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**SERIES: CHRISTMAS: HOPE IS BORN  
PART 4: HOPE FOR OVERCOMING DOUBT**

This is a message that I am confident is relevant to every single person in the room, because in a group this size there's certainly many of us who right now are in a season of spiritual doubt. Our world has been turned upside down and we're living with situations so painful that doubt is our constant companion. Some of you are not in a season of doubt right now, but it's just around the corner. Some event is going to come into your life that's going to turn your world upside down and lead you to a season of questions and doubts. Some of you may have, right now, a family member, a friend, a close co-worker who is going through a season of doubt. God wants you to be His messenger in their life in this coming week.

The fact is doubting comes naturally for all of us. We are born questioners. Babies, when they begin to learn to talk, one of the first words they learn is the word, "Why." And just because you become a follower of Christ does not mean that all of your doubts and all of your questions are forever erased. In fact, the Bible is filled with men and women who are devoted, passionate followers of God, but who regularly find themselves in a situation of questioning their faith and questioning God.

One of those people in the Bible is a man named Asaph. Asaph wrote some of the chapters in the book of Psalms. Listen in as Asaph shares some of his doubts. When you listen you can hear in his words the agony and the angst of his struggle. You can hear his brutally honest questions that he brings to God.

**Psalm 77:1-9, "I cry out to God without holding back. Oh, that God would listen to me! 2 When I was in deep trouble, I searched for the Lord. All night long I pray, with hands lifted toward heaven, pleading. There can be no joy for me until He acts. 3 I think of God, and I moan, overwhelmed with longing for His help. 4 You don't let me sleep. I am too distressed even to pray! 5 I think of the good old days, long since ended, 6 when my nights were filled with joyful songs. I search my soul and think about the**

**difference now. 7 Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will He never again show me favor? 8 Is His unfailing love gone forever? Have His promises permanently failed? 9 Has God forgotten to be kind? Has He slammed the door on His compassion?"**

Let those questions sink in for just a moment. There's a common thread that ties all these questions together. It is the thread of doubt. Will God reject us forever? Do His promises no longer stand? Has God forgotten how to be merciful? Wow!

Those are questions that often aren't very politically correct in some churches. Some churches portray a kind of Christianity where Christians never ask questions. They never struggle with doubts. But I'm glad to be a part of a church where it's ok to just be real, with no pretence or no façade, to just show up with questions that are raw and gut level, and it's ok. God isn't threatened by those questions, and neither are we as a church, because we all struggle with them.

Martin Luther once said, "Knowledge and doubt are inseparable to man. Only God and certain madmen have no doubts." I think he's right. They're gut level questions that I want us to struggle with in our time together this morning.

As I was preparing for this teaching today I continued to think through what is God's purpose for allowing us to struggle? I have heard so many people ask me, "Scott why doesn't God make it easier for us? Why is it that when you become a follower of Christ, why doesn't God just drop in the mail a blueprint for the rest of your life full of explanations? Or why doesn't He, when you face a crisis, send you an email explaining to you all His purposes and the reasons why He's doing what He's doing in your life?"

I have thought about this issue of pain, problems and trouble for a long time. Here is where my biblical search has led me to this point in my life. The reason God doesn't make it easier is because He knows us. He knows our nature, He knows our tendency, and God knows that when life is easy and when everything is making sense, and we're comfortable, and we've got it all buttoned down, our tendency is to forget God. We looked at last week that God uses our

trials and troubles as an opportunity for us to learn, patience, endurance, steadfastness, and stamina. The tests to our faith are all about our spiritual, emotional and relational maturity. What do we call a child that doesn't face problems and has everything done for them? SPOILED. Correct. Life equals difficulty and pain. The mature person embraces pain and learns to trust Jesus in and through them.

That's exactly what He says to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 6 when they're about to enter the Promised Land, and Moses says to them, **"10 The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land He swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. 11 The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, 12 be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. 13 You must fear the Lord your God and serve Him. When you take an oath, you must use only His name."**

God is most interested in our relationship with Him. When everything comes easy, and when life makes sense and there are no doubts because of the pain and turmoil, it is our tendency to forget God. When life falls apart and when doubts arise, our tendency is to look for an answer. But God wants us not to look for an answer as much as He wants us to look *for and to Him*.

