

Thomas the Doubter

John 11:1-16, 14:1-7, 20:24-29, 21:1-25

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

When we walk into a church building and sing the hymns and worship songs, pray, and have conversations concerning our walk with Jesus we try our very best to give the impression that we believe and never doubt God as our Lord whom always does good to those who love Him. And yet in the valleys and on the mountaintops, we have moments when the Devil plants seeds of doubt into our minds and as a result we sometimes question not only the path God wants us to take in life but also our salvation and His very existence! In the face of such doubts we should cry out like the father in Mark chapter nine, “I do believe, help me God with my unbelief,” but refuse to do so for what would the other members whom are “strong in the faith” think about our apparent weakness? After all, if we told them that there are times when we doubt God would ever forgive our heinous sins, that we sometimes wonder if there are other gods or paths to heaven, whether we are important to God, or even our occasional doubt that we are saved, would they not frown and see us as mere babes or worse yet not part of God’s family? When it comes to overcoming doubt, I think there is much that we can learn from Apostle Thomas. In the following sermon we are going to examine four stories in the life of Thomas that clearly demonstrate that those whom obtain a strong faith are precisely the ones that cry out to God daily help me with my unbelief!

Background on Apostle Thomas

Today we are going to continue the sermon series on the Twelve Apostles by examining



the life of Thomas “the doubter.” Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that the book “Twelve Ordinary Men” by John MacArthur was used as the foundation for this sermon series. What little that can be known about Thomas comes mostly from four biblical accounts of his life as found in the book of John (11:1-16, 14:1-7, 20:24-29, 21:1-25).¹ While his semitic name was Thomas in three of the four accounts in the book of John he is called by his Greco-Roman name “Didymus” which meant “the twin.”² It would seem that Thomas had a twin brother but despite

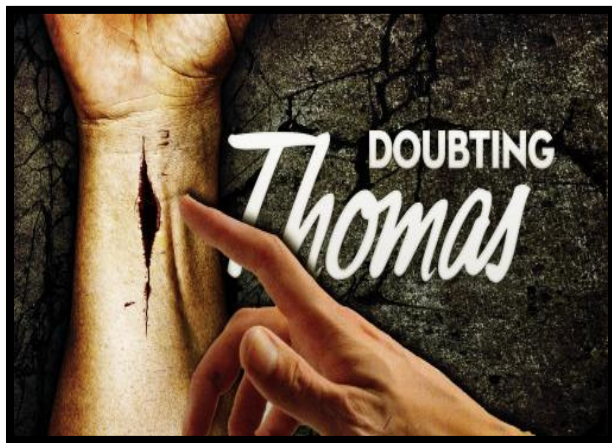
¹ Raymond F. Collins, “[Thomas \(Person\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 528.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Thomas, The Apostle](#),” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2057.

gnostic texts suggesting Jesus was his twin³ this is not supported by Scripture and therefore makes such a statement extremely unlikely.⁴ Thomas appears in the middle of the lists of apostles either being paired with Matthew or Phillip (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).⁵ While we know almost nothing of Thomas' ministry role amongst the twelve disciples,⁶ there is considerable ancient testimony that Thomas carried the Gospel message as far as India.⁷ While some scholars claim that Thomas wrote several gnostic texts such as the Gospel of Thomas, Acts of Thomas, Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Hymn of Jude Thomas the Apostle in the Country of the Indians; due to a lack of proof of authorship and due to these texts containing theology contrary to Scripture makes this claim to be untrue.⁸ When it comes to how Thomas was martyred, ironically as one "whose faith came of age when seeing the spear mark in his Master's side," he died for his faith by being run through by a spear!⁹

Doubt Turned to Faith (John 20:24-29)

Except for Judas Iscariot, no apostolic legacy has been defined as negatively as Thomas's



based mostly on a singular event.¹⁰ To start off this event we are told that when Jesus first appeared to the twelve disciples Thomas was not present (verse 20). While the reason for Thomas being absent is not given one can't help but wonder if Jesus' crucifixion left him feeling alone, rejected and forsaken and was therefore in no mood to socialize.¹¹ When the disciples told Thomas that they had seen the Lord one would have expected him to be ecstatic but instead with great pessimism¹² he refused to accept the claim

³ W. Brian Shelton, [*Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 176.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 157.

