

The Ruin of Doubt

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

There are three men in a plane. There's the pilot, there's a boy scout, and the smartest man in the world. The engine fails.

There are only two parachutes left. The smartest man doesn't hesitate. He grabs a pack, says, I'm sorry, but I'm the smartest man in the world.

The planet needs me. And he jumps. The pilot turns to the boy scout, voice cracking.

He starts his very patriotic speech of, son, I've lived a long life. I don't know why he's American, but son, I lived a long and hard life. You've got yours right ahead of you.

Take the last parachute. Real noble, real certain of his decision of letting the boy jump. And the boy scout turns and he shrugs.

And he says, relax, captain. The world's smartest man just jumped out the plane with my backpack. And here's what gets me about that story.

The smartest man in the world was the most certain person on that plane. But he was catastrophically wrong. He didn't pause, he didn't check, he didn't even doubt himself for a single second.

His confidence wasn't evidence he had the right parachute. It just meant that he was the last one to find out he didn't. And we tend to treat doubt like it's a design flaw in our lives.

Like the people who are sure, sure about God, sure about themselves, sure about the plan, are those who are the ones who are figured out.

And the rest of us who hesitate, who ask questions, who grapple with texts, who aren't so certain, somehow we are failing at faith. That is what is perceived. What if doubt isn't the fail here?

What if doubt is just checking your parachute? Because in the modern world we live in today, there are two camps when it comes to doubt, one being belief, and on the other end of extreme there is doubt. They are opposite and cannot coexist.

But tonight we are going to see how we can hold both the leaf in one hand and our doubt in the other. And that is the series we are looking at. That is what is illustrated here behind me.

It's holding both of those things in tension and finding the narrow way. And so far in this Roads to Ruin series, we've been looking at things that aren't necessarily bad in themselves.

But if they are entertained for too long, if they're not God driven, it leads us down a path of ruin. Last week, we looked at hurt and power. This morning, we looked at anger, and tonight we are looking at doubt.

But before we dive in, let me read our overarching verse for this series. Which is illustrated in Matthew 7, 13 to 14, which says, enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction.

And many enter through it, but small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life. And only a few find it. So imagine this with me for a second.

Raise your hand if you have ever had a swim in the ocean. Okay, plenty of swimmers. That is great, because you're gonna love this sermon.

And you've probably felt this under the water. It's a quiet pull beneath the surface that has nothing to do with the waves, nothing to do with how you are swimming and what you are doing. But there's a definite pull.

And all of a sudden, you look up, and you are 20 meters away from where you started. And like I said earlier, you didn't ignore the flags. You were being diligent to the lifeguards.

The current just found you. The current pulled you away 20 meters. But a rip current, on the other hand, is something far more threatening, far more imposing.

It's one of the most misunderstood dangers of the ocean. Because one, it's invisible, so you cannot see it. And two, science still can't explain why there's sudden rip currents filtering through the ocean.

And according to Surf Life Saving, NSW, there are three pieces of advice when it comes to rip currents. One is pretty obvious, don't panic. The second one is keep your body afloat and raise your hand to signal for help.

Sorry, the second one is keep your body afloat. And this third one is raise your hand to signal for help. Well, I would put it to you that sometimes our lives are in this rip current.

Sometimes we have seasons of doubts in our lives. And we also have three responses. Two that lead to ruin and one that leads to life.

And in the first place this evening, I wanted to see that in response to doubt, dogmatic belief can lead to ruin. Now, there's a technical word there that stops us.

The word dogmatic means expressing personal opinions or beliefs if they are absolute truth, refusing to accept any other points of view. Now, it may seem strange to talk about belief, equal sign destruction. It's very contradictory.

But Jesus warns us throughout Matthew that it is possible to have religious confidence without genuine relationship with God. Remember Matthew 7 earlier. Wide is the gate that leads to destruction.

And in the later verses, Jesus says in verses 21 to 23 of Matthew 7, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father, who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did an in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles? See, these people sound very certain and very confident in themselves.

And like I said, it's not inherently a bad thing. They believe that they are right. They recall serving as evidence of their faith.

And Jesus says, probably one of the most frightening words ever uttered that shakes us to our core. Jesus says, then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers, away from me, you evildoers.

That is a, what I like to call, hard, heart-hitting language. And sometimes that's where we find ourselves in this rip current. This is one of the reactions we have.

We panic and we swim against it head on, full of passion, full of ourselves, full of a zealousness to fight the current. That is a very South African way of thinking. It's, I will do the work to fight through it.

I will put my head down and fight. But I would put it to you that unwavering belief that is ignorant of the dangerous path is ultimately going to leave us in this cycle. Unwavering belief, that is ignorant.

