Craig // Welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here for our continuing journey through the Gospel of John. Today we’ll talk about something not often talked about in church. That is doubt. There are five letters in it, but we treat it like a four letter word, don’t we? Can we be honest with each other? You are not sure yet, right? By a show of hands how many of you in any point in your life have the teeniest doubt about the Christian faith. Look around and notice almost every hand is up. If you look around and think I have doubts occasionally, that doesn’t make you a bad Christian, just an honest one. Doubt is inevitable. How many of you have had doubt about Christianity in the last year? Last month? On the way to church today?

[Laughter]

Craig // Not willing to admit those, right? It’s okay if you do, you are acknowledging the human condition. We are finite creatures. We don’t know everything. Certainty is hard to come by. Doubt is not a bad thing though we often treat it as it is in church. The first thing to understand is that doubt and faith are not mutually exclusive. We tend to think they are because we think doubt is the opposite of faith. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Faith is an act of trust. It’s entirely possible to choose to act to trust and have doubts about things you are trusting. How many of you have ever stepped on to a frozen pond. How many of you have stepped on to a frozen pond wondering if it was a good idea? You had doubts. You were acting in trust while you had doubts. It’s entirely possible, in fact common, that we experience the act of trust while at the same time we experience doubt. They are not mutually exclusive. It’s possible to have both of them together.

Secondly, a healthy approach of dealing with doubt can lead to greater faith. We think if you trust doubt, put doubt on the table, it’s dragging you from faith. That’s not true. If you express doubt, it can drive you deeper into faith. I had a class that a pastor used the Gospel of John to constantly attack the reliability of it. To say this didn’t happen. This is historically inaccurate. It’s not true. He was bright. He was articulate, and he caused me to doubt. I began to have doubts about what I learned growing up. I had doubts. I’m not going to lie about it. By the grace of God, what the Holy Spirit led me to do, I started walking out of the class and going to the library and reading history. Is what he’s saying right? Is the Gospel of John unreliable or does history say it reliable? I learned that what I was taught was confirmed by the evidence. It was reliable. It spoke the truth. This guy didn’t know what he was talking about, much as he was educated and articulate. I came to possess a deeper and profound faith more than when I was going into it because when you deal with doubt in a healthy way I don’t think I would be here today without dealing with doubts in that way.

You think of the apostle Thomas. He has an unfortunate nickname. His nickname was what? Doubting Thomas which is so sad because he was the only one that voiced his doubt. He said what everyone else must have been thinking. Jesus rose from the dead. That doesn’t happen. I’m expressing doubts. He said to Thomas, I hear you have doubts. Stick fingers in the holes the nails left in my hands. First, ugh, right? Second, that allowed him to have the experience of the risen Christ that wiped away his doubts, brought him to a conviction about the resurrection. I guarantee you the other disciples were like, hey, can we go with that? I wouldn’t mind if I could also touch too, right? He walked away with a much deeper and more profound faith.

Dealing with doubt in a healthy way can deepen our faith, lead to a robust faith. How do you deal with doubt in an effective way, a healthy way. If you can grab a Bible, I would love for you to do that. Turn with me to John 9. I think it’s one of the most critical ways of dealing with doubt in a healthy way, to drive us further to a healthy relationship with God. The best teaching came from Andy Stanley at the Northwest Community Church. I thought the Holy Spirit was speaking through him. Some of what I’m speaking about today is what he had to say. So if you are ever listening to him and think that’s what Pastor Craig said. He’s ripping off what he said. That’s not true. Giving credit where credit is due. John 9. As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned? Was it this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

They are asking John to weigh in on who was responsible for the handicap. In Israel, there was a theology that said anyone with a handicap had sin. Usually they were older and they went blind after a time or they had leprosy. After they developed the handicap later in life, it was easy to say this is from sin. When you have someone blind from birth, your theology has a more complicated issue. If handicap is the result of sin, and he was born blind, whose sin was to blame. They thought that people could sin in utero. Not everyone accepted that. There was another school of thought that said no, it must be the sin of the parents responsible for this. The sin of the parents is to blame for his handicap. That’s what they
are asking Jesus, who is to blame for this condition.

