**“I believe in Doubt”**

First Sermon in a Series in the Tas Valley Team Ministry May/ June 2015

The book “Doubt” - by Os Guiness is a major resource for this series. The subjects touched upon in this sermon are explored in more depth in chapters 1-4 of this book.

**James 1.1-8**

This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to the “twelve tribes”—Jewish believers scattered abroad.

Greetings!

2 Dear brothers and sisters,[a] when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. 6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. 7 Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

**Matthew 28.16-20**

16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,[a] baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

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*“To understand doubt is to have a key to a quiet heart and a quiet mind”*

*Os Guiness*

Imagine yourself watching a thin little donkey piled up with a heavy load of firewood. It is slowly struggling up a hillside. The peasant boy accompanying the donkey, is not happy with his efforts - he shouts, he beats the donkey with a stick - the donkey breaks into a slow slot but he cannot take it. He sinks to the ground with exhaustion. The boy shouts and beats him some more and the little donkey struggles to his feet but his knees give way.

What do you think as you watch this? Do you feel like intervening? Most likely you feel that the donkey is being mistreated - and the boy is not only being cruel but stupid… give the donkey a sensible load and treat him well and he could get the best out of him. Beating and shouting is only making the whole firewood carrying exercise less likely to work. He is a donkey not a tractor.

Faith is like a beast of burden - all too often, misunderstood, malnourished and mistreated: So many Christians drive their faith unfairly when they believe and then flog their faith mercilessly when they doubt. It comes from a misunderstanding - they think that true faith would be bout free and that doubt is the same thing as unbelief - and equally sinful!

That is a misunderstanding of faith because doubting and questioning is an important part of real and healthy faith. So the way to get the best out of something whether it is a donkey or faith or anything else is to understand it for what it is and meant to be and nurture it accordingly.

**What is doubt?**

Doubt is basically faith in two minds. In James, the description of a doubting man is of someone in two minds “Dipsukos” “a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind”. In the story of the ascension when they were worshipping the risen Christ and it says “some doubted” the word used is “distazo” - a sense of hesitancy, hanging back, keeping distance.

So doubt is not the same as unbelief - it is faith in two minds, suspended between two options, undecided. And it can be an important part of our growth in faith if our response to it is to seek answers and to work it through.

It can also be a stage on the way to unbelief if we suppress our doubts or do not put the effort in to find the answers our faith needs. Doubt should always be taken seriously. When the donkey falters, its master needs to attend to its needs not to ignore it. And our faith can falter for many different reasons

* Sometimes, we take God for granted and that leads us to forget his activity in our lives
* Sometimes, we have a distorted picture of God in our minds and then of course we doubt because our picture of God is simply not true!
* Sometimes, we came to believe based on our feelings alone, we didn't think it through at the time and never established the firm foundations that believing longterm needs
* Sometimes we have stopped acting in a way that exercises our faith - so our muscles have become wasted
* Sometimes we are tired, ill or depressed and our emotions distort our picture of reality
* Sometimes we are scared to believe because we’ve been hurt before and God seems too good to be true.

All these doubts are normal - but they are meant to be be temporary, we are meant to resolve them. The answer of course is always found in the sufficiency of God - but is not always an intellectual answer about understanding God better. Sometimes it is about examining the intellectual justification of Christian faith. However, there are times when parents tell their children, you’re upset because you’re tired - go to bed - it will look better in the morning. Only after sleep, they will regain their perspective and sometimes it is like that with us - there is something practical to restore our faith - it may be sleep, or putting ourselves in situations where we rely on God’s help, or committing ourselves to a steady rule of life or taking time to count our blessings.

Over the next few weeks, in our sermons we are going to be taking a look at some of the reasons for doubt and the practical ways in which we can seek to address them. So that we will not be permanently double-minded or have divided loyalties like as it says in James but so that our faith can be in God alone and we are ready to receive his wisdom.