

Thomas' Doubting: Encountering Thomas at His Worst

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Why don't we remember Peter as "forsaking Peter"? Why don't we refer to James and John as the "sleeping apostles"? Why don't we remember Paul as "blaspheming and persecuting Paul"? Because we recognize there was so much more to the lives of these men than their moments of weakness and sin. Tragically, we recognize this for just about all the Bible characters except for one of the greatest—Thomas. For 2000 years, Thomas has been remembered as "doubting Thomas." We have no doubt, that Thomas did doubt the resurrection of Jesus. However, to define him by this moment is just not fair. There was more to Thomas than this event. In our next lesson, we will examine the greatness of Thomas. However, for this lesson, let's see what we can learn from Thomas' doubts in **John 20:24-29**.

Discussion:

- I. At our worst, we are not worse than anyone else.
 - A. Two weeks before Jesus appeared to Thomas, women who had gone to the tomb of Jesus reported that they had seen the resurrected Savior. According to **Mark 16:11**, the disciples would not believe it. **Luke 24:11** says the apostles thought the women were speaking idle tales or nonsense. In **Mark 16:13**, two others witnessed Jesus and reported it to the disciples, but again, they didn't believe. In **Mark 16:14**, Jesus finally appeared to the apostles and His first order of business was to rebuke them for their lack of faith. The fact is, instead of remembering Thomas as doubting Thomas, we should remember all the apostles as doubters. None of them believed until they saw with their own eyes.
 - B. Interestingly, the same thing which convinced Thomas was what convinced the rest of the apostles. According to **John 20:20**, it was only after they saw Jesus hands and His side that they rejoiced. Thomas did not pick those criteria because of his great doubts. He was basing his statements on what he had been told by the others. They were able to see His hands and His side. Thomas wanted to see it as well.
 - C. The upshot of this was that Thomas, even at his worst, was no worse than the other apostles. I think there is a lesson in here for us. Often, we build up images of how pure and righteous everyone else always is and have always been. Having intimate knowledge of our own sins, we compare ourselves to others and then begin wallowing in misery, wondering how God could ever forgive sinners like us. But as with Thomas, even at our worst, we are no different from everyone else. Look around you at all these people. What you see are sinners. Every one of us has sinned and fallen short of God's glory according to **Romans 3:23**. John, speaking of the apostles, said in **I John 1:8**, if one of them claimed to be without sin they would be lying.
 - D. Even if you can't wrap your mind around the fact that even at your worst you are no worse than everyone else, at least grasp this. Even while doing your worst, Jesus died for you (**Romans 5:8, 10**). We all deserve hell, but God sent Jesus to die for us no matter how bad we have been (**I John 2:1-2**). You are right when you tell yourself you don't deserve mercy. But that is the point. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy. Jesus died so that even though you don't deserve it, you could receive forgiveness. Even at your worst, you have not been so bad that Jesus didn't die for you. Every single one of us are in that same situation.
- II. Everyone has times of weakness.
 - A. Consider this extension of our first point. Even if we accept that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners, some of us still paint some kind of rosy picture of everyone else. We struggle but everyone else wakes up every morning smiling and ready to attack Satan and false doctrine, overcome temptation and sin, and spread the gospel. Nobody else every experiences times of weakness where they just don't want to get up and serve the Lord. No one else ever goes through times when they think it is just too much work to try to overcome sin another day. Nobody else ever has times of doubts. We wish we could be more like everyone else. We wish we could be this amazing image of strength and constant devotion to God. But we know ourselves to well for that.

- B. Then when we hit these down times, we think we are somehow second class Christians; if we view ourselves as Christians at all. Sometimes, when we hit the weak moments, we believe we might as well throw in the towel and quit. Have you ever been there? I have. How easy it is to view everyone else as super saints. How easy it is to come in here on Sundays and see everyone looking their best and acting their best and think we are the only ones who struggle.
- C. When you are in that moment of spiritual despair, remember **John 20**. That is exactly where Thomas was...weak. He was so weak he had thrown in the towel. Even when the other apostles were telling him there was no reason to quit, he didn't buy it. The fact is, all the apostles were there. Despite the great things they would later do in the kingdom, they all had times of weakness. They had all abandoned Christ in fear and refused to believe the reports of His resurrection. When Jesus did reveal Himself to them, they could have responded merely with shame, depression and abandonment, but they didn't. Instead, they turned to Jesus and said, "My Lord and my God." We must do that as well. Those moments of weakness are the moments when more than ever we need to turn closer to Jesus.
- D. Frankly, this is one of the reasons I think we need to confess to each other more as **James 5:16** says. The rigorous honesty is what will allow more of us to open up and allow us to actually face our sins and overcome. When we recognize we are all in the same boat and start trusting each other with our most shameful secrets, then we can overcome that shame and really start making some spiritual growth headway. One of Satan's greatest tools against us as individual Christians and against churches is letting us all believe we are the only ones that ever face weakness. This cuts us off from each other and causes us to keep from seeking the help we so desperately need.

