

John 20:24-31

Happy Easter everyone! During Lent we've been following Israel as she walked out of Egypt and into freedom.

Today I want to take you on a journey with Thomas who walked out of doubt and into faith in the Risen Savior! Who was Thomas? He was one of the Apostles of Jesus and the last one to come to faith. He is known as Doubting Thomas. He was the biggest skeptic of them all, and yet he came to faith. How?

You may come this morning and be thinking, *"I'm a Christian. I believe in the resurrection of Jesus! I'm not like Thomas."* I thought that until I faced death. It was then that I discovered that I did not believe in it to the depth that I thought I had. Faith in the resurrection didn't take away my fears and anxieties the way it should have and it was because I really hadn't leaned into the resurrection of Jesus.

We look at Thomas and we see ourselves. All of us at one point in our lives were like Thomas. We thought this Jesus stuff was bunk. Maybe you still think this religion stuff is not for you. Let's go on a journey and look at someone like us and see how he walked out of doubt and into faith! Maybe it'll help you do the same!

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[Ⓜ]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though 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; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe[Ⓜ] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I. Why Was Thomas Skeptical?

First, why was Thomas skeptical? It doesn't say. We can speculate as to why, but we can't be sure what fueled his skepticism. We will have to ask him when we see him. But speculating as to why may be helpful for us because there are common reasons why people are skeptical of Jesus and religion today.

One possible reason may be because of his temperament. Now, I'm not sure but I believe they didn't have the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory back then. Had they, Thomas would have scored as being

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a sensing person and not an intuitive person. A sensing person pays more attention to physical realities: facts, data, cold-hard details. Whereas an intuitive person relies on their instinct, a gut feeling. It's much harder for a sensing person to believe in miracles and things you can't taste, touch or see. And if that's you, you are probably looking at Thomas thinking: *"Yep, that's me. I want to touch his wounds to see if he's real! Not sure I'd want to put my hand all the way into his chest cavity!"*

Another possible reason behind Thomas' skepticism was that he just didn't believe in the supernatural. Jews were not prone to superstition. They were very concrete thinkers. You look at how God is described in the Old Testament, and they use a lot of physical objects. He is like a rock, a refuge, a mother hen, a shepherd. It's probably not his reason but it could have been. He could have been a modern person born ahead of his day. Modern people, it's said, are too sophisticated to believe in the supernatural.

It may have been due to his Jewish faith. The Rabbis taught that there was a resurrection, but it happened to everyone, at the same time, at the end of time. It could not occur to one person, by himself, in the middle of history. So, his theological blinders could have kept him from seeing a resurrection even if it occurred right in front of him. It was an impossibility.

Or, and this is probably the most likely reason, Thomas' trauma over the death of Jesus caused him to protect his heart from being disappointed again. He could not get his hopes up high again just to have them dashed on the rocks of reality! A lot of people think that skepticism is a matter of the head. Not always. It can be a matter of the heart.

I've walked a lot of people down the valley of the shadow of death and as hard as it is for the person whose facing their own death, it is much harder on the family surrounding them. All the time, while they are sitting with their loved ones that are hoping and praying that they won't die. And when they finally do, the reality finally hits them and it's overwhelming. The finality of it all is incredibly painful!

I have seen, many times, the family give up hope for a cure and are then suddenly given a lifeline. A doctor comes up with a possible approach or a friend shares about a new technique or a facility in another state that has a potential cure. And they are faced with a decision to try again to find a cure or just let nature take its course. Many times, the family decides to do nothing because it would be too painful to get their hopes up once again, only to be disappointed, again! They just can't take another letdown!

That could have been what led to Thomas' skepticism. I don't think any of us can imagine the depth of the wound the disciples felt when they saw the nails go into Jesus' hands and feet, when they saw the spear plunged into his side and saw his body go limp and breathless and then see him buried! All their hopes were shattered, and their fears realized. Jesus was the person they staked their lives on and pinned their futures too! So for someone to tell Thomas that Jesus was alive, as much as he wanted to believe it, he couldn't take that chance. He would not allow himself to hope again!

