



John 20:24-31

Thomas: A Man of Mature Faith

"Doubting Thomas." It is a common expression even in our modern English. It refers to one of the disciples of Jesus who is often associated with one word: doubting. He is seen as a natural pessimist, a man very liable to take the despondent hopeless view of the future and see the darker side of everything. He has eyes for the gloom of death. "Lord we don't know where you are going and how can we know the way?" We have no doubt that he loved Jesus even enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him. Upon hearing that Lazarus was sick Jesus told his disciples they were going to Judea. Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." If he were that gloomy before the death of Jesus by crucifixion, what would he be like upon Christ's death? After the crucifixion of Jesus Thomas was a brokenhearted man who wanted to be left alone to suffer alone. Perhaps he can rightly be described as "belligerent in his pessimism." Every time we see Thomas it is a day of appalling gloom. We have no picture of Thomas, or account of anything he did or said in the day of sunshine. Perhaps this helps us to understand his responses to Jesus and what is happening about him. He has a lot of kinfolk in our day. But we will observe the method Jesus used with Thomas is not unusual in his dealings with us. His understanding of Thomas was perfect and he patiently brought him to a mature faith.

Thomas helps us to understand what Jesus was teaching His disciples during his post-resurrection appearances. Those who loved him on the earth had to learn to live without the physical appearance of Christ, the actual seeing, touching, and hearing him. There would be no more sitting at the table with him and filling the mind with his words, but now they would learn to walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, he would walk with them, sit with them, eat with them, but in a more profound manner not limited by space and time. Here is a tremendous lesson for us to learn.

Jesus carefully chose his disciples to come and learn from him. Thomas, a twin, was one of those chosen men.

JESUS CHOSE THOMAS AS A DISCIPLE

All four of the Gospels have Thomas in the list of the apostles of Jesus. Matthew and Mark mention him only once (Matt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18). Luke lists him once in his Gospel and in Acts (Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13). John gives us eight references to Thomas as a disciple of Jesus. He was chosen and appointed by the Lord Jesus to be one of His followers. Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends."

Thomas was with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:16).

After Jesus healed the blind man in the Temple the Pharisees and Sanhedrin sought to kill both of them (John 9). Jesus left Jerusalem and word reached him that his friend Lazarus of Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem, was near death (John 11).

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Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus told them that Lazarus was already dead (11:13-15). Upon hearing the news that Jesus will go to Bethany Thomas responded to his fellow disciples, "Let us go too, so that we may die with him" (v. 16 NET).

Thomas was concerned about dying for Jesus. He knew perfectly well the attitude of the religious leaders at this time. There was every possibility that they would arrest Jesus and put him to death.

However, Jesus was concerned that Thomas will "believe" in him (v. 15). Thomas would no doubt have heard the encounter with Martha in vv. 23-27 regarding his resurrection.

Thomas was standing there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (vv. 38-45). Men removed the stone from the mouth of the grave at the command of Jesus. Jesus prayed to the Father and when he had finished he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." John tells us, "The one who had died came out, his feet and hands tied up with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unwrap him and let him go'" (John 11:44 NET). Jesus would later be buried in this similar manner.

Thomas came to Jerusalem to die with Jesus and he witnessed the Master of death call the dead man back to life. Thomas was just as prepared as the other disciples to believe in the resurrection, but along with the others he never grasped that prediction of the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus prepared His disciples for His own death

Thomas was with Jesus as he sought to prepare them for his crucifixion. From the time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead the religious leaders sought an opportunity to kill him (11:53; 13:1).

They celebrated the Passover meal together, and Jesus spent time preparing them for his death the very next day. That night in the upper room Thomas listened to the encouraging words of Jesus about heaven (14:1-3).

In deed, Thomas' response to these words is vivid. Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5 NET). Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you will know my Father too. And from now on you do know him and have seen him" (vv. 6-7 NET).