Because we don't question our beliefs. These people don't question their beliefs. And we try to fight our way out of it.

And this leads to even more ruin. That sort of attitude produces pride over humility, judgment over grace, certainty over wisdom, and religion over relationship.

When we fight against that current, it's very important to remember that there is a difference between confidence in Christ and confidence with oneself.

And the trap we fall into in the mindset of running and going for it, we ruin the flow of trust that faith actually provides for us. We become rigid, which harms our relationship with others. We cannot be approachable to have discussion.

And remember, church, that we are called to trust God and surrender all things to Him. That is our confidence that we have in God.

We read in Proverbs 3, 5 to 6, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding and all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight. There's a really practical truth that is hidden in there.

In fact, it's not hidden, it's in plain sight. It's a simple instruction of leaning on God and giving it all up to Him. Surrender it all up to Him.

And we cannot even begin to fathom and begin without asking questions. And that leads us directly into the second point of ruin, which is that questioning doubt leads to ruin.

And here we are touching on the second lifeguard rule of keeping your body afloat, which yes, is obviously a good thing. No one chooses to drown, I hope. But sometimes, we can just keep on floating.

We can let the current take us all the way. And this is the other camp that we have at the beginning. We had belief and now we're looking at the camp of doubt and questions.

And when I say the simple phrase questioning doubt, it may sound like a contradiction, doesn't it? Isn't questioning good? Sometimes, yes, it is absolutely question.

The Bible is filled with people who ask difficult questions. Think of Job. All the youth leaders will know, we've been doing Job in youth over the past term.

And this last Friday, actually, it was absence in the presence of questions. And remember with Job that we looked at earlier this year, it's, he loses everything at the beginning. He loses his family.

He loses his wealth. He loses everything. But he was a God-fearing man.

This was an unprecedented level of loss. And Job did nothing wrong to deserve it. Surely, he has a right to doubt.

Surely, he has the right to question, What is God doing in my life? Job's life is an absolute misery at this moment. And so what does Job do?

He questions. He puts God under the interrogation lamp. And he directly questions God.

In Job 10, verses 1 to 2, he says, I loathe my very life. Therefore, I will give free reign to my compliance and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I say to God, do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me.

See, the problem is not just having questions. Questions are good. And clearly we see that questions are needed sometimes.

But the problem lies when questioning becomes a permanent stance for your life. When we just keep floating along the current with our cycle of why questions.

And the danger here is when those very questions become more important than seeking the truth. That's the cycle we find ourselves in. And in our context today, this is hidden everywhere.

It's the trap of endless skepticism. There is always another objection, another article, another video, another counterargument, another what if. Eventually, we can spend so much time analyzing the path that we don't end up going for it.

More and more inputs are constantly being filtered to influence our output, and we don't make a decision.

And to take a turn to a more encouraging way instead of me loading the guilt gun on everyone, it's let's look at a healthier picture of doubt in Mark 9.

And for context, there is a father in the story who has been carrying something unimaginable for years. His son has an impure spirit, which the text describes in terrifying detail. He has convulsions.

He's foaming at the mouth. At times, it's thrown him into fire. At times, it's thrown him into water, trying to destroy him.

This father has watched this happen for years and years for this boy. And he has already tried something. He already tried to find a solution in the disciples.

He brought his son to Jesus' disciples first, hoping that they could help him. And we see that they couldn't in Mark 9, 18. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground.

He foams at the mouth, nashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not. So by this time, this man gets to Jesus himself.

He is not coming with the confidence and the fighting power that we have when we look for our unwavering belief. He's not currently swimming against the current here. He doesn't have that textbook level of faith what we supposedly think is good.

Listen to how he actually talks. He says, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. What are the key words there?

He says, if you can. Not you can do all things. He says, if you can.

That doesn't sound like the language of someone who is still stuck in this cycle of skepticism. That's the language of a man who's been in the water for such a long time that he isn't sure if he is floating or not.

And what I love about this story is what Jesus does with that. He doesn't lecture the man. He doesn't give him a teachable moment.

He doesn't even say, excuse me, if. Like who you think you're talking to? If.

This guy is talking to the son of God and he's saying, if after everything I've done, he's still asking, if. And said, Jesus almost hands the very words back to him. He says, if you can, all things are possible for the one who believes.

And this exhausted father, mid-current, unsure of if he's floating or not, unsure of his ways, says, one of the most honest sentences that I've ever read in the Bible. In verse 24, he says, I believe, help my unbelief. I believe, help my unbelief.

Notice carefully what he does not do in that moment. He doesn't drown in the shame of the current just taking him. He doesn't crumble in the presence of doubts in the presence of the Son of God.

He doesn't try to hide anything. He doesn't pretend he's not being pulled at all. He doesn't put on a performance of rock solid faith.