I think Thomas gets a bad rap. In the Gospels there's no indication that Thomas loved Jesus less than anyone else or was less committed to him. When Jesus headed into towards Bethany to raise Lazarus

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from the dead, it was Thomas who said, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* John 11:16 And there is no indication that he was any less devastated by the death of Jesus. You could say that his response to the disciples claim that Jesus was alive, reveals that he was even more devastated. Perhaps it explains why he said: *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* (vs. 25)

Why was Thomas skeptical? We aren't sure but what we are sure is, all of these are reasons why people are skeptical of Jesus today. Some have a world view that dismisses anything supernatural. But world views can be wrong! Others have a temperament that keeps them from believing. They need more evidence for the resurrection. And there is. All you have to do is some research and reading. Others have been disappointed before and they don't want to get drawn into things that promise a lot but deliver little!

So, whoever you are, whatever the reason you can see yourself in Thomas. Bear in mind, Thomas, the great skeptic became a believer! The man who said, *"I won't believe unless I see him and can touch his wounds,"* also made the greatest confession in the Bible. Thomas, a Jewish man, calls another man, *"My Lord and my God!"* He didn't say, *"Oh Jesus, you are alive! Hallelujah!"* He called him Lord and GOD!!! (vs. 28) He goes from zero to 60mph in minutes! What once was the greatest doubter, becomes the greatest believer! So there's hope for all of us here!

So how did he go from 0 to 60?

II. How Did Thomas Come to Faith?

Four things changed his heart.

One, he listened to the eyewitness testimony. In verses 19-24 Jesus appears to the disciples but Thomas isn't with them. A week later, Jesus appears again, this time with Thomas present. In between those times vs. 25 tells us that the disciples told Thomas Jesus was risen. The word "told" is in the present tense, meaning they told him over and over and over again they saw Jesus alive!

Thomas had eyewitness testimony. And so do we. In fact, we have the same access to the same eyewitness testimony that he did. Did you know that? Today, its written down for us to read but it is based on eyewitness testimony. When they wrote down the Gospels and Epistles proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus and referred to the people who saw Jesus alive, those people were still alive. If someone doubted the credibility of the report, all they had to do was go visit those who saw the resurrection of Jesus and ask if the story was true. They did and that's how the story stuck and was written down and why billions have put their faith in him! They listened to the eyewitness testimony!

And, what's gives these eyewitness testimonies even more credibility is no one in Jesus' day said it did not happen. There are plenty of documents from the first century that said that Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by many but there are no documents from the first century that refutes this claim! That's significant.

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Pretend I'm a sportswriter and the day after the Chiefs won the Super Bowl, I wrote that they didn't. The Pittsburgh Steelers won the game. What would happen? There would be an explosion of letters, columns, hash tags, tweets, phone calls, etc. stating I am out of my mind. They'd refute my claim, especially those who saw the game, live! Plus, it was impossible for the Steelers to have won the game, they didn't even make it past the first round of the playoffs! People saw it! The evidence against the Steelers winning would have been overwhelming.

The same can be said of the resurrection of Jesus. Had the claim been utterly false you'd seen an explosion of letters, articles, books, sermons, etc. written refuting the claim. How many such letters/communications exist? ZERO!

In I Corinthians 15:6 Paul says that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time. That's hard to fabricate! And most of them were still alive when he wrote the letter, so if they wanted to see if the claim was true they had over 500 people to talk to, to confirm or deny the claim! They all confirmed what they saw. No one said differently!

So the New Testament is filled with credible, eyewitness testimony. Read it several times for yourself and see for yourself! That should be enough! Who said so? Jesus! *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (vs. 29)

Why should reading and believing these eyewitness accounts be enough to put our faith in Jesus? We didn't see Jesus' resurrection with our own eyes like they did!

Think about all the historical events you haven't seen for yourself and yet you believe they occurred! How many historic events do you believe in without having seen them yourself? 99.999999999999% Yet you still believe they occurred! Why? Because we have eyewitness accounts - people who were there and wrote down what they saw.

If that's enough to believe in all the historical events you believe in, then it should be enough to believe in Jesus because we have eyewitness accounts that are reliable that tell us what people saw. Jesus rose from the dead.

