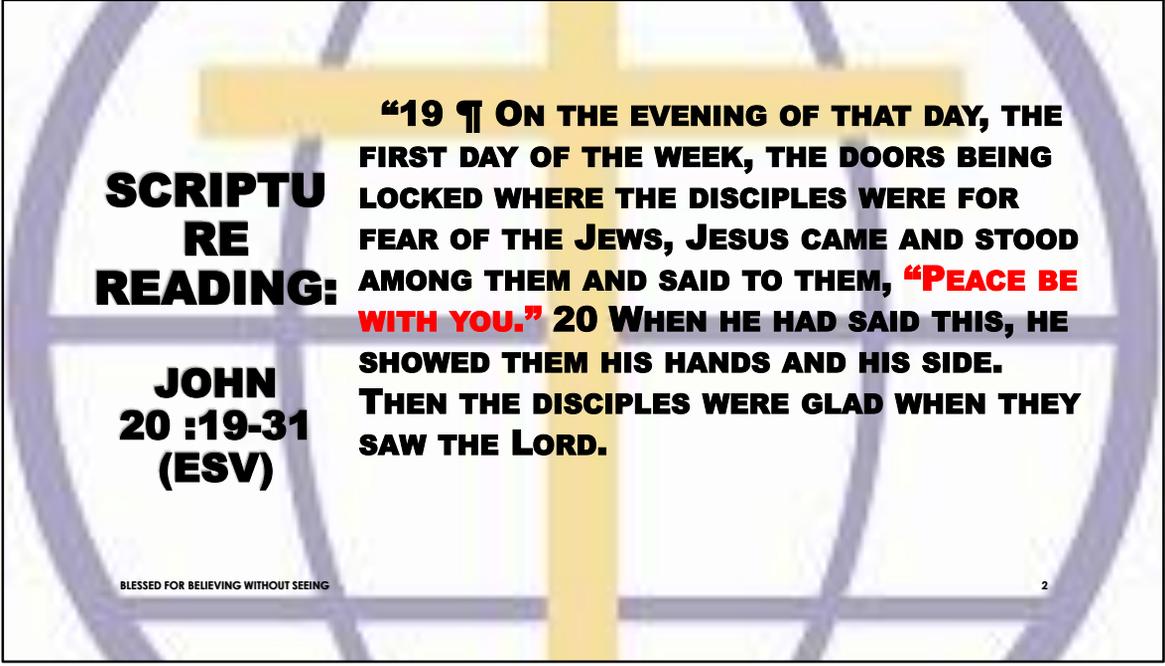


BLESSED FOR BELIEVING WITHOUT SEEING

**Grace Communion International
Minister: Eric Vautour**

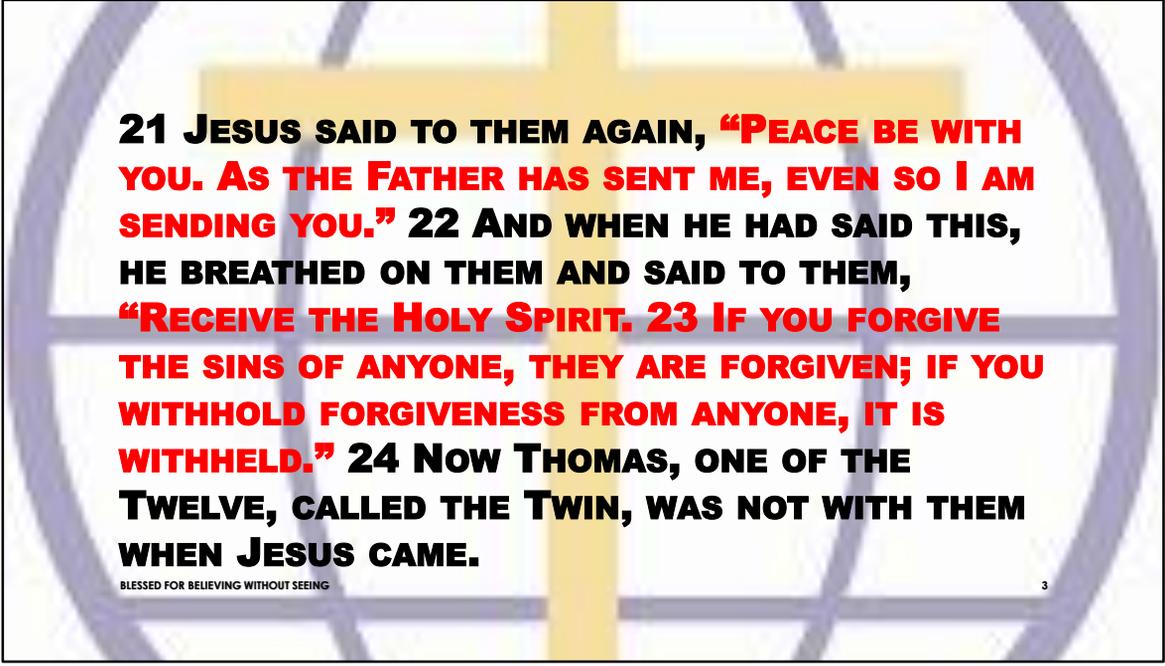
Date: April 28, 2019



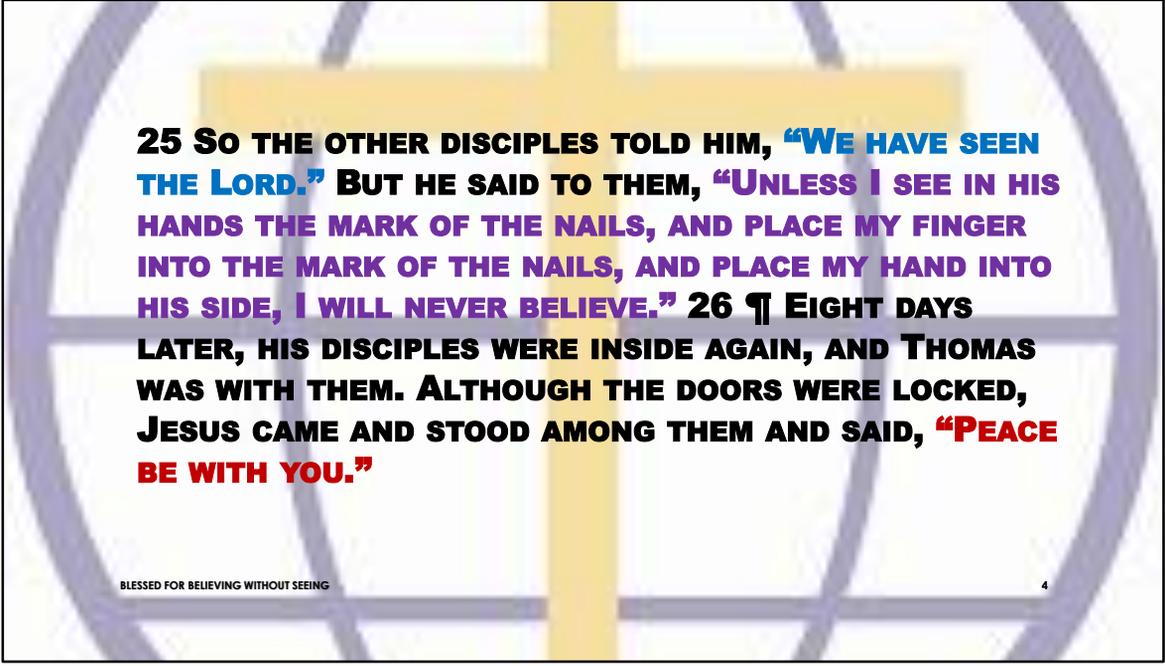
**SCRIPTURE
READING:**

**JOHN
20 :19-31
(ESV)**

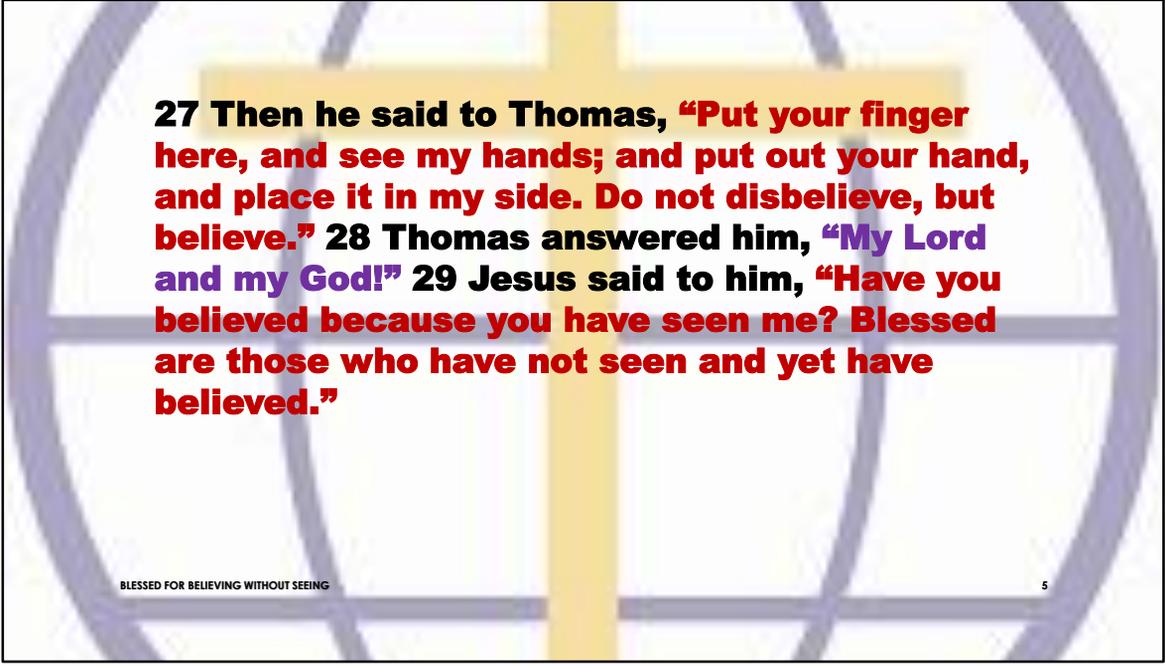
“19 ¶ ON THE EVENING OF THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, THE