

## Doubting yet faithful - Thomas - John 20:24-31

If we look at these Bible characters - Adam and Eve - Abraham and Sarah - Zechariah - Mary  
What do they all have in common?

They questioned God. They doubted Him.

Eve said "Did God really say?" Abraham and Sarah laughed. Zechariah and Mary questioned God's ability to carry out what seemed humanly impossible. Yet, God did not abandon them and they came through to a place of blessing.

So, the person we are looking at today who often gets a bad Scriptural press isn't in bad company. He has gone down in history as "Doubting Thomas", but I hope as we look at his story we will discover this is not a completely bad thing.

Our passage today (John 20:24-31) continues to think about events just after the crucifixion. The disciples were in a state of shock and confusion. Their world had fallen apart. Thomas especially seems to have gone in on himself. He has seen his Master arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, ridiculed, tortured and hung on the cross. Jesus died and was buried and it seemed as if all hope was gone. It's hard for us to imagine because we know the outcome of resurrection and an endless hope. He's in shock and disillusioned and doesn't feel like joining in with the others. When they catch up with him to tell him the good news that Jesus is alive he just can't bring himself to believe it.

### **Doubt**

I think we can all understand how Thomas is feeling. We shouldn't write him off as a failure in faith because he was honest about his doubts.

Oswald Chambers wrote *"Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong; it may be a sign that he is thinking."*

As Thomas wrestles with doubt we can see how honest doubters can come through to a stronger faith - a faith which is personal, discerning and relational.

I have called Thomas' doubt an honest or open doubt. I believe doubts can either be like this or they can be closed up and dead.

Jesus dealt with both types of doubt during His ministry.

#### **Dead Doubt**

Typified by closed minds, hard heartedness and self-seeking.

The Pharisees had closed minds as they asked trick questions.

The leaders had hard hearts as they tried to stone Jesus for proclaiming truth.

The rich young ruler wanted salvation on his terms with a self-seeking attitude

#### **Honest Doubt**

Typified by open minds, soft hearts, and a God-seeking attitude.

The Father of the epileptic boy said "I believe help my unbelief"

The woman with perfume and tears had a soft heart.

Some Greeks came asking "We would see Jesus" seeking God first above self.

So Thomas needed a faith which is personal, discerning and relational and we do too.

## Honest Faith

### Independent

Thomas had been through a lot. He was hurting, confused and feeling let down. He had lost trust in what he believed in and for which he had given up everything. When the others said they had seen Jesus it would have been easy for him to go along with the crowd and agree with them, but he had to be convinced for himself. "Unless I see . . . unless I touch". He wasn't satisfied with a second hand faith. Don't forget "God has no grandchildren".

Thomas was more honest than some of the other disciples because it states in Matthew 28 at the time of Jesus' ascension

*"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted."*

We all need to accept the truth of Jesus for ourselves. Don't hope to be carried along on the faith of someone else. If we do this we are like the shallow earth in the parable of the Sower where the seed has no root and withers away. A lasting faith must be our own.

In his book "What good is God?" Philip Yancey refers to Thomas as:

*" the disciple stuck in sadness, the last holdout against believing the incredible news of resurrection. Jesus appeared to Thomas in His newly transformed body, obliterating Thomas' doubts. What prompted that outburst of belief - was the presence of scars. . . Thomas saw the wonder of Almighty God, the Lord of the Universe, stooping to take on our pain . . . God is love . . . to love means to hurt"* and in that moment Thomas realised Jesus died for him personally.

### Discerning

You would think that Thomas had been with the others long enough to trust them and to believe their story of Jesus' visit to them, but he seems to be exercising caution and discernment here. He is honestly seeking for himself and trying not to be gullible. We too need to be balanced in our weighing of evidence and reports. We need a balance between being taken in - being so open minded and gullible that we believe anything and a fear of being taken in so we reject everything.

In "The last battle" when Aslan is trying to give good things to the dwarves C S Lewis writes:

*"You see," said Aslan. "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. The prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out."*

When we are confused or doubting it is good to keep in contact with true believers whom we can trust - not to rely on their faith but for support, prayer and encouragement. Don't reject the company of believers or their experiences out of hand.

Trust Scripture. There are many references around Jesus' death and resurrection which say "as the Scripture said or foretold" Thomas must have forgotten. Read the Bible and trust what it says. Remember what you've experienced of God in the past.

## Relational

The wonderful part of this account is that **Jesus came**.

Jesus came and he doesn't condemn Thomas for lack of faith. John 20:26

*"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.*

*Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." <sup>2</sup>*

*Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Jesus came speaking "Peace" to them all. He knew where Thomas was at and comes to allay his fears and restore his dashed hopes. That's how Jesus comes to each one of us. As Thomas meets Jesus in this personal encounter of love and hope he is bowled over by the impact of His divinity and is the first person in the Bible to declare "My Lord and **my God**". He has come from honest doubt to a strong, personal faith in His living Lord which cannot be shaken.

Tradition has it that Thomas went on to take the Gospel to Iran and then on into India and in the end dying for his faith in his living Lord and God.

That's the power of the resurrection! Paul writes in Ephesians 1 that his prayer is *"that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places"*

**Resurrection Life** Thomas passed from being doubting to being faithful with resurrection power.

Some one has said that we need to doubt our doubts and believe our beliefs.

It's not wrong to have doubts, but we should pray that we can cope with them by keeping them honest and open to God's possibilities.

When doubts come:

- ❖ Read the Word
- ❖ Pray as you are able
- ❖ Join with sincere believers
- ❖ Remember positive past experiences
- ❖ Let Jesus in

Our Easter declaration is "The Lord is risen" Thomas had a question mark in his mind. The open tomb has deleted that.

Our response is "He **is** risen indeed" . Let's share some of our resurrection stories in our lives today.