Jesus doesn’t really answer the question. Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He’s not saying they are sinless. They are saying neither this man nor his parents are to blame for his handicap. This happened so the works of God will be seen. He never says who is to blame. He doesn’t say God’s to blame or this man is like this because God says this man’s like this so that do you notice that? He changes, and he’s talking about because, but he changes to so that. He doesn’t tell us who is to blame. He says that’s the wrong question. You are focused on who is to blame. I want you to focus on is who is in the midst of that, who is building on the platform. I think it’s an important thing to pay attention to. When we are in difficult circumstances, struggling with something hard, our natural tendency is to ask who is to blame. Is God to blame? Jesus is saying we need to focus less on who is to blame and more on what is to be gained.

The question of who is to be blamed is a dead end street. Stop focusing on who is to be blamed and focus on what God is doing in the midst of it, what God is doing because of it. We are told in Romans that God works for good in the midst of all things for those that love and are called according to His purpose. He works on all things for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purposes. The problem is, when we focus on who is to blame, we are blind to the good God is doing in the midst of that. Jesus says, let’s change the question. I’m the light of the world. This man’s struggle is now going to be the platform to which God shows what it means for me to be light. After saying this, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva and put it on the man’s eyes. Which is weird, right? Let’s just be honest. That’s weird. If you are thinking, maybe it was an ancient tradition, no, it was weird for them too. If you think it was weird for you, think how weird it was for that man. He’s blind. He’s doing what he does every day. He’s listening to the feet go by him. He’s waiting for the feet to slow down. That signals maybe there will be a coin dropped in the bowl. He hears a group of people coming and hears a really insensitive question, right? Whose fault is this, Jesus? Is it his fault? That’s pretty insensitive. Is it his parent’s fault? Jesus says, no, it’s so that he hears Jesus come closer. He starts listening to the sound of coins that would surely be dropped in the bowl. Instead he hears

He has to wonder what’s going on, warm hot mud smeared over his eyes and dripping down. What are you doing? What is he doing, right? Let me cut to the chase. He’s doing what we have seen several times in the Gospel of John. Instead of avoiding conflict and controversy, Jesus is inviting the controversy. The day this happened was the Sabbath. There was a strict commandment that you don’t work on that day. The Jewish religious leaders had all kinds of regulations to make sure you didn’t do anything work. One of the regulations is you can’t make anything and Jesus made mud. It would have been no big deal if you used olive oil. You could use olive oil. You couldn’t press it, but you could use it. Jesus didn’t use oil. He broke the Sabbath commandment as they understood it by making mud and smearing it this guy’s eyes. He’s inviting conflict. Go, he told him, wash in the pool of Siloam. Both things broke the commandment as the religious leaders understood it. They had rules about how you go to wash forbidden by the regulations of the Sabbath, you could not wash. Jesus invited controversy. The most important words are the last three, “he came home seeing.”

Think about that. This man who had never seen before came home seeing. They are simple words. They are black and white on the page. They have no way of conveying that. Can you imagine coming home seeing? How long do you think it took him to come home? Everything on the way home had to be exciting. What is that? Dirt. I love that. What is that? Sky? It’s blue? That’s a color, right. I like that. That’s a woman? I understand what all of the fuss was about. That’s amazing. Every step along the way is a new insight, a new discovery. He came home to where he lived with his mom and dad. If it was me, I would have played a practical joke for sure. I would have come in like I always do. Hi, Mom, I like the blue dress you are wearing. Yeah, I can see. A party breaks out. A celebration breaks out. So much so that the neighbors come to see what is going on here. Neighbors came that had seen him begging and asked, wait a minute, isn’t this the man that used beg. Some said, yes but others said, no, he only looks like him. He himself insisted. No, I am the man. Well, then, how were your eyes opened, they asked? He said the man they call Jesus made mud and put it on my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash, and I did and then I could see.