Notice the next statement: **It is our nature to look for reasons. It is God's nature to offer relationship.** We think the answer to our doubts is explanations. God says, "The answer to your doubts is Me." It is God's higher value to teach you how to trust Him in the midst of your doubts than provide you explanation and proof as to why you shouldn't have doubts.

But we want an explanation. That's how we're wired. We want to be able to connect all of the dots. We're very much like Thomas in the New Testament when after Jesus had resurrected from the dead He appeared to the disciples one day. Thomas wasn't there. When he came back they said, "We have seen

the Lord.” In John 20:25, **“Thomas replied, ‘I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in His hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in His side.’”** So a few days later the Bible says that Jesus appeared to Thomas. In John 20:27, **“Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see My hands. Put your hand into the wound in My side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!’”** Jesus put a higher premium on faith than on visible proof. **“Blessed are those who haven’t seen Me and believe anyway.”** (v. 29) Blessed are those who don’t have answers, but they choose to trust anyway. Blessed are those whose minds are filled with doubts, yet they choose faith anyway.

I want to be sure that we really understand this. Because, like Thomas, we all have doubts in life’s journey. Having doubts doesn’t make you less spiritual. It doesn’t make you less of a Christian at all. In fact, seasons of doubt can lead to some of the greatest spiritual growth in your life. What it does mean is that we allow doubt to work for us and not become proud and arrogant of our skepticism and the questions we ask. So we need to take action that demonstrates that we’re willing to trust Jesus instead of demanding more answers by asking more questions.

There are:

## **I. Three benefits that doubt can serve:**

### **A. Doubts can drive me to Father God**

Often times it is when our lives are turned upside down, and life doesn’t make sense, and I’m in a crisis that I am more prone to seek God for His help and His presence. Notice how Asaph starts this Psalm in verses 1 and 2, **“I cry out to God without holding back. Oh, that God would listen to me! 2 When I was in deep trouble, I searched for the Lord. All night long I pray, with hands lifted toward heaven, pleading. There can be no joy for me until He acts.”** How is that for letting your doubts and problems drive you to God? God allows pain in your life so that you will whole-heartedly turn to Him. He’s not being mean; He wants relationship with you.

## **B. Doubts can cause me to wrestle with life's difficult questions**

When I'm walking along and everything's good and life's easy and everything's comfortable I tend to live at surface level. But when my world gets turned upside down, and I lose a job, or the doctor says to me, "It's cancer," or my spouse walks out, or I discover my kid has a drinking problem, all of a sudden I move beyond the surface. Now it's down to some soul-searching questions that every one of us has to wrestle with some time in our life. Questions like, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Where are You in this? What is Your plan in allowing me to go through this painful experience at this time in my life?" Those are all important questions. And until times of doubt and crisis come, often you won't ever get to them.

## **C. Doubts can deepen my faith**

When you walk in times of doubt and you come out on the other side, often our faith is deepened and our confidence in God is strengthened. If you are doubting certain aspects of Christianity or your relationship with Him, that is okay. Ask Him to make Himself real to you and He will.

Look at point two:

## **II. Doubt plus surrender plus trust equals freedom**

Let me explain. It is often true in our experience that seasons of doubts lead us to a place of surrender. We often surrender because we have no other options. We get to a place where we say, "God, I don't understand. This doesn't make sense to me. I have my doubts. It's not in my control. But I yield to Your will and to what You want to do." It is in those times of surrender that now you begin to really learn to trust God and trust that even when you don't understand, He is a good God and He can be trusted with your life.

When you walk through that sequence – Doubt to surrender to trust – it equals freedom—because now you have the freedom to not have to be in control; to

not have to try to achieve or prove something to somebody or to yourself. Because when you surrender you die to yourself and you die to your own agenda. Now you are submitted and placed in the hands of a good and gracious God who can be trusted with your life. So doubt can drive me to God. It forces me to wrestle with my difficult questions, and it can deepen my trust and relationship and faith in God. For the next few minutes I want to look at Psalm 77 and some practical steps that Asaph took to deal with his own doubts.

