

Without a Doubt

John 20:24–31

INTRODUCTION: This year we are going to look at the Easter story through the eye of Thomas the Apostle. Or as you may know him - “Doubting Thomas”. That really is an unfortunate adjective to attach to a person’s name, is it not? Doubting Thomas.

All because of something he said in a moment of struggle, where he pushed back on the the seemingly impossible claim that a man had risen from the dead.

The other times where Thomas’s story is chronicled in the Gospel record, he certainly wasn’t marked by doubt, quite the opposite - an overwhelming sense of courage and boldness.

On one occasion Jesus had determined to go to Jerusalem a place where the Pharisees were plotting to kill him. The disciples weren’t sure if they wanted to go - but listen to what Thomas says, **John 11:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, and if we die, we die with Him.”

What a courageous statement - ready to walk into the mouth of the beast, the enemies territory, ready to pay the ultimate price. But he is not remembered as Thomas that BOLD, but Doubting Thomas. WHY?

Well the reason for the name, “Doubting Thomas” is because of what happened a few days after the resurrection. Jesus had already appeared to the Mary Magdalene. Now that fact in itself, that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Christ, lends tremendous weight to the credibility of this easter story.

You see, no one would make up a story like this where the first eye witness is woman in first century Israel. A woman’s testimony wasn’t even admissible in a court of law. And IF you were to include a woman, well you certainly wouldn’t make it Mary Magdalene. You see John told us earlier in the story that Mary had been delivered from the influence of 7 Demons. So just the fact that SHE is the first person Jesus appeared to says something about the credibility of the story - you’d never make it up that way.

Not only that, Mary became the first person in church history to PROCLAIM the resurrection. **John 20:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”...

What an honor, what a privilege, on par with the greatest of Angels to be the first to proclaim the resurrection of the Messiah.

***Behold the power of the Gospel, to save from the GUTTER-MOST to the
UTTERMOST.***

***From the “Possession of Satan”, to the “Proclaimer of the Savior” - Mary was a
trophy of Grace.***

Those present ran at once to see the empty tomb. John arriving first then Peter. Jesus appeared also to them. Later that same day, Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples in the upper room. They were all there to see him! Almost...

Judas was not there, the guilt of his soul over his decision to betray Christ was more than he could bear and he took his own life in the Potter's Field.

But we are told there was another **ABSENTEE APOSTLE**. Thomas...

TEXT: John 20:24–29 (ESV)

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

There is something about gathering with other believers that **magnifies one's faith**. There are a few reasons for that:

1. **We Grow Tribally** - We see this in practically every aspect of life. If you are trying to get stronger, workout with a tribe, the tribe will show you what is possible, the tribe will encourage you, the tribe will at times tell you to stop being so lazy and get with it. It is no wonder that when Jesus established the Church, he established it as a TRIBE.

The Ecclesia, the called out ones, this little expression of the body of Christ in every town and village around the world. It is at times called a body with many parts, at times a flock, at times a family - but all of those metaphors point to the same thing - we are a city within a city. We are a TRIBE.

The cost of COVID has been great, but perhaps the greatest price that is overlooked is the inability for many to gather in a COMMUNITY or TRIBE. I cannot overstate the value of being a vital member of a solid church is to your family, your well being, and your personal faith. **Thomas doubted, when Thomas Drifted**. Perhaps this Easter is good time for you to resolve to plug back into the Tribe.

2. **God Works Tribally** - While the work of Christ in an individual's life is precious and important. ***The great works of God we see in the Bible were not private experiences but corporate encounters.*** Jesus who built the church does his greatest work in the TRIBE. Jesus shows up when the tribe is gathered. If you lay out of church and your faith wobbles, and you get frustrated and say, "Why won't God do something? Why won't He give me a sign". Let me ask you, if God said, "do not forsake the assembly of yourselves together" and you are not willing to go to church, why would he bless your disobedience? God works his best works in the tribe.

ILLUSTRATION: Swedish study conducted in Stockholm, Sweden of 150 men. The study was focused on heart disease. They discovered that heart disease sharply increase in those who isolated themselves from community. ***Isolation is bad for you physically but it is even worse for you spiritually.***

But Thomas wasn't there. But, he heard about it soon enough.

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." (in the Greek that is in the Present Active Imperative tense... that is THEY KEPT ON TELLING HIM)

Don't you love how the other disciples wouldn't let Thomas drift too long. The kept hounding him. Perhaps you are hear today because someone hounded you a bit, a caring friend, a loving wife, a concerned parent. Whatever the reason you are here...

ILLUSTRATION: C.S. Lewis was the Professor of Medieval English Literature at Oxford University. In his Autobiography, "Surprised by Joy" Lewis explained how the greatest thing for his faith wasn't a theological book, or a course on apologetics... But rather, he was delivered from Disbelief through the fellowship with a few believers on campus. J.R. Tolkien and others. He said, "Really a young atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully, danger lies in wait for him at every turn". "Just as soon as I got in contact with radiant, joyful Christians my doubt began to shrivel and die"

25b. But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Unbelief demands it's own proof. There was an incredible amount of arrogance in this statement as well as a gross disrespect of the person of Christ.