III. We must walk by faith and not by sight.

- A. After Thomas finally witnessed Jesus and then made his confession, Jesus reproved him for his lack of faith (**John 20:29**). However, that statement is not so much a rebuke of Thomas as it is informative of our own situation. While Thomas believed because he saw, we must believe without sight. In fact, after the ascension, the only other person to have sight was Paul. Yet he claimed he was one born out of due season; he was an exception (**I Corinthians 15:8**). Yet, today, some make it a rule that we should see Jesus. How many people think they should get a sign? How many people tell us about their visions of Jesus? Yet, Jesus said we are blessed when we have believed without seeing Him.
- B. As **II Corinthians 5:7** says, we walk by faith and not by sight. But this means so much more than we believe in Jesus even though we have never seen Him. This means we follow Jesus' path even though we have not seen its outcome. We may even have our doubts that Jesus' way is better. We may think He is asking too much. We may think His way will cause us more trouble. However, because we walk by faith and not sight, we do not have to wait until we see that Jesus' way will work. We simply pursue His path no matter what He asks of us. I think of teaching like **Matthew 5:23-26**, in which Jesus says when we know someone is upset with us that we go to them to reconcile. I have a tendency to say, "Don't rock the boat. If they aren't coming to me, why should I go them? Just let sleeping dogs lie." Jesus says go to them. If I am walking by faith and not by sight, I will simply go make the amends and the reconciliation. Or what about the teachings of **Matthew 5:38-42**. I know I normally try to figure out what the exact requirements of these passages are because I don't really like the path they outline for me. However, when I walk by faith, I trust Jesus that He knows where this leads and it is better for me than I can possibly imagine.

IV. We all respond somehow to Jesus' resurrection.

- A. In Thomas, we see two possible responses to the resurrection. We can disbelieve, as Thomas and all the apostles did at first. Or we can fall on our knees before Christ and submit to Him, saying, "My Lord and my God" (**John 20:28**).
- B. According to **I Corinthians 15:13-19**, the resurrection is the central point of the Gospel. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we who hope in His resurrection walk and talk in vain, and, of all people, we are most to be pitied. However, if it did happen, then the unbeliever is the one

who is to be pitied. Therefore, we must deal with the resurrection. We do not get to simply overlook it.

- C. The fact is, whether modern man wants to admit it or not, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central point of history. Though men today are trying to rid history of the effects of Jesus' life, they will never succeed. Even if they remove His name from all the history books... Even if they change all the time lines to speak of the Common Era instead of the years of our Lord... Even if they finally wipe out any memory of the man Jesus, they cannot wipe out that Christ. The second most important day of all history will sneak up on man like a thief in the night and every man will stand before Christ in judgment for how we dealt with His death and resurrection. But by then, it will be too late to cry out, "My Lord and my God."
- D. Consider Thomas' final response, "My Lord and my God." Have seen the resurrected Savior, Thomas knew who Jesus was. He was God in the flesh. He was no ordinary man. But, when he made this confession, he was saying more about himself than Jesus. He was expressing loyalty. He declared not only that Jesus is Lord and God, but that Jesus was his Lord and his God. We too must respond to Christ's resurrection in this way, making Him our Lord and God, allowing Him to rule our lives (**Luke 6:46**). If our faith does not produce action in serving Christ and making Him our Lord, we might as well be atheists (**James 2:14-26**).
- E. Every minute we delay our response, "My Lord and my God," we are responding by saying, "I do not believe." Do not procrastinate. The Day of Judgment is coming, in which it will be too late to submit. Every minute, of every day, every one of us is responding to the resurrection of Christ. How are you responding right now?

Conclusion:

How will you respond to the resurrection of Jesus? Will you disbelieve? Will you claim faith but never live by faith? Or will you submit to Christ as your Lord and your God. Do you remember submitting Thomas? Do you remember professing Thomas? Do you remember confessing Thomas? You need to follow his example. Confess your faith in Christ and make Him your Lord and God by submitting to Him in baptism (**Mark 16:16**). Don't delay any longer.