### **III. Three practical steps on how to turn doubt into faith:**

#### **A. Remember God's track record**

This is about gaining perspective. This is about stepping back and looking at the big picture. Psalm 77:11-12 says, **"I recall all You have done, O Lord; I remember Your wonderful deeds of long ago. 12 They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about them."**

Circle four words. **Recall, remember, thoughts, thinking.** They all refer to my mind. Because here's the principle I want you to get. Memory is a friend to faith. I can give personal testimony to this because I've walked with the Lord now for more than fifty years since I became a Christian. God has an amazing track record in my life of faithfulness. Even when I didn't understand and even when I had doubts, He has a track record of being a faithful God.

In this passage Asaph says, "I recall all You have done, O Lord; I remember Your wonderful deeds of long ago. 12 They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about them." Some translations say, **"I meditate on Your wonderful works. I ponder them because they are true."** And these stories in the Bible are historically verifiable. If God is able to take two million people out of the bondage of Pharaoh in Egypt and deliver them; and if God is able to part the waters of the Red Sea, an actual miracle, and if God by His powers is able to knock down the walls around the entire city of Jericho; and if God is able to take Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and deliver them from the fiery furnace completely unharmed; and if God is able to shut the mouths of the lions so they don't eat the prophet Daniel; and if God is able to take His own Son and

raise Him from the dead--maybe that's a track record that shows that God will take care of you too.

David says something very similar as he calls us to remember all of God's blessings in our lives in Psalm 103:1-5, "**Praise the Lord, I tell myself; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name. 2 Praise the Lord, I tell myself, and never forget the good things He does for me. 3 He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. 4 He ransoms me from death and surrounds me with love and tender mercies. 5 He fills my life with good things; my youth is renewed like the eagles!**"

Let me give you just a practical suggestion. If you're struggling through a time of doubt right now, I would encourage you to list the amount of time you give to personal worship. One suggestion you might take is get yourself some worship cd's and while you're driving in the car, before you go back to bed—fill your mind and heart with the worship and praise of your Lord and Savior. Worship will help you remember God's track record in your life.

## **B. Trust God's character and power**

Psalm 77:13-14 says, "**O God, Your ways are holy. Is there any god as mighty as You? 14 You are the God of miracles and wonders! You demonstrate Your awesome power among the nations.**"

Asaph says it not only helps me deal with my doubts to realize God's power but to realize God's character. He says in Psalm 77 that, "**God's ways are holy. They are righteous.**" In other words, God's character can be trusted. Psalm 34:8, "**Taste and see that the Lord is good. O the joys of those who trust in Him.**" Hope, that confident assurance that God is who He says He is and He can and will do what He says, comes not in getting an explanation for my doubts--but in seeing who God is. We know this about His character, that God is never evil. He never seeks to harm His children; as a good Father, He is always motivated by love.

That's why I love this statement: **Even when His hand cannot be traced, His heart can be trusted.**

The longer you walk with God and the more intimately you come to know Him, the more you will rest in this truth, that God cannot compromise His character. Hebrews 6:18-19 says, **“So God has given us both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold to His promise with confidence. 19 This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God’s inner sanctuary.”** He says the character of God becomes an anchor for my soul. So even when life and confusion and doubts toss me around, my life is anchored in this fact: God can be trusted.

So Asaph says, “I’ve got my questions, I’ve got my doubts, but when I think about God’s track record, my hope is strengthened. I think about His power and His character and my faith is strengthened.” There is one last thing that he does that I want us to learn from.

He teaches us to...

### **C. Celebrate your future**

Psalm 77:15 Asaph says, **“You have redeemed Your people by Your strength.”** I encourage you to circle that word **“redeemed.”** It’s kind of a churchy word. Maybe you’re not real sure what it means, but it simply means to be bought back out of slavery. For those of us who have entered into a personal relationship with Christ, we are redeemed from Satan, sin and our own selfishness. We have been spiritually changed and transformed. We have been given eternal life.

Titus 2:12-14 says, **“We are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God, 13 while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be**

**revealed. 14 He gave His life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing what is right.”** We know how it ends. Jesus comes back, and He comes back victoriously.