Isn’t this amazing? I can see. This is unbelievable. Let’s have a party, right? Yeah, hang on. I have questions still. He said, where is this man? I want to stop there and pause for a minute. One of the interesting things about the story, the way there is tension between I know and I don’t know. You will see it over and over again. I know this, and I don’t know this. The reason I point that out, I think paying attention to it is one of the only ways we’ll understand what God is saying to us through the story. We are always going to have things that we know and things that we don’t know. We always have doubts. We always have things we are certain about. The question of what it looks like to deal with the doubts in a healthy way has a lot to do with the way we deal with the question of what we know and what we don’t know. What we don’t know can become a blindfold that keeps us from seeing the answers we lock long for, but it doesn’t have to. If we fixate on what we don’t know, what we don’t know becomes a blindfold that obscures the answers we are longing for.

It doesn’t have to. So they say where is this man? He says, I don’t know. I don’t know which direction he went. I couldn’t see. I honestly, guys, he could be in the room now and I don’t know what he looks like because I couldn’t see, but I can now. Can we focus on that? Can someone get me a cake? Is there going to be a parade? What are we going to do to celebrate? Instead of celebrating, verse 13 says they brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was the Sabbath. There’s the problem. He had made mud, did the work, broken their idea of the Sabbath. The Pharisees asked how he received his sight.

He put mud on my eyes, the man replied, and I washed. Now I see. Isn’t that great? Isn’t it amazing? Now I see. Some of the Pharisees said this man is not from God. We have the answers we need. He’s not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath. Others asked, how can a
sinner perform such a science? How can we explain the fact that we have a blind man that sees? How do we deal with that? They were divided. Then they turned again to the blind man. They said what do you have to say about it? It was your eyes that he opened. The man replied he's a prophet? I don't think he was expressing certainty? Honestly, he doesn't care about the question at this point. He's excited he can see. He wants to celebrate but they keep asking him questions. How do I qualify? What bucket do we put you into? Aren't you the religious experts? I don't know. You want me to take a stab at it? Prophet. I'll go with prophet. He's a prophet? But they still didn't believe he had been born blind. They go back. They back away from the undeniable. They didn't believe he had been born blind and received his sight. They sent for the man's parents. Is this your son? Is this the one that you say was born blind? How is it now that he can see?

They say, we know he's our son. We know that. That's undeniable. We know he was born blind. Undeniable. How can he see now or who opened his eyes? We don't know. Ask him. He's of age. He will speak for himself. His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders that had already said that anyone that acknowledged Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue, so they said ask him. They didn't want to be confused with more facts. You should understand that when it says they decided that anyone that accepted Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior God was sending, anyone who said that would be put out of the synagogue. That mattered more than we can understand. It's like being kicked out of a church. If you get kicked out of a church here, you go to another church. There are like three right here. I was looking to the right and First Baptist Church and to the left, United Methodist Church, catty-corner, Second Baptist Church and far right corner a Lutheran Church. I guarantee you, if someone left the Baptist Church, the Lutheran Church would have been happy to have him. That wasn't the case then. If you get kicked out of the synagogue, you were out. You were more than out of the synagogue, you were out of the community. You couldn't buy or sell. You were ostracized. His parents are afraid of that. We know he's our son. We know he was blind. How he can see now we don't know. Ask him. Leave us out of this.

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. They said give glory to God by telling the truth. That's their version of "swear on a stack of Bibles."

We know this man is a sinner. They are not even asking a question. They have made their decision. They didn't want him to sign off on it. He replied, you know, whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know, I was blind, but now I see. Guys, I don't know if this man was a sinner or not. You are is experts on that. I don't know. I get it. I understand why you are asking the question because he's not paying attention to the Sabbath, and that's a big deal. I get that. I don't know why he would make mud to do it. I don't know why he would send me to wash. I don't know why I was blind in the first place. I don't know why God would make me wait this long. There is a whole bunch I don't know, but I know this, and I can't seem to get away from this, I was blind, but now I see.