He wouldn't believe in the face of compelling, continual testimony of his closest friends.. he demanded more.

I MUST SEE AND TOUCH - I MUST RUN MY FINGER INTO THE GAPING HOLES IN HIS HAND, THEN BUTCHER LIKE, I MUST INSERT MY HAND INTO THE MASSIVE HOLE TORN INTO HIS SIDE.

There is an arrogance to unbelief.

I have found that the unbeliever often has his own set of imperial criteria that must be met before he will choose to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Some say - He must appear to me before I believe.
- Others say - He must provide some sort of a sign or miracle for me to believe.
- Still others have a more personal demand - I'll believe if you give me that job, that wife, that healing.

To all of those Jesus said - For you I came to Earth, lived a sinless life, was beaten to a bloody pulp, suffered the wrath of the Father, and drank the cup of death to the dregs, rose from the grave, appeared to over 500 at one time, changed the course of history, moved missionaries and pastors to bring you face to face with the good news of the Kingdom...the ball is now in your court.

You see friend unbelief is not an emotion of the HEART it is a choice of the WILL.

Notice Thomas didn't say - **When I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.**

That's the language of hope... WHEN I SEE....He didn't say that....

But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

That is - my unbelief is settled, my mind is made up, I DON'T believe UNLESS God meets my standard of criteria.

ILLUSTRATION: Josh McDowell the great Apologist for Campus Crusade for Christ had met a young lady in college who was very different from all the other girls he had known. There was a joy and peace and a purity about her that was very unique. He asked her one day - what is different about you. She answered in two words - Jesus Christ. Josh testifies that he began that day to set out to disprove Christianity. But the more he looked at the philosophical, scientific, empirical evidence he said these words, "My mind was telling me Christianity is true... my will was saying, don't believe it".

What about you?

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.” ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

There is an inevitability in which Christ walks in to every life.

It may be in the birth of a baby, the death of a parent, it may be in the midst of an illness. But there seems to come a time in each person's life when the legitimate presence of Jesus visits your life. It may be on an Easter Sunday.

There for a moment - you are made strangely aware that Jesus is more real than ground you stand upon. In that moment in a very real sense you recognize that the material world is the strange unordinary thing - and nothing is more real, more permanent than that which is unseen.

It is at that moment that you choose, as an act of your will to believe.

Jesus said, John 12:32 (ESV)

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

That includes you - there will be a drawing sir, man, young person... is today the day you will sense it?

²⁷ 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.”

You see, Jesus didn't suddenly appear - he had been there all along in one sense. He knew the thoughts and meditations of Thomas's heart. He knew the words of his lips before they were spoken. Friend, he knows you just as well.

There are these blessed moments when we are made aware of his presence in our lives... but never forget that those manifestations are wonderful gifts, but the fact is he's always there. He see all, hears all.

In is in the midst of such an encounter with the presence of Christ that Thomas with his lips confesses a radical change in his heart....

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

John 20:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus didn't appear to Thomas to help him believe - Jesus appeared to Thomas because that was part of the requirements of being an Apostle. If Thomas was to be one of the primary preachers of the Resurrection, he had to witness the resurrected Christ first hand.

Jesus said, it is far better for those who did not see, yet believed.

How is that possible? How is that rational? Can we prove that Christ was raised from the dead apart from literally seeing him alive? Is there DNA Evidence? Is there scientific data? Well friend, you don't prove history in that matter. History is proven, not scientifically but legislatively. For example, we wanted to prove that George Washington was the first president of the United States... we would prove it as one would prove a court case, we would seek the account of witnesses, we would look for corroborating evinced to back up their testimony, and if the validity of the witness was strong enough and the evidence lined up - we would render a verdict that this fact has been legally proven.

What evidence do we have the these men actually saw Jesus alive from the Dead? How about the fact that every single one of them, except from John, were executed as Martyrs for their Preaching that Jesus was alive from the Dead?

Men may die a lie if they believe it to be true, but it's hard to find a man who would die for a lie he knows to be untrue. These men believed they saw Jesus alive and gave their lives to prove it.

But none were so motivated as Thomas - Doubting Thomas took the Gospel further than any of the rest. Legend tells us that Thomas took the Gospel all the way to INDIA, preaching that Jesus was alive. There he incurred the rage of Pagan Priests and was speared through for his testimony that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Isn't that interesting - When Thomas was close to Jesus, he was perhaps the most courageous of the Apostles... when he drifted... he became Doubting Thomas. But

one encounter with the risen Jesus had the same effect that walking with Christ had previously.

Friend, it could happen to you - a legacy can be born in you today. What more evidence do you need to believe?

INVITATION: Dr. Adrian Rogers said, there are three ways that a person can die and go to heaven.

1. Perhaps if they live a perfect life, never sin.... that's not you. Strike #1.
2. Perhaps if they die in childhood before they are old enough to choose right from wrong God will declare them safe... that's not you. Strike #2.
3. They will personally choose to believe that Jesus is Savior and Lord... here it comes friend.... What will you do?