DOORS BEING LOCKED WHERE THE DISCIPLES WERE FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS, JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID TO THEM, “PEACE BE WITH YOU.” 20 WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE. THEN THE DISCIPLES WERE GLAD WHEN THEY SAW THE LORD.



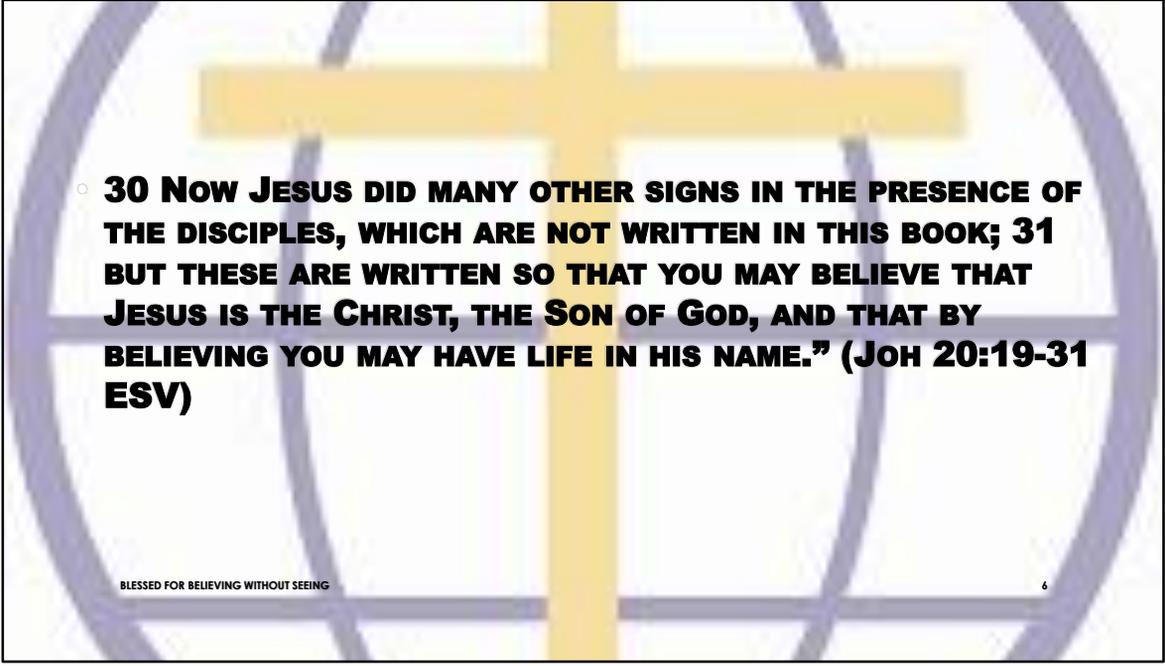
21 JESUS SAID TO THEM AGAIN, “PEACE BE WITH YOU. AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I AM SENDING YOU.” 22 AND WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, HE BREATHED ON THEM AND SAID TO THEM, “RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. 23 IF YOU FORGIVE THE SINS OF ANYONE, THEY ARE FORGIVEN; IF YOU WITHHOLD FORGIVENESS FROM ANYONE, IT IS WITHHELD.” 24 NOW THOMAS, ONE OF THE TWELVE, CALLED THE TWIN, WAS NOT WITH THEM WHEN JESUS CAME.

