

# As He Said

by Stewart Ruch

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*Bishop Stewart Ruch's sermon explores the nature of doubt and emphasizes the transformative power of faith in the resurrection of Jesus.*

**Duration:** 18:59

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:2, Matthew 28:1-10, Matthew 28:20, John 10:10, John 20:29

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruch discusses the topic of doubt and its impact on our joy. He emphasizes that doubt is like a thief that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. However, he highlights that the Bible and Jesus are not afraid of our doubt and are not overcome by it. Bishop Ruch then focuses on the testimony of the resurrection in Matthew 28, where the writers present a convincing account of Jesus' resurrection. He encourages listeners to bring their doubts and unbelief to the empty tomb and see for themselves that Jesus has risen.

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## Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Whedon, Illinois. Today's sermon, from our Easter Sunday services, is by Bishop Stuart Ruch, and is part 5 of our Holy Week 2016 series. Let me tell you a story about how easy it is to doubt, even in the face of certainty.

We were in the midst of potty training one of our six children. That child will remain absolutely confidential, I'm not going to share who it is. But as is the case with potty training, and having done six children, what I know is that actually what we call phase 1, which is potty training for number 1, is not that hard.

You think you've done it, and crossed that barrier, and you're very happy. The fact of the matter is, every parent knows that the hard part is number 2. I mean, I've seen mature, balanced, wise, gifted parents devolve into quivering, blackmailing, bribing, sniveling, kowtowing parents, begging their children with the most arcane and elaborate charts, promises of a year of free chocolate, Starbucks lattes, for those that are inclined that way, like at my house, where they're raised by a Brazilian, whatever it might be. You'll give them anything if they'll just go number 2 in the potty.

For this particular case, I was in the living room, and the child ran out, super excited, and said, Daddy, Daddy, I went number 2 in the potty. I, a broken, callous father, went down like this, so I could have eye-to-eye contact with that child. And I said, Child, it's wrong to lie.

The child was taken aback, Daddy, go look, you'll see. Well, amidst my doubt, I knew that I should indeed evaluate the evidence. So I went into the bathroom and saw, palpably, something that he was referring to.

But I turned on my heels, I went back to the living room, because I did not believe, and I said to all my other children, how many times have I told you, flush the toilet! The older children, aghast, said, no, no, no, no, no, it wasn't us, we're witnesses to what happened, we know that that happened, we saw it happen. Oh, I've got evidence, I've got witnesses, I went back to the subject, I again got eye-to-eye. And that child looked at me with the most plaintive, pleading, please, Daddy, please believe me.

And I broke down. When I was face-to-face with him, I believed. He had accomplished, he had reached the summit of the mountain that we had put before him.

Obviously, there's much more serious issues, are there not, around doubt, particularly spiritual doubt. It's heartbreaking to read of celebrities, Hugh Jackman has spoken about this, Brad Pitt, both of them raised in what they describe as sincere Christian homes. I get to talk about how doubt overtook them, and they walked away from the faith of their family, the faith of their childhood.

I spent five years in my twenties in a locked-in, isolating, chilling place of spiritual doubt. It ruled and controlled my life. In the last few years, in a way, not like that time in my twenties, but in a way that surprised me, I was visited by spiritual doubt again.

I could still teach the Bible with integrity, it didn't utterly shipwreck my faith, but it was there, it was present. Doubt is like a thief. It's like a pickpocket that you don't even know that you've been robbed until you reach for what you needed spiritually, and all of a sudden it feels like it's not there.

It's like identity theft, where you were so sure of who you were and where you were going and what your life was about, and all of a sudden you find that you've got no capital, spiritual capital that you thought you'd set aside. It's like a bold-faced robbery in the middle of the day in which those things that are valuable and precious like your jewelry or your computer system or whatever it might be, you come home and what was once there is gone. And you look and you go, I lost something that meant so much to me.