Did you know we have more eyewitness account of Jesus' resurrection than we do of many historic events. I'll give you one but there are a ton! Washington's crossing the Delaware River. It's in our history books but the story is based on only four eyewitnesses. The resurrection of Jesus is based on thousands of manuscripts, four Gospels and 25 letters, and piles of songs, creeds and sermons written from the first century.

So, if you want to believe in Jesus, read the eyewitness accounts. Read the Gospels over and over and see if they are compelling or not!

Two, if you want to move from skeptic to follower you need to recognize, not only are you seeking him, but Jesus is also seeking you. All week long the disciples were telling Thomas over and over again - *"We've seen the Lord!"* And over and over again Thomas responds by saying, *"I won't believe unless I see him for myself!"*

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And then Thomas sees him and what does Jesus say? *"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" (vs. 27)* Do you know what was running through Thomas' mind? How did Jesus know what he said a week earlier? Where did he hear it? Then it dawned on him, Jesus was right there with him when he said it. He's been there all the time while Thomas was looking for him, hoping to see him! Jesus was right at his side, listening to him!

You know when you are looking for God, you often can't see him. You don't recognize his hand arranging things until after the fact. How many of you have looked back on your life and can see how God was arranging things in your life, pulling you towards faith?

I always believed in God as a kid but I never sought him. Sunday was just another day to go bike riding, play baseball, walk around in the woods, play kids games, which was easy because I had seven siblings! It took the divorce of my parents, and cancer to wake me up to my need for God and when I called on him, he answered. I met Him. I didn't get religion. I got Jesus, spiritually, and he was as real to me had he stood right next to me. I think he's more real because I can feel him, internally!

So what helped to melt Thomas' skeptical heart? One, eyewitness testimony. Two, he discovered Jesus had been pursuing him all along! What else helped? Thomas understood the meaning of Jesus' wounds.

For a week, all Thomas kept telling everyone was: *"I have to see his wounds. I have to touch the holes in his hands and side for me to believe he's alive."* Then Jesus actually appears to him and tells him, *"Okay, touch me! If that's what you need to believe. Touch me!"* Does Thomas ever touch Jesus? No! But that's what he claimed he needed in order to believe! He thought that if he saw big gapping wounds in Jesus' hands and sides that it would prove to him Jesus was alive.

Now think about that! How is that proof of a risen Savior? Scripture teaches that when we die, we receive, not a scarred up body, or life-worn-out body but a glorified body. The resurrection means restoration. Everything wrong with this world is made right. Disease, death, disasters, decay will be done away with. Everything you dislike about yourself, including your body will be corrected: the nose that you hate, your hairy ears, the part of your body that collects fat that you can't get rid of... is gone! You get the best cosmetic surgery ever and its free! You are going to love the way you look!

So the actual proof of Jesus' resurrection is not a wounded body but a made-whole, totally restored body! So why is Jesus standing there with his scars? Because his wounds are not evidence for his resurrection, it's evidence of something much more profound! They show Thomas how much Jesus loved him!

Thomas saw those wounds before. So did all the disciples. They saw the nails being driven into his hands. They saw the spear being thrust into his side. And they thought those wounds were the end of them, the end of their hopes and dreams. It meant their destruction. Those wounds were ruining their lives and the life of Jesus, of course, when in reality, those wounds were saving their lives and our's.

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Those wounds paid for all your sins, making you right with God, opening up the possibility for a relationship with God, and the power of his Spirit to come into your life to reform it in wonderful, life-enhancing ways. You can become the best version of yours if you let Jesus save you!

See his wounds. Look at his hands. Touch his side and know, those wounds were for you! He did that for you because he loves you. Let that melt your heart!

The fourth thing that healed Thomas' doubting heart was... he dropped his conditions. What do I mean by that? Thomas had a condition: *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* He did see Jesus but he never put his finger into the holes in his hands. Nor did he put his hand into his side! He dropped those conditions and cried out, *"My Lord and my God!"*

No one comes to God for God's sake. No one says, *"God is so awesome! I think I'll follow him!"* No one does that. Everyone who came to God, came with conditions, initially. We all have a bargain we want to make with God. *"Get me out of this fix and I'll believe in you the rest of my life."* *"Have the jury find me not guilty and I'll reform!"* *"Have my spouse take me back and I'll take the family to church and get my life right."* We all have them. What's yours?