The man's clinging to the undeniable, not the inexplicable. That matters. They asked him, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? At this point, the man's frustrated. There's not going to be a kink, is there? I already told you this. He answered. I told you already. You didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too? Oh. Mistake. They hurled insults at him. You are this fellow's disciple. We are disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to Moses. As for this man, we don't know where he comes from. The man says that's remarkable. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

Check me on this. Isn't it God doesn't listen to sinners? Didn't you teach that in Sunday school? He listens to the Godly men. No one heard of a man opening the eyes of a man born blind. Checking my math on this, but if this man was not of God he could do nothing.

They said, you were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us? They threw him out of the synagogue. He was excommunicated. He was out of the community. Jesus heard they had thrown him out. He found him and said do you believe in the Son of Man? The man goes out and sits down. It's a rollercoaster of a day, right? He got his vision, but he lost his community. He's on a roller coaster. He's sitting there, watching feet go by. Marveling that, that happened. He sees feet stop in front of them. They are pointed at him not moving. There's a man he's never seen before. He's hurt. He remembers his voice. This voice that says, do you believe in the Son of Man? The Son of Man, it's a title for the Messiah, the Savior. Goes all the way back to the Book of Daniel. The voice he will never forget matched with the face he sees for the first time says, do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he, the man asked? Tell me so I will believe him. If you tell me who he is, I will believe in him. Jesus said, you have now seen him. Don't tell me Jesus doesn't have a sense of humor. It's subtle, but do you see it there? You have now seen him. Good one. Because he's literally seeing even as his heart discerns the truth.

In fact, he's the one speaking with you. The man said, Lord, I believe, and he worshiped. Jesus said, for judgment I have come into the world so the blind will see and those who see will become blind. Pharisees with him heard him and said what are we blind too? Jesus said, and I'm sure he said it sadly, guys if you were blind, if you were really blind, you would not be guilty of sin. Now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. You see the ironic reversal there, right? You have a man physically blind and now able to see physically and spiritually the truth about who Jesus is in such a way that he's put his trust in him and his sins are forgiven. At the same time, you have the people that are supposedly the spiritually seeing, the best at discerning what God is doing, and yet they are completely blind to the reality of God in their midst. Because of that, because they didn't believe who Jesus was, they didn't trust him, they remain in their sin. It's an ironic reversal. The question I have to deal with, what made the difference? What made the man come to see? What made them move into blindness? They were all dealing with the same amount of information. They all had the same set of information that they knew and didn't know. They knew the man was born blind. They knew he could see now. It was undeniable. They all had the same questions. They didn't know why he was blind to this point. They didn't know why Jesus used mud.

In the United States, the University of Mississippi (perhaps the most famous University), to the left, First Baptist Church and to the left, United Methodist Church, catty-corner, Second Baptist Church and far right corner a Lutheran Church. I guarantee you, if someone left the Baptist Church, the Lutheran Church would have been happy to have him. That wasn't the case then. If you get kicked out of the synagogue, you were out. You were more than out of the synagogue, you were out of the community. You couldn't buy or sell. You were ostracized. His parents are afraid of that. We know he's our son. We know he was blind. How he can see now we don't know. Ask him. Leave us out of this.
They didn't know why Jesus broke the Sabbath law. The things they didn’t know outnumbered the things they did. Yet one of them was able to come to believe, and the other group moved further away from Jesus. Why? What made the difference?

The man believed because everything got better for him. Of course you will believe if your life gets better. I want to challenge that. Did this man’s life get better? Of course, it did. He could see. But keep in mind, the day he received his sight, he lost his community. He was excommunicated in the first century, that mattered more than you and I can understand. He would have to go to somewhere they didn’t know him. What was he going to do? He had no marketable skills. He spent his life begging. Now he couldn’t beg because no one would give something to a perfectly capable man. Now he was destitute. In some ways, receiving his sight made his life harder. If you think he believed because his life got better, that’s too simple. What was the difference?

