



Trusting Amid Doubts

Genesis 37:12-28; Ps 85:8-13; Mat 14:22-33; Rom 10:5-15

We often talk of doubt and faith as completely separate entities. Some would say that the presence of any doubt rules out the very existence of faith. We generally consider that true faith has little room, if any, for doubt. Is that really so? Can we live faithfully even amid the doubts that arise to tempt our faith?

Joseph was in a desperate situation. Life had once looked much better. He had stood as his father Jacob's favorite son and had abused that position before his brothers. Now, that same arrogance had stripped him of his robe, and he found himself at the mercy of the brothers he had looked down on. Things looked pretty bad on hearing they wanted to kill him. Even with Reuben intervening to have him cast instead into an empty pit, things did not look too good for his future.

Joseph had been his father's pride and joy. He was son of Jacob's favorite wife, his mother having died while giving birth to his only full brother. Life had been good, basking in his father's favor. Jacob had crafted a special robe for him, setting him apart from his brothers. Then he had had these dreams that set him above his brothers and parents as well. Joseph did not seem to mind telling these dreams, even when they got on everyone's nerves. He was destined to rise above the rest of his family, and wanted others to know about it.

The dreams and his father's doting had given him hope for a special future. Life was good, and it was going to get all the better. Everyone knew that dreams were the divine revelation, and his dreams had projected him into a position of great prominence. He knew that everything was going to go his way. The dreams were that bit of confirmation that put the icing on the cake.

He was unprepared for being captured by his brothers, threatened with death, then being cast into an empty pit. Perhaps this is where doubts first entered Joseph's mind. Perhaps he had already been plagued with them and the dream telling was a way to get input from others on the meaning and purpose of his life. Regardless, the time he spent in that pit gave him ample opportunity for doubts.

Maybe he had misunderstood the dreams. Perhaps being his father's favorite son was not such a wonderful blessing, after all. It might have been better if he had just kept the dreams to himself! What would happen to him now? Did God really have a plan for his life? How would God get him out of this pit and realize the plan proposed for him in those dreams? Would he survive long enough to be rescued, much less find God's purpose brought about in his life?

Joseph was doing some severe soul-searching. He was likely hoarse from shouting and pleading to be released from the pit. Regardless of how much he normally prayed, I am sure he was praying now more than ever before. Perhaps he clung to his faith in God's deliverance. More likely, he clung to faith with one hand and despair with the other. At least, that is the more normal human reaction. We trust God, yet worry about how God's care will work out in our lives.

Couldn't there have been a better way to get Joseph to Egypt? Was this pit really necessary? Why couldn't the brothers simply have tempted Joseph to hitch a ride with the Ishmaelites and try his luck as a merchant? See, I can think of many other ways I might have preferred to enter Egypt. When

God has a plan for my life, I'd kind of like to be in charge of how that plan gets carried out. I would have blotted out the whole scene with the pit, slavery, and threat of death. The problem is that my way does not mold and shape a real faith that knows how to deal with doubt and adversity. If faith cannot respond to adversity, it is no faith at all.

How Joseph dealt with the crisis in his life is anyone's guess. All we really know is that things got pretty dark and dreary before they got any better. The darkness and despair were unable to invalidate God's plan or provision. In the process and in reflection, Joseph learned the reality of trusting God despite circumstance and doubt.

The psalmist speaks of salvation at hand for those who reverence God. For there to be salvation, there must be some kind of adversity to face, as well. We are not offered immunity to problems, but the choice to trust God to light our path through their midst.

The disciples did not know what to do when they saw Jesus walking on the water. They were afraid, they were uncertain, they were in disbelief, they were in awe. Peter took the most forward position, asking Jesus to call him onto the water as well. On stepping out of the boat, however, Peter had a choice to make. Would he focus on the wind and his expectations based upon past experiences, or would he choose to focus on Jesus, despite what experience told him?

Peter started out well. He actually got out of the boat and stepped onto the water. I don't know many people who have actually tried that, especially during a storm. The whole event began with doubt and fear. They were all worried about what they were seeing. Peter's question to Jesus began with, "If it is you...." Faith was taking Peter along fine, not until doubts came into the picture, but until those doubts became Peter's focus.

The only way to really live without doubts is to turn off our minds. The real question that should concern us is where we will choose to focus our attention. We can allow doubts to control our thinking, or we can choose to live by focus on faith amid those doubts.

Paul writes of faith to the Romans, reminding them that it would be extreme arrogance to believe that we can do anything to bring Christ down from heaven, or bring Christ up from the dead. Rather, faith and righteousness demand that we acknowledge our limitations and simply trust Christ Jesus for the salvation and life of faith we so desperately need.

Salvation is not a life of ease, absent any and all problems, doubts, and fears. It is a life that rises above those doubts. It is where trust conquers the very real doubts of living. It is a life available to any who would call upon Christ for redemption from the effects of sin, doubt, fear, and self-absorption. Yet it is a choice, not a demand from God.

How will we choose when life presents us with opportunities to live in doubt or faith? How will we choose when we have the opportunity to offer others the knowledge that living by faith is within their grasp, as well? Without doubts, true faith can never exist. Without faith, life is limited to being lived according to our own strength and knowledge. Will we allow our lives to be controlled and led by our doubts and fears, or by faith in God amid the turmoil of life?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*