Before the end of the day Jesus will be crucified, and three days later will be raised from the dead.

THOMAS AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (JOHN 20:24).

Jesus appeared to the twelve

We are not given the reason for Thomas not being with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them on the day of His resurrection from the dead (John 20:24). But he was to blame for refusing to accept the testimony of his friends when they assured him they had seen the risen Jesus. We do have Thomas' reaction to the testimony of the other disciples. "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord! But he replied, Unless I see the wounds from the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the wounds from the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe it! (vv. 24-25 NET). His words ring with a little obstinate tone in his unbelief.

Imagine the excitement when the other disciples met him (v. 25). I don't think they were calmly trying to persuade Thomas that Christ was alive. They were excited and full of assurance. They wanted their friend to experience that same sense of emotional relief and peace knowing that his Savior was alive. Thomas was not impressed with their excitement, not convinced by their testimony. He would not be taken in, even by faithful companions.

Perhaps it was Thomas' emotional reaction to the outcome of his appalling agony and disappointment. Death was real to Thomas. No doubt he had stood where you have at the graveside and said his last good by to friends and loved ones.

He had been filled with the horror at the sight of the bleeding wounds of Jesus. Thomas declared he would not believe any rumors until those very wounds demonstrated the identity of Jesus.

King George V said, "If I have to suffer, let me go and suffer alone." That was the attitude of Thomas.

Thomas demanded more evidence

How tragic when in our unbelief we take pride in demanding more evidence than that given by a group of credible veracious men.

These witnesses believed what they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears. They had touched him with their own hands. How could his five senses be more trusted than the combined testimony of ten men who all saw him at the same time? How could he reject the testimony of ten witnesses thinking their senses had deceived them or that his five senses could be better trusted than theirs?

The ultimate test for Thomas was the very same evidence that he predetermined to be untrustworthy and insufficient in the experience of others. How arrogant can you become?

On the other hand, there is the unbeliever who thrives on doubt; he likes it, enjoys it, sports it, and lives by it. He enjoys going about telling others his morbid preoccupation with his agnostic views. Therefore, we need to distinguish between the honest doubter and the evil heart of unbelief. "

The dishonest doubter has a deep reluctance to be convinced by the objective truth. He is more than irritated when he is forced to face some pet theory of unbelief.

Do you read one side of the question, courting difficulties, eagerly seizing or new objections? Are you provoked instead for thankful when any doubt is removed?

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A true skeptic will openly, honestly seek the truth regardless of the outcome. An honest doubt is one thing, but a stubborn heart of unbelief is another.

Jesus method was to let Thomas reflect on what the disciples had testified to him for eight days. I seriously doubt if he could get away from those haunting words of eyewitnesses.

I greatly enjoy the creative and stimulating writings of C. S. Lewis. When you examine his life you find there were two converging roads that led that brilliant British scholar back to the faith he had so happily renounced earlier in his life. One was the working of his mind; particularly as he tried to make sense of the odd fact that mankind seems, with minor cultural variations, to have a sense of a universal, objective moral law, while frantically disobeying the demands of that law. The other road was the way of "Romance" or "Joy," the experience of a yearning whose object was unknown and his finely honed reason were incapable of explaining. By the age of thirty he glumly felt God closing in on him as Christian scholars of equal distinction and abilities surrounded him. The "Hound of heaven," the Holy Spirit, would not let up.

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England (C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*).

For a few months more, Lewis was undecided about the role of Christ. He wrestled with the New Testament, haunted by its central figure, and finally found himself fully convinced that one time and one time only God descended to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. The Jesus so sharply outlined in the New Testament was one with the God who had captured a reluctant convert during Trinity Term. The particular route he traveled, from mild faith to atheism and on to strong faith, also helped make him sympathetic to nonbelievers, since he knew their problems firsthand.