⁵ Raymond F. Collins, "[Thomas \(Person\)](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 528.

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⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 164.

⁸ W. Brian Shelton, [*Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 178.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 164.

¹⁰ W. Brian Shelton, [*Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 173–174.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 162.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 157.

until he had “visual and tactile proof”¹³ of both seeing and touching the nail marks in Jesus’ wrists and the spear mark in His side (verse 25). A week later Jesus again appeared to the disciples and this time Thomas was present (verse 26). Upon appearance Jesus told Thomas to see and touch His wounds and in doing so to “stop doubting and believe” (verse 27). There is no indication that Thomas needed touch but mere sight to speak one of the strongest ascription given of Jesus’ deity,¹⁴ “my Lord and my God” (verse 28). Jesus then stated that it is good that Thomas’ sight led to belief, but it is even better when people believe despite never having seen Him (verse 29)!

We whom believe without having physically seen Jesus should not wave our condescending finger at Thomas but learn from him and the other disciples on how to handle doubt. Thomas was not the only disciple with doubt for none of the other 10 believed until they



saw their risen Savior in the flesh (Mark 16:10-11).¹⁵ If the Devil planted seeds of doubt in the disciple’s minds, he will in ours as well. Just because we have doubts does not mean that we are mere babes in Christ or that we have lost our salvation! Remember, even though the disciples doubted the resurrection, their status as being a disciple that would one day sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30) was never revoked. Our high priest Jesus does not treat our doubts with fierce anger and condensation but understands and is sympathetic towards our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).¹⁶ Like Thomas we must

never forget that despite what we do Jesus’ love for us is unconditional! When we cry out to Him “I do believe, help me God with my unbelief” it is not a sign of immaturity but of great faith as one who knows they are utterly dependent on Jesus, our bread of life (John 6:35) and only means of attaining spiritual maturity and holiness!

Asking for the Way (John 14:1-7)

For men whom left everything to follow Jesus to hear that He was going to a place that they could not immediately follow broke the apostle’s hearts.¹⁷ In John 14 Jesus told them not to

¹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 752.

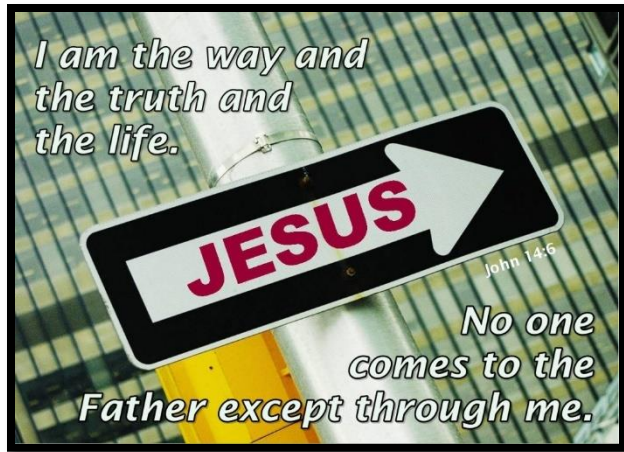
¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 753.

¹⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 163.

¹⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 164.

¹⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 565.

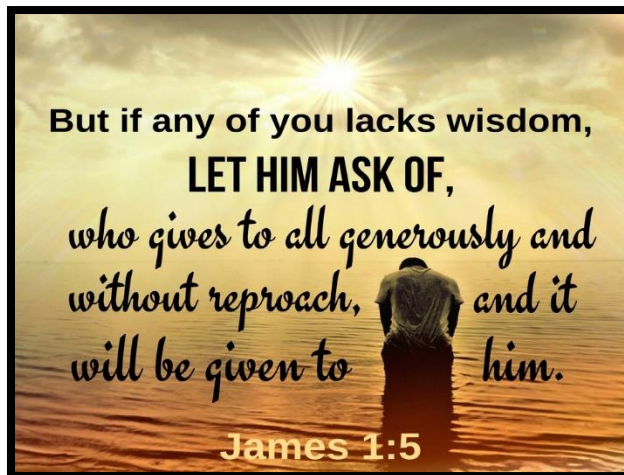
be troubled for where He was going, i.e. the city of God,¹⁸ He would prepare a place and would one day return and take them there as well (John 14:1-3; Mark 13:24-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).



