

## Knowing and/or Believing

Can you know something and still not believe it to be true? It's a weird question, I know, but think about it like this: Lots of people know about the moon landing, but some of those folks don't believe it to be true. They believe that it was all just an elaborate hoax; a fancy movie production shot in a studio. Just about everyone knows about the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>. And yet...there are plenty of people who don't believe it actually happened the way they've been told. They don't believe that terrorists actually did it. They believe that some other sinister, governmental conspiracy was afoot. ***They know, but they don't believe.*** Now, their disbelief doesn't make it any less true. It just shows that they won't let the facts get in the way of what they believe. It's easy to shake our heads at these fools, isn't it? Terms like "nutjob" and "conspiracy theory whacko" very easily come to mind and roll off the tongue. We hear their foolishness and very quickly dismiss them and their crazy ideas.

And yet...could it not be said that at some times in our lives we, too, are guilty of knowing but not believing? I'm not talking conspiracy theories or anything like that. Just consider how often something bad has happened to you. And understand that I'm not talking about something as horrific as September 11<sup>th</sup>. I'm not even necessarily talking about something as tragic and heart-rending as the death of a loved one. I'm talking about your big plans simply not working out the way you want/expect them to; something like job loss or a bounced check or less-than-favorable news from the doctor. I'm talking about healing or rehab that doesn't go as fast as you want it to. I'm talking about the depression and sadness that takes hold when you are faced with the ugly fact that you can't do what you used to be able to do, and you will never be able to do it again. I know that can mess you up. I speak from experience. It's sad, but something as relatively minor as a parking ticket or losing your parking spot at Walmart or a flat tire or running out of milk for your cereal—if you're caught on the wrong day—can send you over the edge into despair and depression. "Why, God? Why me? Why do you hate me?"

Finish this sentence: "God works all things for the good of those who \_\_\_\_ Him." ***See? You know it, but...do you actually believe it?*** Be careful before you answer, because the words and deeds of your daily life do sometimes contradict you and indict you in your unbelief. When all those bad and depressing and less-than-ideal things happen to us, we know that God loves us, ***but it's not always easy to believe, is it?***

And here's the thing: This is nothing new. It's not like we're the first Christians in all of history who've had to struggle with doubt and despair and depression. I know it's hard to believe, but twenty-first century Western Christians

are not the first people in all of history to struggle with faith upon encountering the dark clouds and obstacles of life. Plagues, pandemics, wars, rumors of wars, corrupt government, and political unrest... it's all been around for a long time, and it will all be around long after you're gone. In fact, much of what we struggle with today can be chalked up to "**first world problems.**" We ran out of milk. The checking account is a little low. The Internet connection is slow. And as I said before, even these relatively small "first world problems" can cause all kinds of doubt and despair and worry and unbelief.

Folks: We're not the first people to struggle with actually believing what we know. Just consider the apostles. The words our Lord speaks to them in our Gospel lesson today are the words He first spoke to them on Maundy Thursday evening, *mere hours before* He would be betrayed, arrested, beaten, scourged, and condemned to be nailed to a wretched cross. As bad as all that was, let us not forget that He spoke these words to *the very same people* who would also deny Him, abandon Him, and grieve Him; *the very same people* who dared to boldly call themselves His faithful disciples and His most loyal followers and believers. They even said—at the Last Supper—that they would **never** abandon Jesus. They would all stand and fight with Him to the bitter end if they had to.

And this is important to point out. How long did these gents spend with Jesus? Three years? How often did Jesus make **explicitly clear** not only who He was, but **why** He was here? "*The Son of Man must suffer and die and on the third day rise again.*" "*Just like the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up...for God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son....*" These guys knew all this stuff like the back of their hand, and yet when it came down to it, **they didn't believe it.** You can't argue it either. If they did believe, they wouldn't have been hiding behind locked doors on Easter Sunday in great fear and despair. They wouldn't have been walking to Emmaus with such heavy and downcast hearts. "*We thought He was the one, but He was crucified.*" They would've been at the tomb that Sunday morning, eager to greet Him and rejoice at His resurrection. None of that happened though, did it? Their actions spoke louder than their words. Their fruits contradicted their bold confessions.

And this is why I love Christ's words of comfort and peace that He speaks at the end of this lesson. He knows how things are about to go down. He's God. He's omniscient. He knows. "*I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. Take heart, for I have overcome the world.*" Let this sink in for a moment. Jesus spoke these words **before** everything terrible would go down! Notice: He never gives them **false hope or false assurances.** He **never** tells them that if they just have more faith or better faith then bad things won't happen and life will be a steady stream of rainbows, glitter stickers, and unicorns. NO! He loves them enough to tell them

the Truth. *“In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart (which is better translated as “be of good cheer; be courageous and persevere on”) for I have already nee-kayed [original Greek] the world. I have already overcome. I have already won/conquered.”*

Basically, Jesus was telling them that in Him it was **already** finished. It was a done deal. That wasn't mere bravado or confidence speaking. Jesus wasn't talking like we so often talk, **boasting** about what we're going to do. No. This was God speaking. In the Old Testament prophecies we would call this “prophetic perfect,” which means that the event still lies in the future, **but from God's perspective it's already a past-tense reality**. That's how sure and certain it is. It's already a done-deal for God. *“Be of good cheer. Be courageous. Be at peace. Take heart in your tribulation, for I have already won. It is finished.”*

Folks: Nothing has changed in all these years. Your Lord and Savior speaks these words to you too this very day and in your very presence. Be at peace. Be of good cheer, **even in the midst of your tribulations and cross-bearings**, for Christ has **already** won the victory; the very same victory He Himself has baptized you into; the very same victory that He Himself brings to you today in the real and tangible forms of His own resurrected and victorious Body and Blood. *“I am with you always, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, fat or skinny, ugly or pretty, thick and thin, until death reunites us in all heavenly peace and joy, body and soul complete, world without end.”*

My friends: I can't make you believe any of this. I know you know it already, but as I said a few minutes ago, knowing and believing can be two very different things. I can't make you believe this and actually be at peace and actually have joy, even as you bear your crosses and suffer your tribulations. **But...God can**. In fact, He wants nothing more than for all to hear and believe; that is, to hear and to **know for certain and without a doubt** that He lives, the victory's won, and we belong to Him. Because of Christ Jesus we can have the **full confidence and peace** that we are God's precious children and He is our gracious, merciful, and all-loving Father, **always** working all things for our good and our salvation; **always** leading us to love Him and trust in Him above all things. Folks: Here He is! Here is your peace that surpasses all understanding. Here is your victory, your joy, and your blessed assurance. Here is the rock-solid foundation of your faith. Here is Christ Jesus with you and for you, now and always.

**AMEN**