

The Fork In The Road

John 20:24-29

In a Peanuts comic strip, Charlie Brown is talking with Lucy as they walk home on the last day of school. Charlie Brown says to Lucy: “Lucy, I got straight A’s. Isn’t that great!”

Lucy in her typical fashion shoots down poor Charlie Brown and says: I don’t believe you Charlie Brown. Unless you show me your report card, I cannot believe you.”

Seeing is believing for Lucy. But what if Lucy couldn’t see Charlie Brown’s report card? What if Lucy was blind? She would have to take his word for it or someone else would have to verify Charlie Brown’s straight A’s.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be blind? Have you ever closed your eyes and tried to walk around your house?

I once had serious eye surgery and had both eyes covered for several days. Ellen had to feed me. And I am sure I ate things that I wouldn’t have chosen from a buffet.

Try to imagine not being able to see one of God’s beautiful sunsets; or be able to drive a car. Or watch your favorite TV show. Or to be able to walk down the street without someone helping you. Can you imagine living life completely in the dark?

But there’s something else out there much worse than physical blindness. I’m talking about spiritual blindness. Not knowing where your life is going. Not knowing if you’re right with God. Not knowing if you’re going to go to heaven when you die. Spiritual blindness is much more tragic than physical blindness.

Progressing on the path of life, everyone faces what is called a fork in the road. Hardly a week will go by that you won’t have to make some kind of decision. Most of the choices you make may not be earth shattering. But there is one choice; one fork in the road that every human must face that is life changing. And, it’s a matter of life and death which path you take.

When it comes to religion and spiritual choices, some set the standard so low that they will accept anything that comes down the pike. It’s amazing how much irrational garbage people are willing to swallow without a particle of solid evidence to back it up. Scripture warns that false teachers, false prophets, and even false messiah’s would lead many astray. Every generation has them and we have had our share.

The other extreme is to set the standard so high that it can never be met. For this particular fork in the road, a fair and reasonable standard somewhere between

extreme radical and gullible needs to be set. Your life depends on it.

I want to give you a couple of examples from scripture of forks in the road, the final one being the statement Thomas made concerning the news that Jesus was alive, followed by a third graders explanation of God.

First, let’s look in the Old Testament book of Numbers concerning the report of the spies sent into the Promised Land.

²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” (Numbers 13:26-33)

In this passage of scripture we see the Israelites being advised about the land of promise from representatives sent to spy out the land. The spies brought back the report of a land just the way God had described it. The land was flowing with milk and honey. It was more magnificent than had been anticipated. They even brought back fruit from the land to show its grandness.

“But”... Don’t you hate it when you here the word “but”? Whether it is from the mechanic that says we can fix your car, but...it will cost you. Sure we can help you, but...we are just too busy on that day. No problem we can fix your dishwasher, but...it will be about 4-6 weeks before there will be a service technician available.

The word but wouldn’t be near as bad if we heard it used more in sentences like these. Yes, there is a finance charge, but...we will cover that for you. Sure, it is going to take a little more work to fix it, but...there will be no charge. We are extremely busy, but...we will work you in.

The spies concluded that it was everything that it was made out to be. The only problem was the inhabitants and their resources. They are bigger and their cities are fortified and are large. The people are descendants of Anak, which was a group of abnormally large people. The family of Goliath may have been descendants of these people. The spies said that we are like grasshoppers to them.

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, encouraged the people to inhabit the land; that they could do it. Ten to two; maybe the people were thinking that they had a one in five chance.

Here is the fork in the road for the Israelites. They started down the road of doubt when they heard the report about the people that inhabited the land. They doubted whether they could conquer the people or not.

The fork in the road was to believe and inhabit the land or turn down the road of unbelief. They choose the path of unbelief.

How many opportunities end up lost on the path of unbelief?

The problem wasn’t the giants or the fortified cities; it was Israel’s doubt in God’s ability.

The next example comes from John the Baptist. We know that he inquired to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe in Jesus but he wanted to know. “Are you the one who was

to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matthew 11:3) Doubting is not just about unbelief; it is about having two different possibilities and not knowing which one to believe. Was someone else going to follow Jesus?

We know that John believed in Jesus. Remember Jesus baptism; John proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)

John’s fork in the road was to be clear that Jesus was the one and only, and that another wasn’t following him.

When Jesus answered, he didn’t scold John. He sent this message with John’s disciples back to John:

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” (Matthew 11:4-6)

John wanted to be sure that he had the facts straight.

Now, we come to Thomas.

Thomas, the twin, whose twin we are not told, is listed as one of the Twelve in Matthew 10. He has received the designation ‘doubter’ due to this statement:

“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.” (John 20: 25)

Thomas has come to the fork in the road concerning Jesus resurrection. Was he headed down the path of unbelief like Israel, or was his doubt more like John the Baptists’, needing to get the facts clear for himself?

In John 11, we get a picture of Thomas’ devotion to Jesus.

Lazarus had died. Jesus told his disciples that he was going to raise him from the dead. But only a short while before, the people of that area threatened to stone Jesus and the disciples were concerned about going back into that area.

To this concern, Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, **“Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)**

Doesn’t sound like a doubter here, does he?

In John 14, Jesus is telling his disciples the way to the Father. In verse 4, Jesus says that they know the way. But Thomas said to him, **“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)**

Thomas is just as confused about Jesus as the rest of the disciples.

The first time Jesus appeared to his disciple after he raised from the dead, only ten were present; we are not told why, but Thomas was not with them.

²⁶ 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!” ²⁷ 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.” (John 20:26-27)

I have to ask myself at this point, if Thomas was a doubter like Israel disbelieved God concerning the Promised Land, why would he be present on this day with the other ten?

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20: 28-29)

Thomas’ fork in the road of doubt now has a clear path and direction.

For every fork in the road, set a fair and reasonable standard somewhere between extreme radical and gullible.

Lucy, refusing to believe Charlie Brown unless she saw the report card may be reasonable. But, refusing to believe that air exists, just because you can’t see it, is unreasonable.

Get as much information as you can to make an informed decision. The only dumb question is the question that is not asked.

Harriet, the church gossip and self-appointed supervisor of the church’s morals, kept sticking her nose into other people’s business. Several residents were unappreciative of her activities, but feared her enough to maintain their silence.

She made a mistake, however, when she accused George, a new member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his pickup truck parked all afternoon in front of the town’s only bar. She commented to George and others that everyone seeing it there would know that he was an alcoholic.

George, a man of few words, stared at her for a moment and then just walked away. He said nothing. Later that evening, George quietly parked his pickup in front of Harriet’s house and left it there all night.

Harriet didn’t ask enough questions before she jumped to a conclusion, did she?

I want to close with a third graders explanation of God. This young man has never seen God or Jesus. Written by Danny Dutton, age 8, from Chula Vista, California, for his third grade homework assignment to "Explain God."

One of God’s main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn’t

make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way, He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times besides bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because He hears everything there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears, unless He has thought of a way to turn it off. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your mom and dad's head asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Atheists are people who don't believe in God. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church. Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind like His Father and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said OK.

His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in

heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary only more important. You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to hear you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the times.

You should always go to Church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church to do something you think will be more fun like going to the beach. This is wrong! And, besides, the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with you, like to camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim very good and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and He can take me back anytime He pleases.

And that's why I believe in God."

Way to go, Danny!

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.