What happened to my hope? What happened to my sense of purpose? What happened to my buoyancy? What happened to my joy? Doubt is like a thief that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. And what's so amazing about the biblical testimony is that the Bible and Jesus is not afraid of your doubts. They're not overwhelmed by your doubts.

He's not overcome by your doubt. As a matter of fact, in the testimony of the resurrection in Matthew 28, the section that's right after what was read this morning, in a section where you would think that the writers who are trying to persuade you that the resurrection of Jesus is true, they want you to believe in Jesus. They have every reason to write a propaganda piece because they want to tell you what really happened.

They don't shade. They don't cover. They don't hide.

They actually tell us that when there were those who had followed Jesus, who saw him resurrected, many believed. But in that first moment, it says that some doubted. So if you have some doubt or unbelief, maybe you would call yourself an unbeliever.

Maybe you would call yourself a believer, but the fact of the matter is there's a shadow heart area that still carries doubt. Let's just be really clear. You don't have to keep that from the Bible.

It already knows it's true about you. You don't have to keep that from Jesus. In the very account of the resurrection, there were those who first saw Jesus and doubted.

Indeed, what Jesus wants to do is he wants to embrace you as the resurrected Jesus Christ and embrace your doubt if you'll let him and allow him to wrap his arms around you so that you can see him, so that what's left is not being dominated by your doubts, but what's left is the closeness with Jesus, which is why he resurrected, that he could be close to you. There's a journey from doubt and unbelief to the freedom of believing in Jesus. We see the journey in the scriptures today.

It looks like two parts. It's first the journey to the empty tomb. We go to the empty tomb because the resurrection of Jesus is provable.

Second, we go to Galilee, as he said to the women to tell his followers, we go to his hometown. We go to where he was raised. We go there because Jesus' resurrection is not only provable, Jesus' resurrection is personal.

He wanted his followers to see him and he had a surprise for his followers when they saw him. So let's together in the next several minutes, let's go to the empty tomb. If you've got doubt or unbelief, bring it with you.

Let's go to Galilee. The key sentence in what was read from the book of Matthew, Matthew was a follower, he was a pupil of Jesus. He wrote this account after his actual years of traveling with Jesus.

He wrote it for the Jewish community that he was a part of. In Matthew, there's a key sentence in there. It's the word of the angel.

He is not here. He has risen, as he said, come see where he lay. Come back to that in just a moment.

It's a renowned British atheist in the late 20th century, Dr. Anthony Flew, not as well known in our country as if you've read any books by atheists, Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens, but extremely well known in the United Kingdom, very well known in academic circles. Published over 30 significant philosophical works, most of them dealing in one way or another for proofs arguing against the existence of God. It's said that early on in his Oxford days, he debated a well-known Christian convert, a man named C.S. Lewis at the Socratic Club.

Lewis arguing for the existence of God, Dr. Anthony Flew arguing against it. Decade upon decade, Flew was the articulator of the fact that God does not exist. And even in those days, as a person of integrity, he wrote, if I were to believe in the supernatural, if I were to accede that there is something greater than what we see here, the one event I would be willing to consider is the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

There's so much evidence, he wrote. There's so much provability, I would have to consider that before I consider any other supernatural event. Why would Anthony Flew, who gave his life and his career fighting against the existence of God, say that? Because as a man of integrity, there is so much mounting evidence that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead.

I could literally give you brick upon brick upon brick a kind of granite foundation, but let me just offer one this morning. And that's what was offered to the women at the tomb that first morning. Come, see where he lay.

Because the body wasn't there. And what was true two millennia ago is still true. There's no body of Jesus to be found.

No one has ever, in the annals of responsible archaeology, even put forward that they have somehow found the skeletal remains of Jesus of Nazareth. I've visited Abraham's tomb in Hebron. We know where Abraham's body is.

