I Will Never Believe

 Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Nothing is ever black and white. There are always factors that play into anything that happens on earth. In other words, nothing happens by accident. However sometimes this gets taken to the extreme and that’s when things get interesting. Conspiracy abounds in our society. And what’s more is that we are sometimes captivated by conspiracy. Like, what really happens at area 51? Did the government really cover up the landing of aliens in the barren desert of New Mexico? What about the assassination of JFK? People have been asking questions about this since the day it happened. Was there a second shooter on the grassy knoll? Was Lee Harvey Oswald an agent of a foreign government? Did we actually land on the moon in 1969 or was that staged in a Hollywood studio? There are even those that question as to whether or not the attacks of September 11, 2001 were perpetrated by the United States government. But what is it exactly about conspiracy that causes so much intrigue? Perhaps it’s the fact that it provides another explanation. Or perhaps it’s the fact that the other explanation is juicy, full of intrigue, vague at points but not easy to disprove. It’s glorified gossip really. After all usually these theories are so farfetched that the perpetrators of these theories are sometimes seen as crazy. Was it aliens that landed at Roswell or perhaps some experimental aircraft? Was there a second shooter? Was the assassination of a sitting president ordered by his own vice president? Or was there a man with mental instability that had a gun that decided to do something he shouldn’t?

This brings us to our conspiracy for today. Today’s story is well known among Christians, or at least his nickname is familiar to us. Today “Doubting Thomas” enters our story and I have to say I think he gets a bad reputation. After all last week we saw that the women who spoke with the angel were seized with terror but we don’t have anyone by the name of “Terrorized Mary” that we recognize. Instead we brush off their terror, for they had seen something grand and wonderful that they couldn’t explain and they were terrified. Now I think Thomas’ reaction is somewhat appropriate. Who would believe that a human being could come back to life after being dead for three days? I mean yes Thomas witnessed Jesus raising people from the dead but that was different because Jesus was a great teacher who spoke directly to God. Of course he could do those things. But now that he was gone there was obviously serious doubt that he would ever be seen again. Imagine how he must have felt. I’m sure that in his heart of hearts he wanted to believe the first time. However we know how we get when we are grieving. Perhaps his dismissal was a way for Thomas to try to move on with his life emotionally. By declaring what he saw with his eyes he is confessing what he knows for certain. He knows for certain that which he sees.

But he says something here, he says, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Thomas takes it a step further. It isn’t good enough for him to see Jesus. He needs to touch him. He needs physical proof because to him this could be a conspiracy. After all they were in hiding from the Jews. How could he know that his friends hadn’t turned on him and attempted to trap him into confessing Jesus, only to arrest him? So he plays it safe. He says he will believe, but with a caveat. I think that this describes a lot of Christians right now. What else could explain such a steep decline in church growth over the previous decades? Perhaps apathy could explain it. Christians feel as though they know this truth, Jesus rose from the dead, and they accept it like, “The sky is blue” or “If you don’t drink water you’ll die.” It gets accepted as a reality and as a result people become confident that they don’t need anyone or anything to help their spiritual life. I was one of these people. I remember having countless arguments with my parents in college where I told them that they “had no idea about my personal prayers and devotion life.” I convinced them that I was doing what I needed to do to maintain my spiritual health but the reality was different. I didn’t want to help my spiritual health because I didn’t know I was sick. I felt as though if the end came, I knew that I would confess Jesus as my savior. I believed and I felt that was more than enough. I think this describes quite a number of Christians in our culture. People have become overconfident that simply their belief will gain them salvation. What this leads to is preachers like Joel Olsteen becoming popular, an acceptance of homosexuality, and many of the other problems that we see the church having today. It’s no wonder that all of these radical denominations and preachers have shown up, people have no idea what the bible even says. Basic biblical literacy is at an all-time low and it is causing serious problems. The idea is that actions speak louder than words. Simply stating “I’m a Christian” is not living out your faith in the way that God intended. Instead it is a slap in the face. Everything that God has done for us has been a way of attempting to strengthen our faith in him. Martin Luther did not write out his catechism just for us to have the commandments, creed, and Lord’s Prayer written in one place. Instead he wrote it so that he might instruct parishioners on how to practice their faith. Faith is not just something you have. It’s something that needs to be fed and nourished. It needs to be practiced because our faith can never be perfected. Thomas is an example of that. His faith in imperfect. He needs to see in order to believe. Our faith is imperfect. But there is always time to practice.

Christianity is not some conspiracy to gain control over people or to brainwash people. It’s simply a conspiracy to tell the truth. I’m sure that Thomas did not enjoy speaking those words and stating that unless he saw he would never believe. I can’t imagine the emotions that must have come over him when he saw that in fact the other disciples were not lying to him, but rather they were telling the truth. We know that after this Thomas became a missionary into the subcontinent of India where he met a martyr’s end. So many of our Christian brothers and sisters have met the same fate over the course of history. All of them, imperfect in their faith. I’m not saying that our faith has to be perfect, because as you may know by now I find that an impossible standard for people to live up to. It’s because our faith is imperfect that we need to be here. We need to hear the Word of God. We need to receive his gifts of forgiveness of sins and body and blood. We need this because our faith is imperfect. If our faith was perfect there would be no need of Jesus. But we should know that we are in desperate need of Jesus. But it’s not enough to just recognize our need. We need to act on it just like we would if we were hungry or thirsty. That forgiveness of sins is a lifeline for us. We cannot just accept that it exists, we have to grab it if we want to be pulled out. And once we grab that lifeline it will start to grab us. It will help us keep hold of it not just for a moment, but for eternity. This lifeline begins here on earth and pulls us up to salvation. That is something worth celebrating. That is something worth recognizing. And more so, that is something worth holding on to. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.