

# What Do We Do When Our Plans Fall Through?

## 1) When We're Locked In A Room

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What do we do when our plans fall through? We often sink into fear and denial. In 1944, Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was sent by the Japanese army to the remote Philippine island of Lubang. When the war ended, he and his four-man group were suspicious. After ordering his men to retreat to the hills he lived off coconuts, bananas, and civilian cows which he killed. He came upon a note in October the following year, "The war ended on August 15. Come down from the mountains!" In complete disbelief he held out for many years. It wasn't after leaflets were dropped. It wasn't after relatives of other soldiers were heard on loudspeakers. It wasn't after photographs and newspapers were dropped all over the island. No, it wasn't until after 29 years of eating coconuts and bananas and deftly evading searching parties which he believed were enemy scouts that he finally came out of hiding. Onoda emerged from the corners of the jungle in the spring of 1972. And he wasn't alone as a holdout. Many other soldiers lasted decades including one Taiwanese soldier serving in the Japanese military who was found on an Indonesian island two years after Onoda came out of hiding. This would be the equivalent to some people today being told the world pandemic is over but not believing all the reports and living in isolation and fear until after the year 2050. Can fear really do that to us? This morning we begin our Easter series asking, "What do we do when our plans fall through?" And we begin by looking at the disciples who I fear are locked in a room because they didn't believe the good news.

Certainly, things did not go as the disciples of Jesus had planned. Their teacher Jesus had been arrested, beaten, and suffered a humiliating and agonizing death. He was dead. They were fearful about what was going to happen next. They found themselves cowering and locked in a room. It seemed like all their plans had failed.

But then the reports came. The women who went to visit the tomb carried the first report. Mary Magdalene first saw Jesus and had held onto him in amazement. The other women also saw Jesus and clasped at his feet in worship. Sometime during that day Jesus also appeared to Peter. Later that same evening two men walking down the road to Emmaus talked with Jesus, and even ate with him. These were all reliable reports from people who knew Jesus' disciples. And they reported how they saw him, touched him, and ate with him.

The disciples, however, weren't about to leave the safety of their locked-down room. What about Mary's report? "When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it." What about the other women and their report? Luke records that the disciples refused to believe them because their words sounded like nonsense. Peter also gave his report of seeing the resurrected Jesus. Perhaps the excitement grew. "It is true," some said after the two disciples ran back from Emmaus. But Mark records that Jesus still had to rebuke his disciples for refusing to believe.

What was their problem? Didn't they hear the reliable witnesses? Doubts and unbelief of the good news from God are what people naturally hold onto. One hears, "the war is over, come on out." And it is just too good to be true. Satan lies, "Don't believe it. It's just a trap for the weak. Jesus didn't really rise to life." Then, rather than coming out of the cave, the natural tendency of every soul waging war with God is to fire back as if peace hasn't been declared, "I'll die before I surrender!" By nature, people reject the good news about Jesus. They do this no matter how close a relationship they have with the person speaking to them. Lt. Hiroo Onoda doubted strangers. Those who doubt the gospel and news of Jesus' resurrection can even doubt their closest friends.

The results of Jesus' victory are then tragically lost for such people. Instead of hearing that we are at peace with God they continue in fear. Instead of the joy of victory they only know defeat after defeat as loved ones around them die. News about this world's problems cause many to not only hide behind locked doors, but to hide in fear of what's next. And they grow angrier at God. Finally, the war wages as those who don't believe the resurrection mock, "It's nonsense! You actually believe that! It's a trap for weak people! Don't believe that message!" And they remain in darkness, fighting a war against God. A war which they can never win.

How does God respond to such disbelief? When the disciples were together fearfully behind locked doors that first Easter evening, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you." Though these words were a customary greeting, they knew this man gave them a peace "which the world cannot give." His declaration of peace was one of peace between God and man. The war finally declared over. Jesus really had risen, the battle against sin, Satan, death, and hell was over. They saw it with their own eyes! Jesus showed them his hands and his side—the battle scars of the victor. His body, pierced on the cross by nail and spear, bore the marks of peace.

The disciples saw the Jesus as he assured them peace was won. They were overjoyed. The greatest moment when a victory is declared in battle is not when those at home hear of victory, but when they know of the best and fullest victory when they see their loved one return alive. The disciples felt this victory and this joy as they saw their Lord alive. They know understood. Their plans had fallen through. But God's plans ever do. Not even death stops him. This is real victory!