The difference was the man chose to cling to what he knew. He chose to cling to the undeniable. The Pharisees chose to cling to the inexplicable. They focused on the things they didn’t know instead of the things they did. We must cling to the deniable not the inexplicable. That’s how we deal with doubt in a healthy way. We don’t pretend we don’t have doubt. We don’t pretend we have all of the answers. We cling to the undeniable not the inexplicable. Maybe you are here today and you are not sure what you think about God. You are not sure what you think about Jesus. That’s fine. There is nothing wrong with that. My question to you, the question I long for you to ask yourself, am I clinging to the inexplicable rather than the undeniable? Is that why I struggle with faith? Is that why I’m not putting my trust in Jesus? I’m clinging to the inexplicable instead of the undeniable? There will always be another question. We are surrounded by people that know Jesus and don’t have it all figured out. Does your struggle with faith come down to the fact that you are clinging to the inexplicable rather than the undeniable? If you struggle whether God exists, every scientific explanation points to the universe as having a beginning. The universe has not always been around. Red shift, observation after objection says that the universe came into existence at some point. How does that happen? Nothing cannot produce something. If there was nothing, it didn’t produce something. It doesn’t happen that way. Only someone can produce something. Let’s move outside of the realm of science. Let’s talk about what’s going on in the human heart. If you are willing to acknowledge that your soul longs for God to exist.

Your soul longs for God to exist. Which either means you are crazy, or you are circling that God exists. Every human longs for God. That’s why we have so many faiths. We long for God. If we long for God and God doesn’t exist, then we are psychotic. We long for water because water exists. We long for air because air exists. We long for food because food exists. We long for God because fill in the blank. If you are here today and you are willing to admit that your soul longs for God, maybe it’s because there is a God that calls you. You are circling the truth of existence. There’s another thing you have to wrestle with, that something earth shaking happened first century Palestine...the Resurrection. It’s 2018. 2018 years since A.D., the year that Jesus was born. We count the whole world counts our time from the day Jesus was born. I know they are trying to move away from that. My daughter has a history class, C.E. Common Era. She asked the question, what does that come from? We are going to move on. The answer is because of the resurrection of Jesus. The 12 guys that ran when Jesus was arrested became days later people that were willing to die because of the unshakeable conviction that he was risen from the dead. It changed history. It’s changed millions of lives since then. The resurrection is an undeniable time in history. If you are here and say, I get that, but I can’t seem to move forward, my question is, is it because you are clinging to the inexplicable rather than the undeniable? If you are here today and you have been following Jesus for years, we have to make the same decision on a daily basis to cling to the undeniable not the inexplicable. If you are here today and you wonder why God did this or what’s going on? The temptation is to cling to those questions.

I want to say to you, we also have to decide on a daily basis to cling to the undeniable not the inexplicable. Don’t pretend we don’t have the questions. Don’t fake it as though we don’t have doubts. I’m not saying that at all. That’s not a healthy way to approach it. We acknowledge our doubts, put them on the table, but we cling to what is undeniable not inexplicable. If you are a follower of Jesus, go home and ask yourself these questions, what are the top three things I need to cling to? You can do more, obviously, but take time today to write down three things you know God has done in your life. It’s by clinging to those that we find ourselves able to move forward in a way that takes us around the corner when we find the answers to the question. If we focus on the inexplicable we get stuck in our past or pain. We don’t find the answers we are longing for. When we cling to the undeniable instead of the inexplicable we find the answers that threaten to chain us in darkness.

Will you pray with me? Jesus, thank you for the undeniable right now, that you love us. This truth is demonstrated in your willingness to come to us, to die for us, and to rise to new life and to give that new life to us. It is undeniable to me that you love us. Lord, would you speak to each of us, remind us of the ways that you have moved in our lives, that you have demonstrated your love, your compassion, your care, your concern, in undeniable ways and give us strength to cling to those when things are hard? To cling to those when we have questions and when we have doubts to move forward in our walk with you and in that way, bring us to the place we find the answers to those questions that we so long to see answered. In Jesus name, amen.