He says the truest thing out loud. He doesn't fester it. He doesn't harbor it.

And he's good for him. He says it to the only person that can actually help him in this situation. And to sum it up, I would say this.

Doubt becomes dangerous when it drives us away from Jesus. But it can come very productive when it drives us towards Him. Because what does the Father do here?

He holds belief, He holds his doubt together, hand in hand, following the narrow way of faith. I'll say it again. Doubt becomes dangerous when it drives us away from Christ.

It comes productive when it's a vehicle to go towards Him. And this leads me to the final piece of advice that our New South Wales Life Guards have to give us, and that is reach your hand out and signal for help towards the shoreline.

In other words, navigating the way between belief and doubt, finding the narrow way is found in faith, the narrow way of faith, what is illustrated here behind me.

And I would say the perfect passage, not just for the sermon because we're using a water analogy, but also it's because it's one of the most famous passages of Jesus walking on water.

But I want to really focus on the interaction between Peter and Jesus. Let's read together, Matthew 14, 22 to 33. Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd.

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid.

Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, Tell me to come to you on the water. Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and he was beginning to sink. He cried aloud, Lord, save me. Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

You of little faith, he said, Why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who are in the boat worshiped him, saying, Truly, you are the son of God.

Did you notice what Peter does not do? He doesn't try to swim back to the boat under his own power, under his embarrassment, his silence. He's not determined to fix this himself before anyone noticed he is actually struggling here.

He doesn't fight the water straight on against the current. Instead, he turns parallel to the one place where the current can't follow him. And he cries out the three words, Lord save me.

That's that sideways move of going out where the current can't follow you and reaching out your hand. And take courage. Look what happens next in this story.

Because the timing here is everything. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. What's the key word there?

Immediately, immediately, not after a conversation about Peter's faith issues and having a psych analysis, not after teaching, not having a teachable moment on the importance of trusting God during storms. The hand comes first.

The rescue becomes, the rescue comes before the review. Only after Peter is safe in Jesus' grip, does Jesus say, Oh, you have little faith. Why did you doubt?

And by then, Peter's already standing at this point. And the point is exactly that. The direction in which your faith travels is the key.

And that is found in the outstretched arms of Jesus. When we are in this rip current. So where does this leave us on this narrow way?

Take courage from probably one of my favorite passages, The Great Commission, Matthew 28 16 to 17. And I marvel at the last words that is used to describe the disciples here.

And remember, they are, yeah, it's the last glimpse we have of the men who followed Jesus for three years. They learned from him. They saw him crucified and resurrected at this point.

Matthew 28 16 to 17. Then the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.

Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Imagine this, you have followed Jesus throughout this whole timeline, seeing him perform miracles, see him dead and see him resurrected.

They listened to him, they followed every movement, they studied every movement. And what does Matthew not cover up in this passage?

He points it out, he says, And some doubted, the disciples who saw this live, where the world is asking, Show me proof that Jesus is real. They saw this happening in front of them. And yet some of them still doubted.

Biblical scholar, Fredericks Dale Brunner, says, the Christian faith is bipolar. The disciples live their life between worship and doubt, trusting and questioning, hoping and worrying.

And notice that Jesus gives, after the doubt, he gives him the great commission. He gives him the very purpose of our faith, of our Christian lives. He sends them out as agents of this world.

Jesus is basically saying, you go, go doubters, you go. Send them out. You have unwavering belief in me, and you question, go out.

Then take courage, because that is the God that we serve, that He is always ready to receive us at that point, mid-current, when we can swim out, raise our hand and say, Lord, help me. Lord, save me.

Finding the narrow way is holding belief and doubt in the same hand and following out in faith, and that's redirecting our doubt to God. And before we close in a time of worship, I'm going to read a prayer from a very old Puritan writer.

And it took me a while to translate it into normal speaking English, but I'm going to do my best. So let's pray together. And I would ask you, allow these words to echo in your heart.

Allow these words to soften your heart. Because doubt is a very tricky topic. And there's two ways to ruin and one way to life, and that is found in Jesus.

Let us pray. God, you are in everything. You are above everything.

You know everything. You are orchestrating everything. All control is yours.

All vision is yours. All power is yours. You move the handle and the needle of my life.

Thank you that you want to take care of me. Thank you that you love me. You withhold no good thing from me.

Thank you that I can trust you, not with half my heart, but with my whole heart. Thank you that you know my way even when it looks like I don't know mine. Grant me greater faith to trust and obey you by faith.

Stand closer to me so I can dwell in your love. Help keep my mind steadfast on things that are true, noble, righteous, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. If I move with you, I won't depart from you.

Teach me, God, in all your ways. I am open and willing to what you want to do in my life. And we need you, God.

Amen.