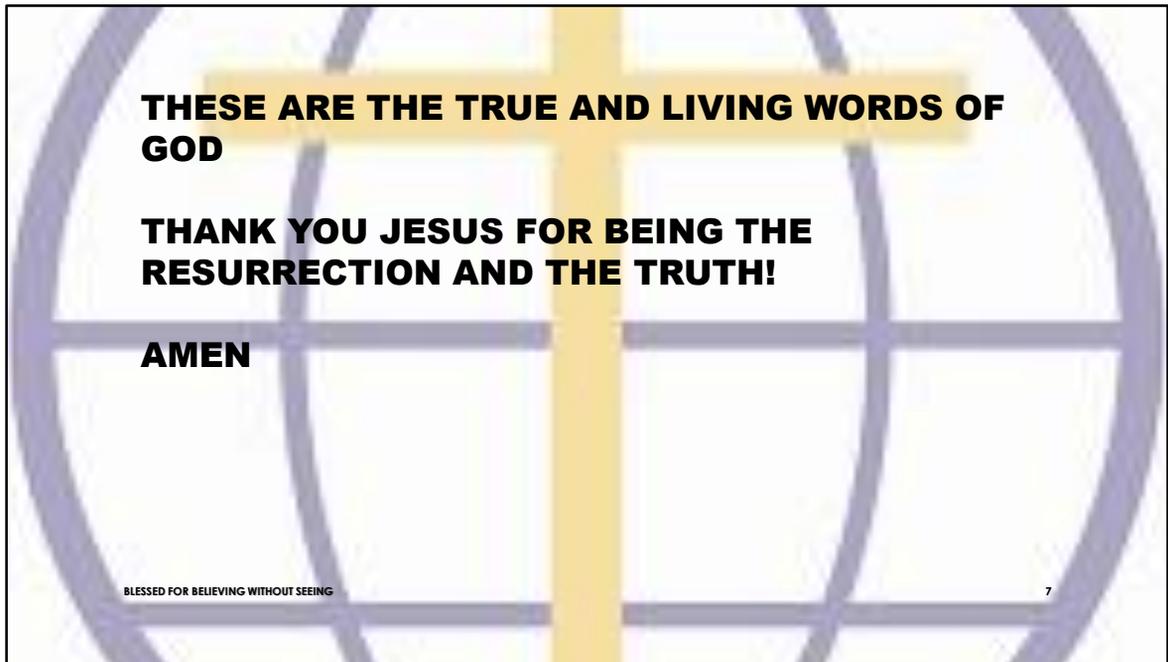


25 So the other disciples told him, **“We have seen the Lord.”** But he said to them, **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”** **26 ¶** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you.”**



27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

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- **30 Now JESUS DID MANY OTHER SIGNS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK; 31 BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT BY BELIEVING YOU MAY HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME.” (JOH 20:19-31 ESV)**



Recently, I was reading about the conversion of Josh McDowell in his introductory comments of a book he wrote, **“THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT, Evidence I & II Fully Updated in One Volume to Answer Questions Challenging Christians in the 21st Century.”**

I’m sharing his story because it has many similarities with the apostle Thomas, although there are obviously differences. As I summarize and talk about his conversion, I encourage you to see and hear the invisible hand of God in the process of his conversion.

As a teenager, God was already working with Josh McDowell without his being aware of it. He wanted the answers to three basic questions:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- Where am I going?

As a young student, he began to look for answers.

As he grew up, where he lived, everyone seemed to be into religion. He thought he

would be able to find the answers by being religious so he began to attend church. It was very purposeful. He got into it at the 150%. He went to church in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. He reports that he felt worse inside the church than outside.

Josh was brought up as a farmer in Michigan, USA. Farmers are practical people. His father had told him that if something did not work that he was to chuck it aside. So he chucked religion aside.

He did not find answers in religion so he thought that he would find answers for his quest for happiness and meaning in education. He enrolled in university. He was greatly disappointed. He said that you could find a lot of things in University but you cannot find truth about the meaning of life.

He questioned the professors to a point where he made a nuisance of himself but he found no answers to the important questions of life he was seeking. He saw fellow students who had many problems, many frustrations and unanswered questions about life. He said that one time he was walking around a university campus where he saw a student with a sign on his back: **'Do not follow me, I'm lost.'**

He realized that he would not be able to find the true answer to his quest in institutions of higher learning.