Jim Collins in his book, Good to Great, recounts a fascinating discussion he had with Admiral Jim Stockdale. Jim was the highest ranking military officer as a POW in the camp that affectionately became known as the Hanoi Hilton. From 1965 to 1973 he was in that camp and tortured more than twenty times with unimaginable brutality that has left him crippled today. When Jim Collins asked the admiral how he made it through those times of uncertainty in the camp, listen to what the admiral said. He said, “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only would I get out, but also I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life which in retrospect I would not trade.”

Biblical hope is not passive waiting. It is not ignorant denial. It is not wishful thinking. It is not blind optimism. It is squaring off and facing directly head-on your doubts, and you cling to a God’s promised future anyway. That is biblical hope.

No one exemplifies this better than Job, whose life was completely turned upside down, who got no answers from heaven, whose mind was filled with doubt, yet it still says in Job 19:25-27, **“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He will stand upon the earth at last. 26 And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! 27 I will see Him for myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!”** In spite of the uncertainty of his circumstances he was absolutely certain about his destiny. And you can be too.

As we begin to wind down I want to get really practical. You’ll see a line in your notes that says: **My next step is...** What I’d like you to do is over the next minute or so consider, “What is it that God really wants you to take away in a practical way from our time together?” I want to encourage you to write something in there. Maybe for you it’s, “I need to spend more time in the Word

of God, becoming familiar with the stories of God and the activity of God so that I can understand His track record.” Maybe for some of you it’s just picking up those CDs like we talked about and beginning to fill your mind and heart with the truth of God and the music and worship of God. Maybe you’ve got a friend and that friend’s name has come to mind during this message this morning (afternoon), and you just need to pick up a copy of the message and give it to them. Maybe you’re here and you would honestly say, “As you talk about being redeemed, that’s not my experience. I’m not there yet.” Right where you sit today in simple faith you could just say, “God, I know I’m lost. I know that Jesus died for my sins and right now I want to ask You to come into my life.” And you could be part of those who are redeemed. Maybe you need to follow the Lord in baptism and just publicly identify yourself as a follower of Christ. What I want to ask you is, “What is it you could take from today and put into practice after this service?”

As we finish I want to leave you with one verse that I think summarizes much of what I’ve been trying to communicate during our time together. It comes from John 6 after Jesus had fed the multitudes with fishes and loaves. The Bible says the next day the crowd came back, and Jesus responded to them rather harshly. He said, “The only reason you’re here today is because I fed you yesterday.” Then the Bible says He began to teach them. And He said to them things like, “Life is more than just food and more than just meeting your physical needs,” and He began to teach them about the things of God. When He got done, the Bible says their response to Him was “This is a hard teaching.” And the Bible says, “Many of them left that day and stopped following Christ.” And when they left and they were walking away Jesus turned to the rest of the disciples that were still there and He said to these guys, “What about you? Are you going to follow them or are you going to stay with Me?” Peter responds in verse 68 of John 6 with these words, **“Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them and we know that You’re the holy one of God.”**

I think there’s a defining moment in the life of those of us who are followers of Christ when we say, “I don’t really understand. I’m not sure what God’s up to. I have lots of doubts. But when I look at God’s track record and I understand His

character and I see how powerful He is, and when I understand what my future is, where else would I go?" And you resolve in your heart, and with faith and trust say to God, "I believe. I don't have it all figured out. I don't know how to connect all the dots but I trust You." I know that for some of you right now that's where you are. It doesn't mean that because you make that decision it's done and you never have to revisit it again. Sometimes you have to make it daily. But I want us to pray and pray especially for those of you who are going through those tough times right now.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the opportunity to be here this morning. There's no doubt there's a number of people going through a season of doubt in their lives right now. They're struggling and they don't have answers and they're not sure what You're trying to do in their lives. I pray that Your presence would be real to them, that they would understand who You are and the kind of track record You have and that You're a God of good character, and You'd never try to do anything to try to hurt us, and that You have promised us a sure and certain future. So Lord I pray that across this room our faith would begin to soar, and we wouldn't seek so much of an explanation as much as we would seek You. Because You are a good God and a gracious Father. So we surrender ourselves to You and say to You that we love You and we trust You and we give our lives to follow You. In Jesus' name. Amen.