

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on John 19:19-31 on April 27, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Stonework**  
**Today's Focus: Grindstone**

**"God's Not Dead!**  
**So You Can Keep Going."**

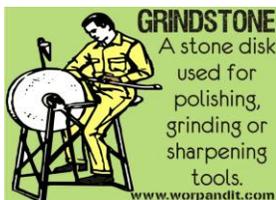
In the name of the Jesus Christ who said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Have you heard about the movie *God's Not Dead*? It's a movie that's doing pretty well at the box office across the country right now, better than anyone expected even though it's only playing at select theaters. I think that's because the plotline resonates with so many people. It's about this guy named Josh who's a college freshman. He believes in God. He believes that Jesus is his living Savior.

But on the first day of his philosophy class his faith starts to go through the grindstone when he learns that in order to pass the class he has to deny the existence of God. Josh never figured that his faith would get in the way of him getting his degree. So this shakes him up pretty good. He tries to graciously get out of this requirement. But Professor Radisson won't budge. If Josh wants to continue in the class, he has to make a convincing argument for the existence of God and the semester will culminate in a debate between the teacher and the student on whether God exists or not. If Josh can't convince the rest of his class that God exists, then he will fail the class, and his entire academic future will go up in flames. And that's all I'll tell you about it because you'll probably want to see it eventually now!

But have you ever been there... in that place where it feels like your faith is being put through the grindstone? Maybe it wasn't quite as dramatic as the college philosophy class that Josh experienced, but maybe it was in college or in high school where it was implied that you can't be a Christian and still have a working brain. Or maybe it was as you were watching something on TV where someone's mere speculation was presented as if it were based on facts while at the same time your beliefs were mocked as if they were founded on a bunch of myths. Or maybe it was when you were challenged by a brash family member at Thanksgiving. Or by an argumentative co-worker at the Christmas party. Maybe it was when you saw someone's post on Facebook.

Have you been in that place where your faith meets the grindstone of doubt? I have. That's why I always tell people that if it seems that when I stand up here and speak in front of you with conviction about my faith it's because God has used the grindstone to sharpen and polish it and I'm pretty sure God's not done with me yet either.



Because here's the thing about a grindstone {pic}. When used by someone with skillful hands who knows what they're doing, it's a helpful stone used to sharpen and polish tools. On the other hand it can just as easily be used to make a tool duller, harder to use, and less effective. Doubt is kind of like this. In skillful hands, our doubt can be a useful tool that God uses to change us—bringing us to have a sharper and more polished faith conviction. This confidence helps keep us going.

But in the devil's hands, doubt can be a grindstone used to grind us down and eventually destroy us.

Actually we see this happening even to Jesus' own disciples when their faith was put through the grindstone. In our text from the Bible that I'm going to read in just a little bit we're going to find Jesus' disciples all huddled together on Easter Sunday of all days. Except that they're full of fear. They're full of doubts. They've heard the reports of the women who said that Jesus is alive. They've heard Peter and John return to tell them that they found the tomb empty. But they remain unconvinced. Seeing Jesus brutally murdered and his broken body buried was such a traumatic experience that it's left them feeling deeply shaken. They are afraid of those who killed Jesus. They are afraid for their future. They don't know any more whether their sins can ever be forgiven. What does God think of them? The grindstone of doubt was grinding them into cowards hiding behind locked doors. They are not sure how they could keep going in life when the one who they believed was the Son of God is dead.

But look at how Jesus skillfully takes control of this grindstone of their doubt. Take note of how he deals with them. We read today in the Bible from John 20:19-31...

<sup>19</sup> *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* <sup>20</sup> *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

<sup>21</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* <sup>22</sup> *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

So how does Jesus deal with them? Not harshly in anger. Not with a stern rebuke. Rather he meets them right smack in the middle of their doubt with mercy and forgiveness. This says so much about God's heart and his desire when we are confronted with doubts about him or his love, doesn't it? Jesus knows exactly what troubles his disciples and the first thing he says is, *Peace*. He then says it again, *Peace be with you*. "Go away, fear. Get lost, doubt. Peace is here. And here is proof. See my nail-marked hands. See my spear pierced side. These are the wounds of my crucifixion that won your pardon. Peace be with you, friends, because I've been to hell and back to secure this forgiveness for you." And then what does Jesus say? *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*.

In the hands of the devil, he (the devil) wants to use doubt as a grindstone to turn people into cowards like Jesus' disciples hiding behind locked doors and keeping quiet. But in the skillful hands of God, he (God) wants to use doubt as a grindstone to turn people from cowards into ambassadors. This is amazing, isn't it? Here the doubt that Jesus' disciples had about God and his willingness to forgive them is replaced by a commission from Jesus to share that forgiveness with others. *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*. As Jesus continued to sharpen their faith over the next couple weeks he would give them a great commission to go into all the world with the gospel.

Now their reason to be afraid of the Jewish leaders didn't necessary change, did it? Testifying about Jesus would still be quite dangerous. In many places around the world today it still is. So the danger didn't change. Their reason for fear didn't change. But God changed the disciples so that they weren't afraid anymore...so much so that every single one of Jesus' disciples was willing to go out into the world and die testifying to what they saw with their own eyes—that Jesus is alive. What else could cause that change but a strong conviction that God is not dead? What they experienced, that change from doubt to confidence

and fear to forgiveness, they wanted others to experience too. So Jesus in love used the grindstone of doubt to sharpen and polish their faith that they would hold onto his promise even unto death, “I am with you always.”