Then he tried another avenue. Josh McDowell is obviously a very intelligent, brilliant and pleasant man. He thought that if he would obtain prestige that he might find satisfaction. Among his fellow students who had the most influence were the ones who control the purse strings and who were student leaders. So he got elected. He got to know and to be known by them. He became part of the elite who also controlled some of the University money. This also turned out to be an empty pursuit with all the other things he had tried.

Feeling empty, he began to look for the weekends to have pleasure. His happiness would revolve around Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Every Monday morning, he would wake up with a headache because of his behaviours during the weekend.

He continued to feel very empty. He could find nothing that would help him to know who he was and his purpose in life.

Then one day, he noticed a small group of people on campus—eight students and two faculty members. There was something different about them. To Josh, it appeared that they knew where they were going in life. They had a quality about them that he greatly admired—**conviction**. He enjoyed the dynamics of their conviction. So he wanted to

know more about them.

There was something more about this group that caught his attention. It was love. These people not only loved one another but they also loved and cared for people outside their group. As he says, **'They didn't just talk about love; they got involved in loving others.'**

Since this quality of love was foreign to him, he decided to get to know them better and to become friends with them.

One day, as he was having a conversation with some members of this group. The subject of God came up. This made him uncomfortable but he put up a big front, not to show how uneasy he was. He told them that Christianity was for weaklings and not intellectuals. But deep down, he wished so much that he had what they had. His pride got in the way. He did not admit to his emptiness of heart.

During that conversation, he turned to one of the girls in the group and said, **'Tell me, what changed your lives? Why are you so different from the other students and faculty?'**

This girl looked him squarely in the eye and gave him an answer he never expected. She answered **'Jesus Christ'**.

Josh quickly responded by telling her not to give him that kind of garbage. He told her squarely that he was fed up with religion, the Bible, and the church.

The girl quickly responded, **'Mr., I didn't say religion; I said Jesus Christ.'**

He was surprised by these girl's courage and conviction. He apologized for his attitude. He said to her, **"But I'm sick and tired of religion and religious people. I don't want anything to do with it".**

Josh was a pre-law student. These new friends gave him a challenge. They challenged him to examine intellectually the claim that Jesus Christ is God's Son.

He thought that this was a dumb challenge. He did not think that Christianity could stand up to an intellectual examination. Needless to say, he was cynical, doubting and unbelieving.

Day after day, they continued to issue this challenge. He became so irritated and frustrated with their insistence that he decided to take up their challenge.

His purpose was not to prove that Jesus was the Son of God but to refute that Christianity did not have a leg to stand on and not sound foundation.

One day as he was sitting in the library in London England. He sensed a voice within himself saying, **“Josh, you don’t have a leg to stand on.”** He quickly dismissed that voice. However, the more he studied the more he heard this voice.

He returned to the United States. He couldn’t sleep at night. From 10 o’clock to about 4 in the morning, he would lie awake trying to refute the overwhelming evidence that he was accumulating that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

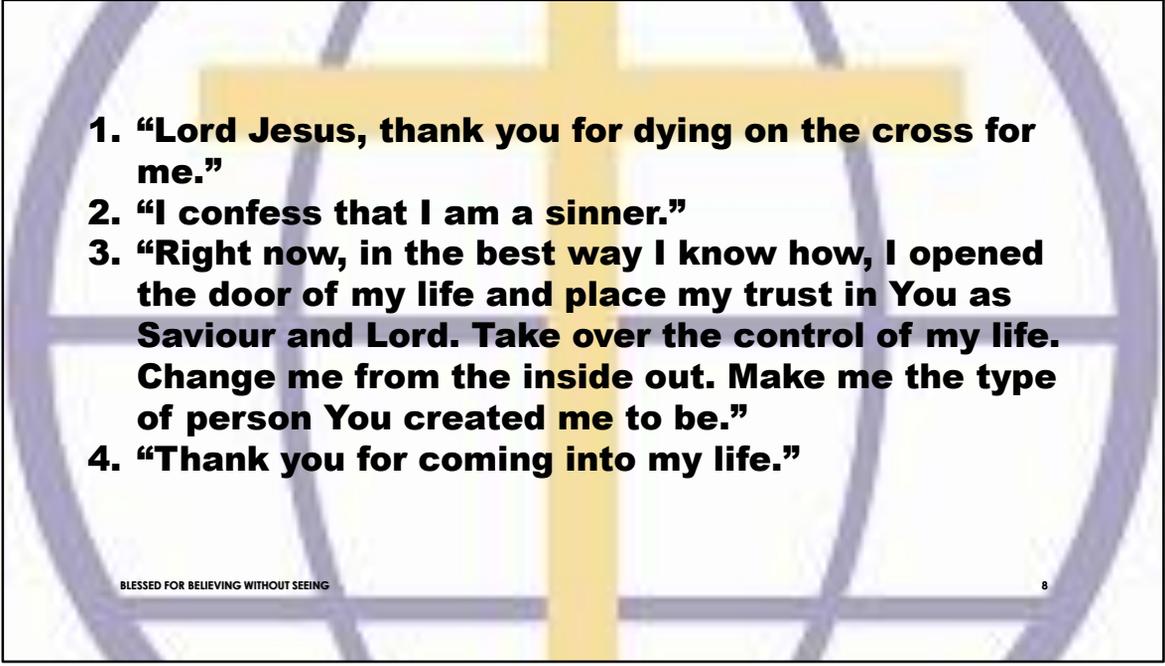
Doing all this research, he began to realize that he was intellectually dishonest. In his mind, he knew he was finding the truth about Jesus but in his will, he resisted and did not want to submit to it.

