

the importance of doubt

Like I said earlier...

our food for thought dinners are all about giving us some food for thought about important ideas.

And on the menu tonight is **the importance of doubt**.

It might have struck you as a strange topic....

Maybe you were thinking.... "Christians are all about faith... doubt is the opposite of faith.. doubting is bad..."

But I want to suggest tonight... that rather than doubt being the opposite of faith... doubt actually helps us to grow good faith...
doubt helps us to grow reasonable faith.

The importance of doubt is that it helps us work through whether what we believe is actually reasonable.

Couple of quick points to get out of the way first though...

- **faith, belief trust**

Firstly words....

Just so that we're clear... the words faith, trust & belief essentially mean the same thing.

I know that these days we tend to use the word faith only for religious things... but that's not right....

Faith is the same as belief which is the same as trust.

I have faith in you....

I believe in you...

I trust you ...

All saying the same thing.

- **we are all people of faith**

Second thing to make clear is...

every single one of us in this room is a person of faith.

That might be harder for you to swallow.

Every single one of us in this room is a person of faith.

Now if you are hearing me say that everyone of us is religious or spiritual... you've misheard me.

You've forgotten the first thing...

What I am saying is that...
every single one of us in this room...
we trust things... we believe things... we have faith in things.

Some of our faith things are small...

you had faith in your car to get you here tonight...
& your faith was proven right
you had faith in the cooks that prepared your food...
and time will tell whether or not your faith was proven right!

when you jump into bed tonight you'll have faith that it will hold you up... you
have faith in your alarm clock to wake you up in the morning in time for
work...

Get the idea...
lots of faiths... lots of faiths in little things all the time.
So small that we never much think about it... except when they let us down.
"I'm not trusting that alarm clock ever again!"

But along with our small faiths all of us have big faiths too... big beliefs.....
big beliefs in the big questions of life.

For example how about this question...
"What happens to you after you die?"

That's a big question.
If we went around the room... there would be lots of different answers to that
question.
Some might say... go to heaven... some might say nothing apart from the
decomposition of my body... some might say I expect to be reincarnated...
some might say I become an angel... others might say it depends on how I've
lived my life... some might say I don't know... some might say I don't care....

But here's the thing...
behind each one of those different answers...
is a faith... a belief.... a trust....

it might be a belief that there is no God or gods or spiritual reality... just stuff...
It might be a belief in a system where good is rewarded & bad is punished
even beyond the grave...
it might be a belief that whatever happens isn't very important...

But whatever the answer is... its an answer based on belief.

We need to realise that we are all people of faith... we are all people of beliefs... even in the BIG things... especially in the BIG things...

doubt helps us grow good faith

So here's the importance of doubt that I want us to chew on tonight...

It's really important that we doubt our beliefs... so as to help us figure out if our beliefs are reasonable or not. It's really important that what we put our trust in is trustworthy. And doubt helps us do that.

What we believe should not be unexamined... untested. Especially our big beliefs... they're too important. We need to make sure that they are sensible beliefs... reasonable beliefs.

Eg. so for me in answering the question...

"What happens to you after you die?"

I'm a Christian.
That's the shape of my beliefs.

So I believe that at a particular moment in human history the Son of God came among us, in human flesh... the man Jesus Christ. I believe that he came because we have rejected God & God's ways... and as a result our lives & this world are in chaos. I believe that he came out of love on a rescue mission and that that rescue mission required him to die in the place of rebels so as to deal with their rebellion against God.

I believe the promise recorded in one of Jesus' biographies in the Bible ...
Jesus promised

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11.25-26)

Jesus was making some massive claims about himself & his ability to save people from death.

I believe he backed up the promise by rising from the dead.

So I take him at his word.

I believe that what happens to someone after they die depends entirely on their response to Jesus... if they believe in Jesus... if their loyalty belongs to Jesus...

than beyond death they live forever.

That's what I believe.