Friends, how might he be doing the same thing with you? Some of the best ambassadors for Jesus are those who have experienced the sharpening of faith that doubt in God’s hand produces. So think about this. Just because you have some doubts or you have some unanswered questions doesn’t mean God doesn’t love you. It doesn’t mean God can’t still use you. It might just mean that God wants to use your experience of going through the grindstone of doubt to sharpen you and to polish you for a purpose that you right now can’t even imagine—the purpose of helping someone else like you come to faith in a gracious, forgiving, living Savior. Because of your life experience, you might be just the person God is preparing or has prepared to reach even one particular person like you.

Martin Luther is another good example of this. He was once a coward before God. He feared God’s judgment. He had profound doubts every day about God’s love. So he went to hide himself away from the world in a monastery thinking this would help. It didn’t. But over time as his doubts drove him more and more into the Bible, he eventually became a courageous ambassador of Jesus and someone God used to courageously share the comfort of the gospel with many others. God can turn cowards into ambassadors. He can do the same with skeptics...

<sup>24</sup> *Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.*

<sup>25</sup> *So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”*

*But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

Classic, huh? It’s no wonder that the one word everybody associates with Thomas is what? That’s right. *Doubting*. Doubting Thomas. He wanted proof. Tangible evidence. Is Jesus really the God he claimed to be? Thomas didn’t think so. He thought, “He’s dead.” But Thomas is not so different from a lot of us, is he? The devil wants to use the grindstone of doubt to make us skeptics like Thomas when it comes to God’s existence. He wants us to think God is dead.

<sup>26</sup> *A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”* <sup>27</sup> *Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

<sup>28</sup> *Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”*

<sup>29</sup> *Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

I just appreciate so much that the Bible records for us this story about Thomas and Jesus. Because here’s the great thing...Jesus knew Thomas’ doubts. He knew exactly what Thomas had said. And so what this means to me is that you don’t have to hide your doubts behind the locked doors of your heart either. We can talk about them with each other. We can ask the questions that are on our minds. You can come to church and have questions. In fact there is no better place to be when you’re going through the grindstone.

Jesus knew what Thomas said and yet what did Jesus do? He loved him enough to meet him in the middle of his doubts too.

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

In other words what did Thomas say? "God's not dead! Jesus, you are God!" And do you notice what Jesus didn't say after that? He didn't say, "Whoah Thomas, hold on there. Don't get carried away with yourself. I'm flattered that you think so highly of me but don't confuse me with the Almighty God." No, Jesus received his confession. He received his worship. Not even God's holy angels would dare do that.

In the book of Revelation, John who is one of Jesus' disciples, tried worshiping an angel—one of God's special messengers. John says, *"At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!"* (Revelation 19:10)

Friends, why do we worship Jesus? Because Jesus is God. He is fully God who took on a human nature like ours. And so he is the only one whose sacrifice could take away the punishment for our sins. He is the only one whose resurrection could remove the curse of death. He is the only one whose empty tomb could guarantee that heaven is now open to all of us who believe in him. It's ok if you weren't there with Thomas and Jesus' other disciples a week after Easter. It's ok if you weren't there to witness with your own eyes Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It's ok if you weren't there at the creation at the world to see something spring up out of nothing. Jesus was. He was there. He was always there. God was there. And so no matter what some people might say today, **God's not dead and so you can keep going in life.** You can keep growing in faith. Faith in Jesus Christ isn't blind faith. It's based on actual eye witness testimony of those who saw him alive...and the Holy Spirit's work in your heart.

<sup>30</sup> *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*

<sup>31</sup> *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

You have still have some doubts about God? Whether he loves you or even if he exists? God invites you to keep going and to let his skilled hands sharpen and polish your faith. This is what he promises to do as you keep going through the eyewitness accounts in the Bible of those disciples who saw him alive, who heard him speak, who ate with him, and touched his scars. That's what we do together in church. That's what we do in my Bible 101 groups. That's what we do in our Sheep Squads. And because Jesus also knows how truly weak we can be as human beings this is what he invites us to do as we keep going to the sacrament of The Lord's Supper. In this special meal he invites us to come with all our weakness and all our doubts and all our fears and to believe this promise: "Here, see, touch, take, eat. This is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood. This is for you. This is for the forgiveness of your sins. I am surely present with you now at this feast just as one day you will surely be with me forever in paradise."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, **God's not dead...so you can keep going!**

[Video Conclusion](#): Our Mission After Easter

## My Next Steps

**Point to Ponder:** In the skillful hands of God, he wants to use doubt as a grindstone to turn people from cowards into ambassadors.

**Treasure to Share:** <sup>30</sup> *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* <sup>31</sup> *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20:30-31)

**Action to Take:** If you have personally had struggles and questions, then you may be in a better position to help those who have questions about God. Talk about the doubts that you have with a trusted Christian friend or pastor and seek God's answers together.