The Scripture found in Revelation 3:20 began to reverberate in his mind more and more. **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Re 3:20 ESV)**

For him, there was no faster way of ruining his good time and fun than by becoming a Christian, a follower of Jesus.

He had a major inner conflict which he needed to resolve. He said that it was driving him crazy. So one night, in Michigan, he decided to put Christ’s claim to the supreme test. One evening in his home, at the end of his second year in university, he became a Christian.

He said 4 things to Jesus Christ: (new slide)

- 
1. **“Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me.”**
 2. **“I confess that I am a sinner.”**
 3. **“Right now, in the best way I know how, I opened the door of my life and place my trust in You as Saviour and Lord. Take over the control of my life. Change me from the inside out. Make me the type of person You created me to be.”**
 4. **“Thank you for coming into my life.”**

BLESSED FOR BELIEVING WITHOUT SEEING

8

1 – Josh McDowell realize that he was deeply loved by God. What brought him to Jesus was the realization that Jesus loved him enough to die for him.

2 – He had no problem realizing that there were things in his life that were not in line with living in the grace of God. He knew what the Bible said, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 Jo 1:9 ESV). He believed this scripture. He knew that He was forgiven at the cross of Calvary.

After he prayed, nothing happened. If anything, he felt worse. After he prayed, he felt almost physically sick. He was afraid that he had made a decision based on his emotions, a decision he would later regret. He began to fear what his friends would say about him when they found out. He basically thought—what have I done?” He felt that he had gone off the deep end.

In the one and half years that followed, his entire life was changed. His perception of life and his view of people changed.

His ultimate goal was to become governor of Michigan. He had planned to reach his

goal by using people to reach this plateau of political success. He basically saw people as objects to be used for his own purposes.

After he gave his life and surrendered his life in the hands of Jesus, his perception of people completely changed. Instead of using others to serve himself, he wanted to serve them. He became other-centered rather than self-centered—a complete change in orientation of his life.

Josh also had a bad temper. He would go into a rage even when people looked at him in the wrong way. In his first year of university, he almost killed a man. He said that his bad temper was so ingrained that he did not consciously try to change it but one day he faced a situation where he would have gone into a rage but he discovered that his bad temper was gone. As he said, he is not perfect yet but there has been a significant change in his life.

The most significant thing that changed his life was the area of hatred and bitterness.

His father was heavily addicted to alcohol. He was the man whom he hated the most on all the face of the earth. He felt contempt for him and despised him. At night, as a young 8 year boy, he would lie in bed figuring out ways of killing his dad without being caught by the police.

Growing up, his father was the town drunk. Rarely, did they see him sober. His friends would laugh at his father, and he would uncomfortably laugh with them. Inside, deep down, he felt pain, shame and disappointment. He wished his dad would have been different.

His father was violent towards his mother. This is what he writes, **“I would sometimes find my mother in the barn, lying in the manure behind the cows where my dad had beaten her with a hose until she could not get up. My hatred seethed and I vowed to myself, when I am strong enough, I’m going to kill him.”**

The situation was so bad that when visitors would come to visit, his father being drunk, Josh would tie him up behind the barn, tie his hands behind his back. He would also put a loop around his neck so that if he tried to get up, he would strangle himself. He would then say to the visitors that his father had gone to a meeting.

Two months after his graduation from high school, he walked into the house after a date to hear his mother sobbing. Josh ran up to her and she sat up in the bed. She said, **“Son, your father has broken my heart.”**

She told Josh that she had lost the will to live. She told him that all she wanted to do

was to live until he graduated and then her desire was to die.