Thomas met the resurrected Jesus

So far as we can tell it was solely to remove Thomas' doubts that our Lord appeared to the assembled disciples the following Sunday. The apostle John brings his Gospel to a climax with what happens next. "Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you! (v. 26)

We don't know if the disciples expected a fresh appearance of their Lord on this day. But it is not without significance that after an uneventful week that Jesus appeared the next Sunday. The situation before us is an exact duplicate of the one sketched in verse 19. Silently and suddenly as before, without warning, without opening of doors, Jesus appears exactly as he did a week ago. He is suddenly standing in the midst of his disciples and he greets them exactly the same, "Peace to you!"

Surprise, surprise, unutterable surprise! Then sudden shame as Thomas unexpectedly realized his Lord had heard his obstinate ultimatum and sullen unbelief. Jesus simply repeated almost in the same words the hard, rude, bare, crude test Thomas had proposed to the other disciples.

Jesus turned to Thomas, who is the last of the disciples to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. Jesus did not scold him. His words breathe forgiveness and encouragement to Thomas' faith. He brings Thomas to assurance, just as He did the other disciples. Thomas' faith is deepened with the appearance of his risen Lord.

Thomas you wanted evidence, proof; look, see for yourself! Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood

together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and examine my hands. Extend your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue in your unbelief, but believe. Thomas replied to him, My Lord and my God! Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed (20:26-29 NET).

Jesus agreed exactly to Thomas' demands for evidence. Jesus answered Thomas as though he himself had been listening to every word Thomas had uttered when making his demands to the disciples in verse 25! Jesus hasn't been seen for a week. I never read this verse without asking myself, who told Jesus what Thomas had said? The fact is *Jesus was there all the time!* Jesus has heard every word Thomas had uttered when making his demands. Jesus met every one of the outrageous demands of this disciple to the letter. He let Thomas set up the demands and Jesus knocked them down.

Jesus held his hands out for Thomas' inspection. Then with shame, humble and joyful confession, he declared, "My Lord and my God." Thomas is satisfied with precisely the same proof as the other disciples. Thomas is carried entirely out of preoccupation with himself and sees nothing but his Lord. His soul rests in the person before him. Christ captures him.

This is a powerful and clear confession by Thomas. Moreover, our Lord accepted the declaration of his deity as the true expression of faith.

The beautiful thing about the method of Jesus with Thomas is he is offering to all eleven of the disciples "many infallible proofs" or "demonstrative evidence" of his resurrection. Acts 1:3 reads, "To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God" (NET).

Jesus not only answered Thomas' doubt, but every Thomas in the future. All eleven disciples were "witnesses" of his resurrection (Acts 2:32; 3:15). Their testimony would stand as being unassailable in all future ages. Fifty years after the resurrection of Jesus the apostle John wrote: "This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us). What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ)" (1 John 1:1-3 NET). Thomas saw and experienced the same "demonstrative evidence" as each of the other apostles. The early church has not just two or three authentic witnesses, but a multitude who saw the risen Lord alive. Thomas was one of the twelve. His faith had been tested and it was pure.

Jesus has given a decisive blow to all doubt and unbelief in his resurrection. There would be many more Thomases down through history who would wrestle with the same question of the resurrection. Jesus answered satisfactorily every doubter by the way he answered Thomas' doubt. We should be thankful that Thomas expressed his doubt about the resurrection of Jesus because in answering his questions Jesus answered ours, too. If one of the twelve had remained a doubter it would have cast disbelief on the integrity of the others and the ripple effect would have passed down through history.

My Lord and my God!

Thomas gave Jesus Christ "full acceptance of His deity and of the fact of His resurrection." Remember these words are those of a Jewish man. The two possessives "my" makes the two affirmations stand out independently. This is the strong climax to the whole gospel of John.

independently. This is the strong climax to the whole gospel of John.

