

Encountering Thomas at His Best

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
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Introduction:

I feel sorry for the apostle Thomas, forever branded as doubting Thomas because of **John 20:24-29**. Think about it. If I were to ask you to list some of the greatest, most loyal, most courageous servants of God in the Bible, would Thomas ever make it on that list? Probably not. Despite the fact that he actually didn't behave any differently than did the rest of the apostles (cf. **Mark 16:14**), he is the one who has been labeled as the doubter. How many of us would like to be remembered for our worst moments? Wouldn't we rather be remembered for our great moments? Are you aware that Thomas actually had great moments and one was even recorded in Scripture? In our haste to see him as the doubter in **John 20**, we often overlook Thomas at his best in **John 11:16**. In this passage, Jesus was going back to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead, but the apostles were afraid for him to go back. In **John 11:8**, the apostles reminded Jesus that the last time He was in Judea the Jews tried to stone Him. Why would He go back? It wasn't Peter who stood up and showed courage saying they should go. Rather, Thomas stood up and said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (ESV). Thomas did not say, "Let us also go, and if He dies we might also die with Him." He expected Jesus to die if He went to Judea. He expected all of them to die if they went to Judea. But he stood up, faced that death and encouraged the others to have courage as well. Truly, this was a great moment in Thomas' life. Let's turn away from his moment of doubt and see what we can learn from his moment of courage.

Discussion:

- I. We must be committed to Christ even if it means death.
 - A. In **John 10:31**, Judeans tried to stone Jesus. In **John 10:40**, Jesus left the region. However, because of Lazarus' death, Jesus wanted to return to Judea. While Jesus was eager to return, the apostles were frightened. In **John 11:8, 12**, the apostles actually try to talk Jesus out of His plan to return. Jesus, however, was determined. Thomas was the apostle who stepped out to lead, calling the other apostles to be ready to face death with Jesus.
 - B. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (**John 15:13**; ESV). Thomas demonstrated this love for Christ. We must examine our own lives, seeing if we have this kind of commitment. **Revelation 2:10** says we must be faithful unto death. This doesn't mean just faithful until the day we happen to die. It means being faithful even if that faithfulness leads to death. Are we that committed?
 - C. We should not be surprised that Thomas was willing to die for Jesus, he had already given his life to Jesus. We do not know what events surrounded Thomas' first contact with Jesus, but we see from the others that apostleship meant sacrifice. In **Mark 10:28**, talking about all the apostles, said they had left everything to follow Him. Have we given our lives to Jesus (**II Corinthians 8:5**)? The fact is, if we are not willing to sacrifice our material things... If we are not willing to sacrifice our pleasures... If we are not willing to sacrifice our time... If we are not willing to sacrifice other pursuits... If we are not willing to sacrifice our sins, then we are not going to be willing to sacrifice our lives for Jesus. If we have committed our lives to Jesus, it will be a small thing to lay down our lives for Him. How committed are we?
- II. Even those who have sinned can be great servants of God.
 - A. Can anyone deny the greatness of the act of Thomas here? An act of sacrifice and commitment above that of the common man. It is hard to believe this is the same Thomas we have come to know and ridicule as "doubting Thomas." Yet, it is. This is the same Thomas who didn't get it in **John 14:5**. This is the same Thomas who refused to believe the reports of Jesus' resurrection in **John 20:24-25**. And yet, here is great service demonstrated.
 - B. Of course, some will say that we see a great Thomas here but by **John 20** we see that Thomas had fallen. Absolutely not. Thomas was a great servant even after **John 20**. Thomas was with the apostles in the upper room in **Acts 1:13**. Thomas was with the apostles on the day of Pentecost. He was with the apostles when they were cast in prison in **Acts 5:18**. Thomas was with the apostles in Jerusalem at the time of the persecution in **Acts 8:1**. Thomas was still a great and courageous servant of God even though he did have times of weakness and sin.