Two months later, he graduated. The next Friday his mother died, he believes, of a broken heart.

His hatred of his father intensified.

After he made the decision to accept Jesus and to trust them as his Saviour and Lord, he said that the love of God inundated his heart. God took his hatred of his father and turned it upside down.

Five months after becoming a Christian, he found himself with his father. He looked his father straight in the eye and said, **“Dad, I love you.”** Josh said that he did not want to love the man but he did. God had changed his heart.

He went on to university. After he was in a serious car accident, the victim of a drunk driver, he went back home to recover. His father came to see him. That day his father was sober. His father was very uneasy as he paced back and forth in his room. His father then blurted out, **“How can you love a father like me?”**

Josh told his father that six months before, he hated his father. He despised him. He told his father that he had put his trust in Jesus Christ, had received God’s forgiveness and Jesus changed his life. He told his father that he could not explain it all but that God had taken away his hatred for his dad and replace it with his love. They talked for about an hour.

Then his father said, **“Son, if God can do in my life what I saw him doing yours, I want to give him an opportunity.”** Then he prayed, **“God, if you’re really God and Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for what I’ve done to my family, I need You. If Jesus can do in my life what I seen him do in the life of my son, and I want to trust him as Saviour and Lord.”**

Hearing this prayer from his father was one of the greatest joys in Josh’s life.

As Josh trusted in Jesus Christ, he saw a transformation in his life during a period of 6 to 18 months. The change in his father’s life was immediate. He completely stopped drinking after 40 years of abusing it. Fourteen months later, his father died as a result of the complication of alcoholism.

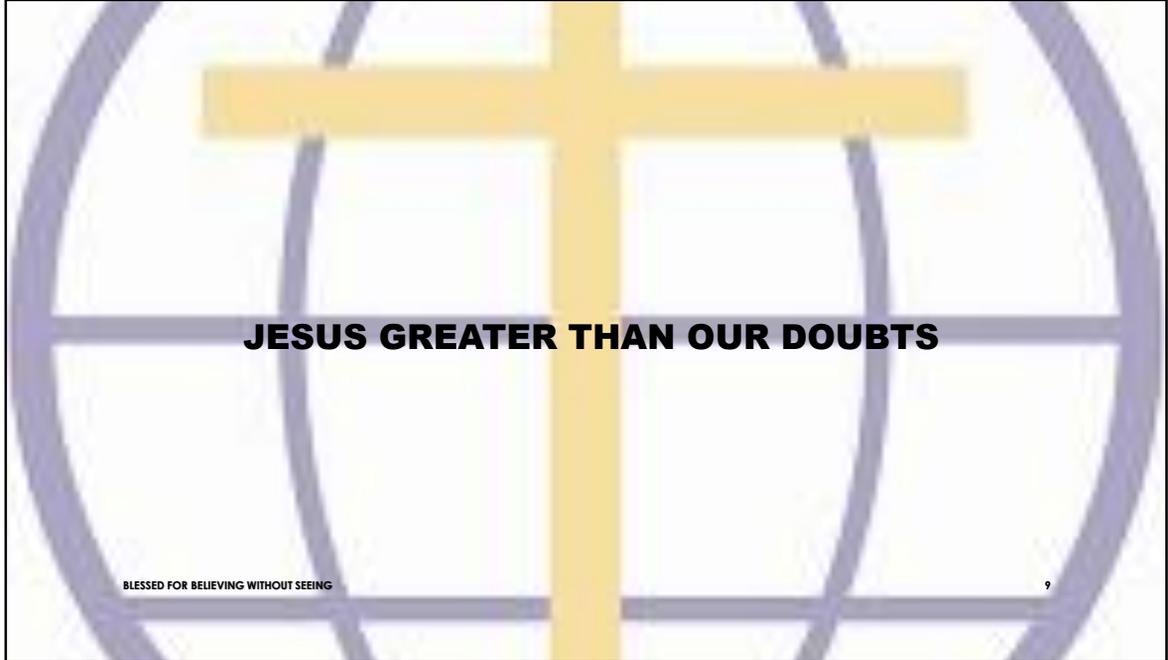
In that 14-month period, the changes were so dramatic in his father’s life that over 100 people committed their lives to Jesus Christ. He accepted to be reconciled with God because of those are incredible changes in the town’s drunk, his dad. (Paraphrase of

pages—XXIII—XXVII)

Jesus is in the business of changing lives from the inside out through the Holy Spirit.

God doesn't stop loving because a person has doubts.

