

## **A Doubting Thomas**

### **John 20: 24-31**

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We've all heard about people who are a "Doubting Thomas." This morning let me tell you about one of them, a man by the name of Harry. Harry was a bonified sceptic. He was a professional doubter. He wanted the facts before he believed in anything or anybody. One day a new doctor arrived in town. Harry had his doubts. Maybe this new doctor was a fraud. So one day he showed up at the doctor's office and said, "Doc, I've lost my sense of taste." The doctor thought for a moment and said, "What you need is bottle number six. Here, take a sip." Harry took a sip and gaged, "That's horrible," he said. "It's the worst stuff I have ever tasted." "Sounds like you're cured," the doctor said. Harry was furious. Now he was sure the doctor was a fraud. Several weeks later he returned and said, "Doc, I can't remember a thing." Once again the doctor thought for just a moment and said, "What you need is bottle number six." Before the doctor could complete his sentence, Harry fled from the office and was never seen again.

Are you a "Doubting Thomas" or perhaps a "Doubting Thomasina"? If you are, you're not alone. You're in good company for the man who acquired that title of being a doubter was none other than one of Jesus' disciples. He is listed among Jesus' twelve disciples in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Each time he is placed in the middle of the grouping, indicating that he was neither the greatest nor the least among them. In the Gospel of John he also acquires the additional name of Didymus. It's the Greek version of his Jewish name which means "twin." In that same Gospel Thomas makes an appearance on two occasions.

The first takes place in John the eleventh chapter. Earlier Jesus had been in Jerusalem and according to the Gospel of John had almost been stoned to death. Now news had reached Jesus that His friend Lazarus had died. Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany, a village just outside of Jerusalem. Deciding to return to Bethany to visit the grieving family and ultimately to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus' disciples warned Him that such a trip could be dangerous. "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there" (John 11:8)? Thomas, however, responded in a different way. He said to Jesus and the others, "Let us

also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). His response tells us two things about this disciple. He was a realist. He objectively looked over the situation and comprehended the danger of returning to Jerusalem or anywhere even close to the city. He was also a man of intense loyalty who was not afraid to risk his life for the Master. He said he was ready to die with Jesus and he meant it.

A little later in the Gospel of John, we run into Thomas once again. Jesus has told the disciples that He is preparing a special dwelling place for them in His Father's house in heaven and that they should know the way. Thomas, once against the realist who is not afraid to raise a disconcerting question, blurts out, "Lord, we don't know where You are going, so how can we know the way" (John 14:5)? What the other disciples may have been thinking but were afraid to ask, didn't stand in the way of Thomas' desire for additional information. In many respects he had adopted the motto of the state of Missouri, the "show me state." You're going to have to show me what you are promising. I need to know the details, the plan of action, otherwise I'm going to be very reluctant to believe what you are telling me.

In the passage of Scripture that was read this morning, this is the same way that Thomas reacted to the announcement that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Thomas had not been present when Jesus appeared to the other disciples on the evening of His resurrection. So Thomas remained doubtful with regards to all of those reports about Jesus being alive. True to his "show me" nature, Thomas required some proof that what Jesus' followers had reported was true. After all people can talk themselves into believing and seeing a lot of things when they desperately want them to be true. For that reason Thomas said, "I'll believe all this talk about Jesus being resurrected when I can see Him for myself and examine those wounds in His hands and side. Otherwise it's all just hearsay." On more than one occasion he had probably voiced that same skepticism in response to those who said that they had actually seen the resurrected Christ.

It was now a week later and once again the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room. This time, however, Thomas was present. Suddenly Jesus was standing in their midst. He had not entered through a doorway because all the doors were locked. He was just there and after greeting everyone He spoke to Thomas personally. He said, "Thomas, touch and see the nail prints in my hands. Reach in and touch the place in my side where I was stabbed by the spear. Stop doubting and believe." In response Thomas did not hesitate. He

fell to his knees and cried out, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus gently admonished him. He said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

What does the resurrection account in the Gospel of John have to say to us today? There are two things that I would like to call to your attention. Here's the first one. Jesus does not dismiss those who are skeptics, those who are prone to be doubters until they can observe and examine all the facts before they come to a decision about what is real. That's especially true with those who have religious doubts about Jesus and His life and teachings. One such man was C. S. Lewis. His popularity is somewhat diminished now that so many years have passed since his demise. However, during the later years of the twentieth century he was one of the best educated and most prolific advocates for the Christian faith. He wrote a number of books which became best sellers like *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. C. S. Lewis was not, however, always an ardent Christian. During his teenage years, he became a rebellious atheist who was more interested in Norse and Greek mythology as well as the occult than in Christianity. He had serious doubts about the reliability of the Christian faith and divinity of Christ. Those doubts gradually faded years later. In his book, *Surprised by Joy*, he wrote, "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen College, Oxford, 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." His journey to faith in Christ is a reminder to all of us that doubters are not excluded from the Kingdom of God. Like Thomas they just need a little extra time and a life-changing encounter with the Savior to become a believer.

There's one more thing that I want to share with you. When Thomas met the Lord in that Upper Room, all doubts about who Jesus was immediately vanished. He didn't say, "Jesus I need a little more time to consider all the possibilities about why You have chosen to reveal Yourself unto me. He didn't say, "I need to do a physical examination of the wounds that You suffered when You were nailed to the cross so that I can verify that it really is You." Instead he responded with just five words, "My Lord and my God." Just as firmly as he had been a doubter, Thomas was now a believer, and his profession of faith possessed not one hint of uncertainty. Jesus was now his Lord, the Master of his life. He was also his God, the one who was truly the divine Son of God. From this point on his allegiance to Christ was absolute and unwavering. It was

so absolute and unwavering that he became an ardent evangelist for the resurrected Lord of his life. Unlike Peter and Paul, we do not possess written accounts of where Thomas labored for Jesus in the years after he met Him in that Upper Room. However, there is one tradition that I personally have had an opportunity to observe and even be a part of.

During a mission trip years ago, I was privileged to preach in a "Mar Thoma" Church in India. It was located in Trivandrum, a city located on the southern tip of that country. Christianity was brought to India at an early date and the members of the "Mar Thoma" Church believes that Thomas was the one who journeyed to their distant land and brought the message of God's salvation in Christ Jesus. Whether or not that actually happened may never be resolved, but Christians in that southern region of India have designated their churches as "Mar Thoma," in English "Saint Thomas" to honor him. Speaking in that church in sock covered feet because you cannot wear shoes inside a "Mar Thoma" Church and watching the smoke of incense arising from behind a curtain at the front of the sanctuary before the service began, brings back memories which I still treasure. In my mind those churches and especially the one in which I preached so long ago are a fitting tribute to the man whose doubts were transformed into rock solid faith.

May the same be said of all of those who have risen above their doubts to declare with unshakable faith, "Jesus, my Lord and my God."