

Darren Ball
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Youth Sunday Sermon

“Do not doubt, but believe.” But a week prior to these words, Thomas had watched his leader crucified. Jesus had died, and that was it. At that time, and even now, there was nothing to suggest that man could rise from the dead, and others’ hearsay would far from alter his state of mind. How does one come back from the grave? *How, by what means, in what manner?* In order to give reason to this how, Thomas had to feel the scarred flesh of Christ for himself.

Would not all of us have asked this eternal question seeking explanation to a seemingly unfeasible occurrence? For who amongst us would believe me if I told you that I had just resurrected? I’d imagine certainly not without seeing a death certificate first.

Personally, I confess, belief in the supernatural has never been easy. I’ve always asked *how, by what means*. Ever since I was young, I always appealed to reason, like Thomas, and questioned biblical stories that were passed along as verbatim truth. By what means, was Noah able to congregate two of every species of animal onto a single wooden boat that was supposed to withstand a flood lasting 40 days, and 40 nights? *How; in what way or manner* is that even possible?

Growing up, I regularly attended Sunday school, during which I sat and listened to endless stories of life-changing miracles performed by Jesus Christ the Messiah. Still very young, I never devoted much thought to the possibility of such stories but rather focused on what kind of doughnut I was going to get at coffee hour. Yet, as time went on and my mom told me about confirmation, I began to realize my doubts and had decided I wasn’t going to go through with it. However, my mom insisted that I at least attend the first meeting and attempt to find to what extent I did believe. *How, to what extent or degree?* By this point, the extent of my disbelief of the many biblical stories had outweighed my extraction of the individual lessons and morals. *How damaged is the car...* about how damaged my faith was after a battle with reason.

And so I took my mom’s advise and embarked on my confirmation; the journey to find my place in Christianity. And as we progressed, I found that I could co-exist with faith. It was ok to ask questions. It was ok to ask *how*, very well knowing that there was no clear answer. I began to appreciate the lessons that were threaded throughout the tales of a distant time, and my damaged faith began to heal. Not like a new car off the lot, but like a freshly cleaned used car.

How; in what state or condition. Though I still struggle with faith, though I still have doubts and often need to see just as Thomas did, I'm in a better place. One that not only accepts some of the Bible's limitations, but also accepts and embraces the possibilities that comes from its lessons. To be a better person. To give back. Coming from a position in which I am able to live a comfortable and enjoyable lifestyle, it's refreshing to be able to help out those less fortunate, to inspire hope in those who lack it.

Two years ago, I traveled to Montana on a mission trip, following in my sister's footsteps, who had previously gone on three trips of her own. Before then, I didn't fully realize what it meant to give back, nor did I understand that I could really make a difference. *How* could I really change someone's life? To say the least, Montana was an eye opener. Aside from the glorious mountain ridges and calming streams which did encourage me to open my eyes and embrace nature, it put the lessons I had struggled to find in Bible stories to fruition. *I* helped repaint a summer camp. *I* landscaped a garden whose owner gave shelter to those going through a difficult time. *I* made a difference. Such an experience was astounding to me. The following year I partook in an eight hour car ride to Myrtle Beach, very different from Montana but another place to which I had never been. Though the weather did not work in our favor, I was able to help build a brand new porch and back steps for a single trailer housing 7 people that received air conditioning but a week prior to our arrival. Once again, *I* made a difference. Two groups of people in two entirely different parts of the country that will never meet each other, and the only link between them is me and the rest of our wonderful youth group. I had begun to answer my *how*. And now, with New Mexico around the corner, I look forward to being able to help a whole new group of wonderful people that just need a bit of inspiration to restructure their lives, something that *I* can give them.

Though I admit that crossing faith with reason will always be a struggle for me, I have been fortunate enough to learn that asking questions is a good thing, and that the two can live in harmony. I've learned that the story of Thomas is an important one. For faith is not verbatim. We should all ask *how, in what way, by what means, and to what extent*. For it is when we ask this seemingly unanswerable *how*, that we begin a journey in search of answers, instead of having them told to us, where this is this, and that is that.

Amen.