

To Doubt and To Believe

John 20:24-29

So, what do you do when your world has been turned upside down?

This is where Thomas finds himself after the death of Jesus. All his hopes and dreams were wrapped in Jesus. All the promise that Jesus held for himself and his friends was now lying in a tomb. Life was making no sense. Was Jesus just another pretender, like all the other pretenders who came before him? He did say that he, even though He had never been wrong - until now.

Today, I would like to explore with you Thomas and his doubts concerning Jesus Christ. We will first see who Thomas is, the situation in which he finds himself, the explanation for his doubt, and finally, the resolution of his doubts.

I. Who is Thomas

Two things can be said about him: he was courageous, and he was no pretender.

Courageous: John 11:16 – Jesus and the disciples go to Jesus' friend Lazarus. Thomas is willing to die with Jesus if death was the outcome of their return to dangerous Judea. Perhaps Thomas's statement was spoken out of ignorance and blind commitment, yet it showed that Thomas had a strong affection for Jesus.

No pretender: Thomas is refreshing, He does not pretend that everything is all right, nor will he pretend to know if he does not understand. He is not a 'Yes' man.

John 14:5 – Thomas is confused about Jesus saying that he would be leaving soon to prepare a place for them. Thomas, in all sincerity, asks Christ how they are to find the way to this place if they do not know where they are going. Only Thomas had the nerve to ask. Thomas is a thoughtful person. He will not make a confession of faith unless he believed deeply that it was true. Only through deep thought and personal reflection will Thomas believe. His faith will be won through personal struggle.

II. What is the Situation Thomas Faces?

We forget how confused and discouraged the disciples and the other followers of Jesus were following his death, even though Jesus told them repeatedly that he would die and rise again. Rising from the dead, however, is not a common thing.

I wonder what you and I would have done if we were in the disciples' place? Would we have believed, or would we have doubted?

No one believed at first: not the women nor the disciples. The disciples saw him die! No one rises from the dead. The last three years were nice, but nobody rises from the dead.

Then came Sunday night, and the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples who saw and believed; but Thomas was not there. He was with them when the women came back from the tomb, but he was now gone.

It seems that when sorrow and tragedy appear, people do one of two things: they either seek solace in the company of others or they go off by themselves, preferring to be alone with their thoughts.

Thomas does the latter. The thought of Jesus being alive is just too much. Everything he had, he had given to Jesus, then Jesus died. How could he believe that Jesus is alive? What if it is not true? He had been hurt once, why set himself up for more pain. A false hope is no hope at all.

He loves Jesus. He cares about Jesus. He wants to believe that Jesus is alive, but his heart is broken

III. What is the Explanation for Thomas's Doubt?

Thomas is doubting, but that does not make him an unbeliever.

He is not a skeptic. He is not a rationalist. Rationalists enjoy their doubt, talk about it, laugh about it, and get angry when they are refuted. This person is not looking for answers; he or she is looking for an argument. He or she counts the difficulties, seizes objections, and looks for loopholes. They have a hard heart. This type of doubting is unbelief. The Pharisees were skeptics/rationalists.

It is one thing to doubt when you are a skeptic/rationalist, but it is something else to doubt when your heart has been broken. The doubter who is hurting says, "I don't believe, but I am willing to believe if I can see for myself." This is Thomas.

Thomas is not unwilling to believe; he is unable. He is stuck. In his mind and heart too much is at stake to believe that Jesus is alive. He cannot be satisfied with the testimony of others. He must see for himself that Jesus is alive. He does not want to be heart-broken again.

IV. The Resolution to Thomas's Doubt

Thomas has gotten a bad reputation over the years. We call him Doubting Thomas. We look down on him.

But Jesus did not look down on Thomas. Eight days later, when Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time, Thomas was with them. Jesus speaks to him as to one whose faith is weak, not to one who has an evil heart.

John 20:27 With compassion, Jesus commanded Thomas to place his finger in Christ's wounds, and challenges Thomas to stop doubting and believe. Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He knew the raging sea within his heart. He came just so Thomas could be sure.

Jesus is saying to all of you who are doubting Him because of your hurt and disappointment, "Come, see for yourself. Stop doubting and believe."

Here is the wonderful truth: Doubters are welcome at the tomb.

It is ok to be an honest doubter. Being an honest doubter is not a sin. Some Christians pretend they understand all things; all their questions are answered; they have no doubts. This attitude is both sad and wrong. All Christians have doubts. All of us would be healthier if we admitted we had doubts.

Thomas was authentic. God desires that we be authentic with Him and others. We need to stop looking down on people who have honest doubts.

To those of you who are skeptics, Look at the evidence. You cannot be shown Christ's body, but you have the written account of Jesus in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Read them for yourselves. Read them with an open heart and an open mind. Stop arguing and believe.

Whether you are honest doubter or a skeptic, John writes these words to you. (John 20:21)
Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.