We know where Sarah's body is, ancient figures from the scriptures. You would think that of the 11 followers of Jesus who were at his core, and then there were 70 who were very involved in his school of the kingdom of God, and then there were over 500 who actually witnessed Jesus bodily raised from the dead, you would think among one of the 500, many who were tortured because of their belief in Jesus of Nazareth raised from the dead, many who were imprisoned, that at some point, in some way, one of them would have broke under duress and torment and said, okay, okay, okay, I'll tell you what sepulcher he's buried in. I just want to be relieved of what I'm under right now.

Yet not one gave testimony to that. Yet not one shared that because it wasn't true. There was no body.

He'd not swooned or fainted and then was living somewhere in the nether regions of Nazareth. It wasn't true that his body had been taken and stolen and hidden somewhere. The fact of the matter was Jesus is no longer in the tomb.

He is risen just as he said. It's the most plausible and most profound of explanations. It's a provable reality.

And yet even for the followers of Jesus who saw the proof and the evidence right there, Jesus knew they'd need more. He understood the unbelieving heart and has mercy on it and loves us amidst our doubt. So he says, after the angel has said, come see where he lay, he then says to the women who have seen him, go, tell my followers to meet me at home in Galilee where they will see me.

I was having lunch with an atheist friend, a medical student, and he said, here's the thing, Stuart. Even if you could completely airtight prove to me that Jesus is the son of God and he died to save my sins, if you could prove that to me, it's not enough. And then to my delight, he used a biblical reference.

He said, I would need to see a burning bush. I would need to have a personal encounter with the reality of God. That was not a bad thing to ask for.

That was not wrong of him to somehow not take the evidence alone, although for many of us that's what we need. No, he needed to go to Galilee. He needed to go where he could encounter the risen Jesus himself, and that's where they went.

That's where the followers of Jesus went. And it was there that they saw him. Several years ago, I was crossing the border, you have to do it by foot, from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

And when you do so, you're dropped off about half a mile from the border of Pakistan. I was coming in from Afghanistan. You have your passport.

You're moving with hundreds of people. I'm in a land where I don't know the language. I don't know the customs.

I literally know nothing except my two traveling companions that are right next to me. We're making our way over to the border, and amidst the dust and swirling and all that's happening, I hear, not from my two companions, an American-accented voice. And the voice says, Stuart Rock? I'm totally shocked.

I turn. Brian? My Wheaton College classmate? And then, in unison, what are you doing here? But when I saw Brian, I knew it was Brian. I knew him.

See, when they saw Jesus, you've got to track with this. It wasn't ghostly. They knew it was Jesus.

They knew it was him who they walked with. They knew it was him who'd washed their feet. They knew it was him who'd been crucified upon the cross.

They knew it was Jesus in the same way that I knew it was Brian. I knew my friend. I knew him well.

They saw him. They gazed upon him. And then Jesus said, he said, all authority on heaven and on earth has been given.

When I saw Brian, I didn't just see Brian, my former classmate from college, but I saw a man dressed in a kaftan, the local dress, as someone who spoke fluent Pashto, the local language. I didn't just see Brian. I saw one who had a personality, a life, a calling, an authority, a ministry.

I saw more than just Brian himself. I saw the fullness of who Brian was. And when they saw Jesus, they saw one who had a new and one authority through his trampling down death by death.

It says right before Jesus says to them, I have all authority, the disciples saw him, they believed, but a few doubted. And I think it's very possible that Matthew follows a few doubted with Jesus' statement of authority. It's he wanted to minister to even to us today, that you may have doubt, you may have unbelief.

Don't give it that much credibility. The authority of Jesus is greater than your doubt. He can have authority over your doubt.

He can utterly and completely handle and overcome your doubt. If our Lord has truly overcome death, be assured that he mercifully wants then to take and overcome your doubt. It need not have authority over your life.

It need not rule and manage your thinking and your behavior. Put the unbelief in its place. It's a thief.

And Jesus, Jesus has power over it. That's a relief for any of us who have had seasons where we doubt the goodness of God, the love of God being real, the closeness of God. He has authority.

It belongs under him. He'll take it. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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