-22; 17:30-31.
- c) A final dramatic evidence for the impact of the living Lord Jesus upon them was their ability to model his reality before a watching world, 4:13; 11:26; 16:25.

It is possible that "faith" in the form of "belief" and "trust" can accept false assumptions for truth and rely on an uncertain foundation. Some common false assumptions are:

1. God loves everyone, so he won't punish anyone; and, even if he does, that punishment is reserved for the most heinous of offenders, Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 6:23.
2. I know that I'm a sinner, because everyone has said, thought, or done something wrong. I even feel bad about my sin. That's why I pray to God, try be nice to people, help those in need, attend church as often as I can; because I want God to know that I'm sorry and intend to make up for my shortcomings. I just want to be a good person, Rom. 3:9-20.

3. I know that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. I know that Jesus was raised from the dead. I believe the Bible is the Word of God. I know about Jesus because I was taught this by my parents and Sunday school teachers all my life. In fact, I can't remember a time when I didn't know about Jesus and the Bible. I guess that I've always been a Christian, Jn. 1:12; 3:17; 5:24.

The fact is that there is a moment in time where as a sinner our faith exchanges all the assumptions for the reality of a living Savior whose blood washes away our sins and whose life becomes our present possession. All else may be sincere and may be the experience of many who call themselves Christians, but it will not pass the test of God's judgment, Matt. 7:24-27.

1. For the professed Christian today, where is the change of character, the flame in the bosom to boldly proclaim Christ, and the involuntary capacity to model him before the world?
2. Perhaps the answer is something like, "I remember when..."
3. What happened along the way?
4. You adopted a lifestyle based upon a reality far below that of the living Lord Jesus.

Maybe you can't remember a time when your faith met the living Lord Jesus.

1. You would know if this happened, because you would have sensed the need to find an answer to the guilt and shame of your sin.
2. You would have looked and seen a loving Savior with arms open wide to receive you and forgive you.

Conclusion

Imagine a ship filled with people crossing the Atlantic. In the middle of the ocean there is an explosion. The ship is severely damaged and slowly sinking. Most are dead, and the rest are rushing for the lifeboats. Now suppose one man doesn't know about the lifeboat, so he does not get aboard. He doesn't have knowledge, so he is not saved. Suppose another man knows about the lifeboat and believes it will save his life, but he is grief-stricken over seeing his wife killed, so he chooses not to get aboard and dies with his wife. He has knowledge and mental assent, but he is not saved. Others believe the lifeboat will save them, and they get into the boat. They are saved by faith, that is they have knowledge, mental assent, and trust. However, it is not their faith that saves them—no matter how much they have. **It is the boat. Saving faith trusts Christ, and Christ saves.** (Evangelism, A Biblical Approach, M. Cocoris, Moody, 1984, p. 77.)