- C. Far too many Christians look at the sins they have committed and the weaknesses they have experienced and believe they can never do anything great to serve God. So they sit dormant on a church pew thinking anything they could do will only amount to nothing. Because of this thinking, they do not reach their true potential as a servant of God and the church with which they work never reaches its true potential.
- D. No matter what sins we have committed, no matter what weaknesses we have faced or will face, every single one of us can be great servants of God if we will simply follow Paul's advice from **Philippians 3:13-14**. You can do great things for God and His kingdom!

III. At our best, we are not better than anyone else.

- A. In our previous lesson, we learned that at his worst, Thomas was not worse than anyone else. This is important to note for us because we learned that when we have messed up, we did not become second class Christians. When an individual feels he is a second rate Christian, he cripples himself and the congregation. However, there is another attitude which is just as crippling to the individual and the congregation. That attitude is arrogance, thinking that because I have done something great I am better than other Christians.
- B. Just because Thomas did have times of great service throughout his life, did not mean Thomas was better than anyone else. Thomas still had weaknesses. He still had misunderstandings. He still failed sometimes. He still deserved to spend eternity in hell. He was just like everyone else, saved by the grace of God.
- C. It would have been easy for Thomas to look back through his life and think highly of himself because of the great thing he did in **John 11**. However, marring the beauty of those great accomplishments is the day we so often remember in Thomas' life. It was surely a humbling experience for him and likely stuck with him all his life. While each of us can do great things, let us not so forget our past sins that we forget how miserable we are compared to God (**Romans 3:23**) and, therefore, how much we need His grace.
- D. No matter what great things we have done, we are not better than anyone else. Paul dealt with this attitude in **I Corinthians 12:20-22**. Paul follows this with his teaching on the need for love in **I Corinthians 13:4** saying that love doesn't boast and is not arrogant. We must not think more highly of ourselves than we ought (**Romans 12:3**). **Galatians 6:3** says if we think we are something when we are nothing, we deceive ourselves.

IV. Leadership is necessary.

- A. Until **John 11:16**, the apostles were afraid to return to Judea with Jesus. It almost seems like Jesus is starting the trip without them and they are all just staring dumfounded after Him. It took Thomas stepping out in front, making himself vulnerable to their criticism and their complaints, to get them off center and heading in the right direction.
- B. Every group needs leaders. One of the most interesting psychological phenomena is that of group paralysis. This is the phenomenon that allows a group of people to watch a woman being beat to death and do nothing about it. Generally, in a paralyzed group, if one would simply lead the way, the others will join in. Unfortunately, what generally happens is everyone wants to do something about the situation, but they all sit back wondering why nobody is doing anything.
- C. Notice, Thomas didn't say, "Hey guys, you all really need to go with Jesus." He said "Let us go." Jesus is moving and now Thomas is following beckoning the other apostles to ante up and have some backbone. The key to leadership is not constantly nagging others about what they need to be doing. Leaders do not push others ahead of them, nor do they pull others along. Rather, they set the pattern, blaze the trail and encourage others to join them.
- D. According to **Romans 12:8**, leadership takes zeal. The term translated "zeal" carries with it the connotation of haste. That is, leadership is not something we procrastinate and put off until tomorrow. Leaders start working hard today. Leadership takes work. That is why so many refrain from leadership, they are just too lazy.
- E. Are there things you would like to see this church doing? Are there things you would like to see members of this church doing? Don't gripe and complain. Don't belittle the elders, deacons and preachers for not doing it. Blaze the trail for us. If it is scriptural, wise and proper, people will follow you. However, if all you do is complain about what isn't done and try to nag others to get

it started, nothing will ever happen. For this congregation to do great things, people must lead the way as Thomas did.

Conclusion:

What a great servant Thomas was. Even though he made some really bone-headed mistakes... Even though he sinned greatly... Even though he doubted profoundly, he was still a great servant of God. You can be as well. No matter what terrible things you have done or what great things you have done, if you come to Jesus as Thomas ultimately did submitting to Jesus as your Lord and God, you will be a great servant. What do you need to do right now to surrender and submit to Jesus? Why wait?