Even though Jesus stated the apostles knew the way to the place where He was going Thomas, “the loyal but undiscerning disciple,”¹⁹ voiced what the rest of the disciples were wondering: since we don’t know where you (Jesus) are going, how can we know the way (verse 5)? While this statement reveals some pessimism on the part of Thomas it also reveals his honesty and deep love to remain close to his Master.²⁰ In response to his question Jesus tells Thomas that “He is the Way (to the Father’s house) because He is the truth, i.e., the revelation of God, and because the life

of God resides in Him.”²¹ While Jesus does not reveal the complete significance of His words at this time later the apostles came realize that His words meant it was only through belief in the atoning sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16), “whom was the only authorized revelation of God and representative of humanity to God,”²² that one could be adopted as part of God’s family (John 1:12).²³

From Thomas we learn that the only way to overcome doubt is to humbly come before our sympathetic high priest Jesus and acknowledge that we don’t know the way we are to live



our lives and therefore desperately need Him to reveal it to us! Human confidence in one’s path does not make one spiritually mature but naïve to think one’s thoughts could ever be equivalent to God’s thoughts (Isaiah 55:8)! The response to experiencing doubts upon the mountaintops and in the valleys should never be to pretend to have holy living figured out so that one might impress other members of the church but to cry out to God for wisdom and discernment as to what steps Jesus wants one to take! In response to our humility and faith James 1:5 promises that

¹⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 249.

¹⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 252.

²⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 162.

²¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 252.

²² Merrill C. Tenney, “John,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 144.

²³ D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2183.

the light of the world (John 8:12) will not only generously light the lamp before our feet (Psalms 119:105) but will also enable us to accomplish more than we could ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21)! Doubt is overcome not by human effort alone and certainly not by human pride but is granted to those whom put their trust in Jesus (Proverbs 3:5-6)!

Acknowledging Jesus as Lord (John 11:1-16)

The final passage that I want to review speaks volumes about Thomas' character.²⁴ Jesus had just left Jerusalem where the Jewish leaders had tried to seize and stone Him for claiming to



be the Son of God and was now ministering beyond the Jordan (10:22-42). Jesus was sent word that the one He loved, His friend²⁵ Lazarus was sick (verse 3). Despite His love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus Jesus decided to wait another two days before He announced to the disciples that they were going back to Judea (verses 6-7). Jesus' failure to respond immediately to the news that Lazarus was deathly ill was not due to a lack of love but due Lazarus already being dead and due to His desire to have the Son of God glorified (verse 4) by raising one whom had been dead for four days.²⁶ Upon hearing that

Jesus wanted to go to Bethany which was near Jerusalem the disciples questioned the wisdom of such a decision.²⁷ While the other disciples appeared to be afraid to return to such a hostile territory, Thomas boldly told them "let us go, that we might die with Him (Christ – verse 16)!

From Thomas we learn that when Jesus is not the Lord of our life in all that we think or do, spiritual maturity becomes unattainable. "Thomas looked death in the face and choose death with Jesus rather than life without Him."²⁸ While there is no place where we can go where God's love (Romans 8:37-39) and presence are not accessible (Psalms 139), there are many times in our lives that we refuse to acknowledge His nearness and right to rule over our lives! It is precisely in these times that doubt rules our hearts and paralyzes our walk with Christ! The key to spiritual maturity then is to continually deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). While the "self-confessed strong" might poke fun at our apparent weakness I think

²⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 158.

²⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 478.

²⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 479.

²⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 159.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 484.

it is better to die with Christ than to be left behind²⁹ to walk on our own self-designed path (Proverbs 14:12) that merely appears to be holy but totally misses the mark of what God has equipped us to do in His kingdom (Ephesians 2:10)! Those whom obtain a strong faith are precisely the one's that cry out to God daily help me with my unbelief!

²⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *[Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You](#)* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 161.