When I came to God, I came with a bargain to make! While I lied in bed, dying of leukemia at age 13 I prayed: *"God if you heal me I will serve you the rest of my life!"* While I said that I had a secret chip in my bag ready to play if God did heal me. I said I'd serve him but I never promised to become a preacher! You can serve God many ways. I actually wanted to be a businessman and work for a Forbes 500 company. God needs Christian businessmen out there, doesn't he? He also needs Christian salespeople, doctors and lawyers, contractors and electricians, etc. See how sly we are?

My brother told me after he came to faith that the reason he held off for so long was because he was afraid God would tell him to become a missionary to Africa. So his bargain was, *"I'll follow you but only if you don't make me go to Africa!"* It's odd how many people think that if they come to God that he will make them a missionary and send them to a remote area of the world!

Do you have an "if" Do you have a *"I'll believe but only if you don't make me..."*

The first church I served a 40 year old guy came up to me and shared what his "if" was. His grandfather, which he was very close to, had a sudden stroke and died before he was able to get to the hospital. On the way he prayed: *"God I will believe in you if you let my grandfather live until I get there."* He died. So he walked away from God for 20 years! Could God have kept his grandfather alive? I guess. Was it fair of him to slap that condition on God when at anytime he could have visited his grandfather and expressed to him how much he loves him? God doesn't do well with ultimatums. Who are we to give him an ultimatum?

I know of another guy who said, *"If I believe in God does that mean I have to forgive my sister and begin talking to her again?"* Answer: Yes. Scripture says, *"Forgive, just as God in Christ has forgiven you!"* Ephesians 4:32. Think about what he just said. What he was saying was: *"Hmmm I don't know."*

Eternal life or remaining angry with my sister. I don't know. Tough choice!" Really? You have to be kidding me!

It may sound funny but all of us have these petty conditions we place on God. What's your condition? Compare it with the offer of eternal life. How does it measure up? It doesn't even come close, so give up your condition and come to God!

Have you seen the movie, "*Fisher King*?" The character played by Robin Williams is homeless and he's been observing a woman, played by Amanda Plummer. She's socially awkward. Has no friends. Isn't attractive. Has some issues. Is self-loathing and lacks any confidence. And this homeless man loves her. He's seen everything and falls in love with her.

Jeff Bridges plays the character who ruined this man's life so he decides to make amends by cleaning him up and buying him a new suit so he can date this woman. And they have a lovely time but at the end of the date she tells him she never wants to see him again. She fears that if he really got to know her, he wouldn't love her. But he refuses to leave, and he tells her that he knows all that. He knows everything and that he loves her and will never leave her! Ever.

Hearing that she walks up to him, touches his face, and says, "*Are you real?*"

Fisher King is just a movie and the character played by Robin Williams is fictional. But we have someone who is not, who is real and loves us unconditionally. God knows everything about you. He knows your habits, your hangups, your temperament, your attitudes (Yes the ones that stink!), your secret sins, your opinions, your character flaws and relational dysfunctions and he still says, "*I love you. See my hands, my feet, my side. Go ahead and touch them and believe!*"

That's what Thomas did and it moved him from doubt to faith. Thomas had such a depth of faith that of all the Twelve Apostles, he traveled the farthest to preach the Gospel. He traveled all the way to India and ended up forfeited his life for Jesus. Jesus was so real to him that even his life was nothing in comparison to knowing him! Do you have something that real in your life that you'd give your life up for?

So if you want to know the risen Savior yourself: 1) Listen to the eyewitnesses. Read the Gospels and I Corinthians 15. 2) Know that God is pursuing you right now. He's right next to you now, calling you to himself! 3) Realize what his wounds mean. He loves you unconditionally. 4) Set aside your conditions! In light of knowing the Risen Savior, they are nothing! Place your faith in him!

Do that and this will be the best Easter of your life!