Now here's the thing though...
as you hear me say those things what do you do with that?
Especially... what do you do with that if you don't believe it?
How do you respond to me if you don't believe what i believe?

Tragically I reckon our instinctive response... is to discard it.
So maybe you're all ready thinking...
"That's nice for you but its not for me"... discard.
"You're an idiot for believing those things"... discard.
"What you are saying is old fashioned rubbish"... discard.

You doubt my belief and so you discard it.

But I want to suggest a better way if I may.

Rather than discard... I suggest we discuss.
I suggest we discuss our alternate beliefs.

Because if you doubt what I believe...
that's because you believe something different.
Its not that you don't believe anything.
Its that you believe something different to me.

And so the question to ask is... are you sure that what you believe is more
believable?
In fact every time we come across someone who does not believe what we
believe...
well that's an opportunity to measure our own beliefs.

Rather than discard... lets discuss.
Lets have a discussion in which we listen to each other... graciously &
patiently.. not abusing each other or poking fun at each other...
You doubt what I believe...
Lets discuss that...
I doubt what you believe..
Lets discuss that...

Lets find out why we each believe what we believe...
and lets see if one is more reasonable or not.

As a Christian I've got to own up and say that
Christians sometimes believe things without knowing why they believe them.
And so to have someone who doubts that belief discuss it with them...
that's really helpful.

Because they need to think it through & measure it carefully.
We shouldn't be afraid of doubt... doubt helps us grow good & reasonable faith.

One of the best things I do to grow good & reasonable faith is to teach scripture to 10 & 11 year olds at South Public school around the corner.
Because they doubt what I believe all the time and ask really good searching questions ...
and answering their questions helps me enormously.

I said Christians sometimes believe things without knowing why they believe them.
That's true... What's also true...
is that most Australians believe things, big things... without even knowing that they believe them.
Most Australians have entirely unexamined beliefs, untested beliefs about the big , important things... like God & meaning & death

And so when I ask you
"What happens to you after you die?"
You need to work out your answer..
and then you will need work out why you believe that.
What grounds do you have for believing that?
That's the importance of doubt.

And lets not put in our hand in the sand and say well if 2 people believe 2 opposite things then they are both right.
That's just silly.
And when it comes to a question like... What happens to me after I die...
I want to get that right...
And I reckon you do to...
So lets discuss it...
lets discuss what we believe & why we believe it..
and lets help each other find the truth.

Even to say.. "I don't believe anything about life after death...I couldn't be bothered"
well that's a belief isn't it?...
Its a belief that what happens after death is unimportant & not worth worrying about.
Okay... but why do you believe that?

That's the importance of doubt.
It helps us to measure how reasonable our beliefs are.

And when it comes to BIG beliefs...

what you believe ought to be believable.

I'm biased I know...

But I reckon Jesus & Christianity offers convincing & great answers to the big questions of life & death.

And I reckon too... that many people discard Jesus & Christianity... without ever having thought through nearly carefully enough... whether what they believe is more reasonable.

So I'm making a plea for doubt.

I'm making a plea for discussion.

A night like this is a great starter for it.

We've come along I take it because we're interested in discussing the BIG things.

And I'm going to finish in a couple of moments... and I want to encourage you to have a go at it.

To have a discussion with the people around you about "What you think happens to someone after death?" and why you believe that...

Remember we want to help each grow reasonable sensible belief.

But beyond tonight I'd love to offer some more help with all of this.

We love running discussion groups about the BIG answers that Jesus & Christianity offers.

If you are interested in one of those.... you can grab a card from the table & fill it in.

We plan to hold 3 more of these food for thought dinners this year.

We want to use them to keep these discussions going.

And I'd love to know what you'd like to put on the menu.

So on those cards I've suggested a couple of possible topics.. but you might like to choose another...

Fill in the card if you want & drop it in the box ...

We're going to serve some tea & coffee now...

Thank you...