Let us go back to Thomas (Next slide).



One thing that we can say about the apostle Thomas is that even if he had his doubts, he was willing to be proven wrong.

The Gospels referred to Thomas in John 11:16 and John 14:5. John 11:16 speaks about a statement Thomas made to his fellow disciples when Jesus was going to bring Lazarus to physical life following his physical death.

The other incident is when Jesus told his disciples that they were not to be troubled, that they were to believe in God and also to believe in Jesus.

Jesus was standing before them as a man. He told them later on that he was one that with the Father. He said that he was going to the Father's house to prepare a place for them so that they would be with him in the Father's house.

Jesus said to them in verse 4, **"and you know the way to where I'm going"**. Thomas did not understand what he was saying and he asked Jesus, **"Lord, we do not know where you're going. How can we know the way?"**

Jesus then revealed to them that he was the way, and the truth and the life.

Thomas was obviously a very honest man. He was able to voice his preoccupations to Jesus.

After the resurrection of Jesus, for some reason, Thomas was not there when Jesus first appeared to the 10 apostles. When he showed them his hands and his side, the apostles were exceedingly joyful.

At that first appearance, Jesus told them to twice, **“Peace be with you”**. We can imagine the scene. The 10 apostles were there fearing that they would also be taken captive by the Jews. Jesus reassured them twice and the second time, gave them their job description with reassurance. **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** They would not be left alone because after breathing on them, he told them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Again, for some reason, Thomas was not there the first time Jesus appeared. He was told by the other disciples that they had seen Jesus. Thomas simply could not believe that. He did not understand at that time who Jesus really was. In his mind, no one could survive the Roman crucifixion and the horror of it.

Jesus knew what Thomas had said to the other disciples that he would never believe unless he personally saw in his hands the mark of the nails, put his finger into these marks in place his hand into his side.

Jesus appeared out of nowhere in the midst of them even if the doors were locked. He challenged Thomas with the words that he had said. We are not told whether or not Thomas places fingers into the holes of the nails that had held Jesus on the cross. We are not told either whether or not he put out his hand and placed it on his side. This is really secondary.

What is important is what Thomas said, **“My Lord and my God!”**

Jesus did not condemn Thomas. The others had seen and believed. Thomas was not ready to believe that a man would survive the Roman crucifixion.

When Thomas saw Jesus, he realized that Jesus was really the way, and the truth and the life. He realized that the resurrected Jesus was God come in the flesh and he had been sent forth by the Father not to condemn but to save the world – save everyone who would believe in Him!

Jesus then extended a blessing to those who have not seen and yet have believed.

To believe Jesus and to believe in Jesus is a blessing beyond our puny understanding.

Many times, we are like Thomas. There are things in the Scriptures that we do not quite understand fully. It is okay to admit that we do not understand. We are to trust in Jesus, to continue to seek him with all our hearts and minds. In His time, God will make things clear for us. Like Thomas, we are to be willing to change our mind as God reveals himself to us.

Like Josh McDowell, we realize that apart from Jesus we cannot know who we really are and know our purpose on this earth. We cannot find real reassurance and answers to the important questions of life apart from Jesus who died a shameful death, the death of a sinful condemned man, for all of us.

Jesus is the one who satisfies all our longing. He obviously does not call everyone at this time although he has died for everyone. Jesus did not call all of Jerusalem to be apostles. He called and chose 12. After his resurrection, not all the Jews came to faith in Jesus nor all the Gentiles but just a few people comparatively speaking.

We have the privilege, for reasons that God only knows, that we have been called and that our eyes have been opened to believe in God through Jesus by the Holy Spirit. (God is one and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are always in perfect relationship).

God's plan for humanity is great. He has made provision for everyone to be saved who will believe on him when he reveals himself.

Jesus did not call all of the University Josh McDowell attended. He called Josh and a few others.

Jesus changed the disciples' lives. He changed Josh McDowell's life. He changed my life and yours. As that young girl said to Josh McDowell who was a doubter, Jesus changed my life.

The apostles were given a mission to go forth and preach this good news of the kingdom of God. We have been given the same responsibility.

Josh McDowell expresses it well in his introduction. He says, **“Christianity is not something to be shoved down your throat or forced on you. You have your life to live and I have mine. All I can do is tell you what I have learned and experienced. After that, what you do with Christ is your decision.”** (Idem page XXVII)

On a side point, Jesus never berated Thomas for not believing without seeing. He

worked with Thomas and brought him to the point of faith! What a great God we serve!

Blessed are we, blessed are all who believe in Jesus without seeing him!

Let us pray