Jesus' appearance and assurance of his resurrection to his disciples was just the first step of his plan. They were to be eyewitnesses and declare peace to others. "As the Father sent me, I am sending you. Receive the holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven!" Go and share the message, "the war is over, peace between God and man. Forgiveness is won." See how God dispels our doubts? He gives us eyewitnesses who declare to us peace. The gospel of the living Jesus has gone out into all the world like the pamphlets and newspapers that littered the Philippine islands right after the war had ended. Hear the good news and respond with joy!

Notice who ended up as the first target of this message of peace. Many seem to overlook this, but one of the first Easter witnesses is given to an unbeliever who once had faith! Thomas is called "doubting" Thomas. But what is often translated as doubt is more than that. Thomas did not believe the good news. Thomas said, "I will refuse to believe." Jesus later said, "Stop not believing." Thomas, once a faithful disciple had fallen into unbelief. He was the first man targeted with this message of peace by the other disciples.

You might know someone who is living in uncertainty and fear even though they once knew the peace of Jesus. Maybe their life didn't work out the way they planned, and they turned aside from God's Word. Maybe some hardship or unexpected turn like a death of a friend set them back into doubt, fear, and even unbelief. Or maybe they caved into the lies around them. How many believers don't hear that cry of Satan, "Don't believe it! It's a false trap for the weak."? They lose their confidence in the resurrection. Thomas knew that Jesus was pierced, killed, and buried. He knew that reports of a stolen body were around. He knew that the people who watched Jesus die mocked, "prove you are the Son of God." But Jesus didn't give them any proof at that time. He clearly died. Just like Thomas, we are not always surrounded by witnesses of the resurrection in this world, but by those who stand against it demanding proof. And we have the same thing that Thomas had the first week: nothing but the word of eyewitnesses who tell us, "we have seen the Lord." Even a believer can fall into unbelief by seeking more than the Word, wanting proof.

Imagine Thomas' agonizing week of doubt. For an entire week there was no joy in the resurrection, only Jesus defeated. We have seen fellow disciples who once followed Jesus become unbelievers. We all have a sinful nature which will join in questioning what Jesus has done. With so many TV programs etc. questioning whether the news of Jesus resurrection was real. The gospels, faithful accounts of eyewitnesses, faithfully shared as the Word of God, have been labeled as "unreliable" while texts of historians that lived centuries later are considered reliable only if they reject the resurrection. The History Channel says this so much. And many people consider them as the experts. Such experts lead people into fear, despair, and leave them out of the joy of resurrection victory. So, the heart retreats to find the truth outside of God's Word to inside the cave of man's mind. No real peace. No joy. If we doubt the resurrection our faith in Jesus is useless! Only darkness of the grave and war with God forever! This where doubt leaves such people.

How did Jesus deal with Thomas' doubt, his unbelief? Don't overlook the fact that he gave Thomas all he needed for an entire week. He gave Thomas friends, his fellow disciples, who reported the good news to him. Thomas had the Word of God shared by eyewitnesses. It says, "they were telling him." He had an entire week of witnesses speaking to him. "This is what Jesus said! He lives!" And this is what God still provides today for those who doubt the resurrection: these recorded witnesses and your sharing of that news "The Lord lives. The war has ended! Come on out!"

In the end Thomas would not be lost to unbelief but would share in the joy of being an eyewitness to the living Jesus. 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!" 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."

Thomas became one of the strongest witnesses! He knew just who this man Jesus was! Thomas called him "my Lord and my God." Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus' plan was for Thomas to reach more people with the powerful gospel message. His plan for all people was that they would hear of his victory by his Word. How do we believe? His Word, eyewitness reports of the truth. His Word creates faith, removes fear, gives joy and life! A theme of John's gospel: Believe in Jesus and live forever!

Now the world is flooded with witnesses who share the news. "As the Father has sent me so I am now sending you." After those first eyewitnesses were sent, only a little over 500 witnesses are recorded as seeing the risen Lord. But their message spread, and hearts were changed by their report, "We have seen the Lord!" Through the words that were shared, doubts were removed, and the victory won by Jesus spread.

There are many today who still doubt the good news and are living in fear of death. They are still waging war with God. All our own plans of cowering in fear of death have been changed. We know the good news. We open the door, step out boldly into a world filled with fear and proclaim the good news. The war is over. It ended on Good Friday. And on the third day the word started to spread -- even though those who should have known better were locked in a room. Now all our plans are changed because God's plan is fulfilled.