"My Lord" includes the full deity as fully as "my God." This is an emphatic declaration of Thomas' conviction as to who Jesus Christ is. It is a natural expression of his faith in Christ. The word *L'ord* (*kyrios*), is used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament to translate Yahweh, the LORD God of the Jews. Jesus is both *L'ORD* (Yahweh) and God (Elohim).

What is just as important is the response of Jesus to Thomas' faith. Jesus accepted the exclamation of him as Lord and God. Only God can do that. This fact cannot be overemphasized. Jesus acknowledged and accepted the faith of Thomas. Jesus accepted the worship of this man. Jesus does not modify or demean this acclamation of faith and worship. He accepts it from Thomas. He does not add to it or take away from it. This is a full grand confession of Jesus as God. "Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed (v. 29 NET).

How strange that Thomas rejected the testimony of others who saw the same evidence in the same manner as he did. He demanded even more that would set him apart from the others. When Jesus offered his hands, his feet and his side, Thomas conceded to the same evidence as the others. And so it is with us, too.

Jesus speaks of us when he says, "Blessed are they who did not see and did believe." Whoever at any time, past, present, or future, believes without seeing is pronounced, blessed. We walk by faith and not by sight, but our faith has solid credible historical evidence of a risen Savior.

The apostle Peter was writing to persecuted believers when he said, "This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials. Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold—gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away—and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, because you are attaining the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:6-9 NET).

The last scenes of Thomas in the New Testament were on the shore of Tiberias as a silent listener to Jesus as He dealt with Peter (John 21). Then he passes off the pages of the N. T. at Pentecost where he is with all the apostles worshipping Christ Jesus in the upper room (Acts 1:12-14).

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY

Eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. What more evidence do we need? That will hold up in any court of law.

Thomas lost an opportunity

Thomas' big mistake was he withdrew from Christian fellowship. In his isolation he missed the sight of Christ. He wanted to be by himself in his suffering. Alexander Maclaren noted, "Thomas did the very worst thing that a melancholy man can do, went away to brood in a corner by himself, and so to exaggerate all his idiosyncrasies, to distort the proportion of truth, to hug his despair, by separating himself from his fellows. Therefore he lost what they got, the sight of the Lord. He was not with them when Jesus came." He would have been far better off in the upper room with the rest of the mourners than alone turning over in his gloomy mind the dissolution of the fair company. He was alone by himself hugging and nurturing his unbelief. As G. Campbell Morgan said, "The only justifiable criticism of Thomas is that he was not there on that first occasion." Yes, he ought to have been there with the other disciples, but he wasn't and he missed the

occasion." Yes, he ought to have been there with the other disciples, but he wasn't and he missed the blessing.

As a loyal disciple he was willing to die with Jesus. His intentions were good. However, we also know that when Jesus was crucified Thomas fled with the rest. He was probably ridden with guilt and remorse.

How many of us have tried to go it alone when God has provided others who have made the same difficult journey through hurts, grief and suffering? That is the very time when we should be in the company of fellow believers. Thomas would have been better off spiritually if he had been in the company of the other disciples.

Thomas was a practical, pragmatic disciple of Jesus.

He had calculated the situation carefully, and he was not going to pretend to understand that which to him was fraught with mystery. There are a lot of things in your spiritual walk that you must ponder and think through for yourself. Jesus patiently waits and guides us at our spiritual level. Jesus patiently worked with Thomas and strengthened him at the point of his weakness.

I am thankful that he has come to me again and again and picked me up where I failed or doubted or went in my own stubborn way. He is the way, the truth and the life.

Thomas was an intellectually honest man.

He was willing to face the facts. He looked carefully into things, determined to inquire as to their deepest meaning. He refused to say he understood something when he did not. He refused to say he believed something he really didn't. A faith like Thomas is better than a profession without possession. Thomas was willing to count the cost and when Thomas was sure he went the whole way. He declared, "My Lord and my God!" and he meant every word of it. When a man fights his way through his doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, and God, his one consuming passion is to glorify God and serve him.

Thomas was a man of courage and vision.

When he was faced with the facts he declared, "My Lord and my God." And he worshipped the resurrected Jesus. Moreover, Jesus accepted that worship.

Thomas has come to be known as "doubting Thomas," but he was not really any more doubting than the others. If had he been with them on the Sunday evening when Christ rose from the dead, his doubts would have been removed at the same time as theirs. Because he was not present, he had to wait a full week. When he saw Jesus his resolute skepticism vanished. There was no need for probing fingers. "You are my Lord and my God" rings with absolute conviction because it is true. The apostle John began his Gospel by writing, "the Word was God." He brings it to a close by quoting Thomas' absolute conviction, "You are my Lord and my God." Just as in the case of Thomas, Jesus makes us sit it out when we treat him the same way.

Verse 29 Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed (NET). That verse includes you and me! Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God. Thomas saw Him and worshipped Him. Jesus says to you and me, "Blessed is he who has not seen me with physical eyes, but indeed has seen me and believed."

Every individual who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ today is assured of this great blessing of Christ. All believers today have believed without seeing. To us, faith comes not by seeing but "from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom. 10:7). There can be no permanent faith in Jesus

what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom. 10:7). There can be no permanent faith in Jesus except faith in Him as the risen Lord who still bears the scars of His atoning death.

Believing is Seeing

Believing is directing the heart's attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to behold Him as *my* Lord and my God, and never ceasing to behold Him for the rest of our lives. For Thomas and for us, this is one great volitional act which establishes the heart's intention to gaze forever upon Jesus. God knows that we have set the direction of our heart toward Jesus.

Thomas got his eyes off himself and upon Jesus. Unbelief puts self where God should be. Faith looks out instead of in and the whole life organizes around Him. When we lift our eyes and they focus upon Jesus we worship Him alone. Faith is the gaze of the heart at God. This gaze is but the raising of the inward eyes of the soul to meet the all-seeing eyes of God. This gazing is of the heart, but it involves the whole person. We can do it anytime and anywhere. You can gaze upon Him from anywhere if your mind is set to love, obey and worship Him.

Get into the habit of inwardly gazing upon Christ and you will know that something inside your heart sees God. Blessed are the pure in heart, said Jesus, they shall see God (Matt. 8:8). There is a secret communion always going on even when the believer is compelled to withdraw his conscious attention in order to engage in the affairs of everyday life. Let that attention be released for a moment and it will flee back to God. A new set of spiritual eyes will develop within us enabling us to be looking at God while our outward eyes are seeing this passing world.

That steady gaze becomes easier as we look steadily at his wondrous Person, quietly and without strain (2 Cor. 3:18). We are often distracted by the world, but once the heart is committed to him, after each brief interruption away from him the attention will return again and again to rest upon him and we worship him as *my* Lord and my God. The habit of the soul after a while becomes a spiritual reflex. Our minds and hearts become attached to the steady gaze into the face of Jesus and we scarcely notice it. Faith is the least self-regarding of the Christian virtues. It is scarcely conscious of its own existence.

True faith is occupied, not with itself, but with Christ Jesus. It pays no attention to itself. We cannot see ourselves while we are looking at Jesus.

It was a great moment of repentance when Thomas saw the risen Christ and declared, *my* Lord and my God. "

The apostle Paul prayed, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17 NET). Jesus said, If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him (John 14:23 NET). Jesus is speaking of the individual believer. The Greek translation note in the NET Bible reads, we will come to him and will make our dwelling place with him. "

The Holy Spirit enables us by faith to set our inward spiritual gaze upon Christ and we grow to new levels of spiritual life in keeping with these promises. The Triune God will be our dwelling place moment by moment. He has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6 NET). May the Holy Spirit cleanse and cause us to set our eyes by faith upon the risen Lord Jesus. Oh that we with unveiled eyes may look upon him in the beauty of his holiness and be prepared to see him in the full splendor when he comes in glory.

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