

## Believing Thomas

Thomas is an interesting disciple who has gotten a bad rap being labeled Doubting Thomas. Interestingly in the first three gospels, we are told absolutely nothing about Thomas. It is in John's Gospel that he emerges as a distinct personality, but even then, there are only one hundred and fifty-five words about him. When Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem the disciples thought that it would be certain death for all of them. Only Thomas said, "Then let us go so that we may die with him." It was a courageous statement, yet we don't remember him for that. We also fail to point out that in this story of Thomas' doubt, we have the one place in all the Gospels where the Divinity of Christ is boldly stated. The same story that gives Thomas his infamous nickname, is the same story that has Thomas making an earth-shattering confession of faith, "My Lord, and My God." It is uttered with conviction. These are certainly not the words of a doubter. Unfortunately, history has reminded him for this scene where the resurrected Christ made an appearance to the disciples in a home in Jerusalem. Thomas was not present and when he heard about the event, he refused to believe it. Thomas, like many of would, said, "Unless I feel the nail prints in his hands I will not believe." The second time Jesus made His appearance Thomas was present with the disciples and this time he too witnessed the event. This time Thomas believed.

We learn a lot from Thomas' encounter with the Resurrected Christ. First, we learn that Jesus did not blame Thomas for doubting. Jesus never condemned Thomas. I think that Jesus understood that once Thomas worked through his doubts, he would be one of the surest men in all Christendom. Authentic faith always begins with intellectual honesty, and doubt is the bedrock of honesty. Faith is not the absence of doubt; it is the overcoming of doubt. It was Alfred Lloyd Tennyson who said, "There lives more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds." So, we find ourselves crying out, as did the disciple of old: "Lord, I believe. Help thou, my unbelief".

Second, we learn that the most endearing things in life can never be proven! Jesus said, "Thomas, you have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen yet still believe". Jesus is talking about us. We will never see Jesus in this life like the disciples did. We will not have the chance to put our finger in the nail scars. We will not get the chance to touch His pierced side. Jesus understands it's harder for us to believe than for Thomas and he counts us blessed. What we must understand is we had better leave some room for mystery and miracles in our worldview. That does not preclude science. That does not preclude reason. What it does mean is that the most important things in your life will never be conclusively proved. You will, on a daily and even momentary basis, need to live by faith. God has called us to be the people of faith.

Third, we learn that we must move beyond doubt to faith. Jesus admonished Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe." Unbelief is a normal part of life, but it is not healthy to remain in unbelief. It paralyzes the joy that Christ wants for us! I find it significant that the highest confession of faith in Jesus we find in any Gospel comes from Thomas. Not Thomas the doubter, but Thomas the believer. Doubt can lead to faith. Only those who have had their faith shattered by the hammer blows of pain and adversity, by their own personal Calvary, can get to the other side of Calvary and experience resurrection faith. We can't get to Easter without passing through Good Friday. Faith is always reaching out into the void without any more assurance that someone is there than the promise of His presence. It's easy enough to have faith when things are going well, and problems do not loom on the horizon. Real faith is trusting your life in God when that seems more foolish. Thomas is not a villain. He is a model for us.

Fourth, in Thomas' encounter, we learn that Christ comes to meet us amid our shattered and broken world of doubt and despair. He knows our doubts and He comes to us anyway. There are times in our lives when we face grief, disappointment, pain, or depression. There are times when these things happen and our hold on God falters. When these moments of true, deep doubt come let me urge you to never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light. I say this because it is in moments of spiritual light, that God shows us true reality. These moments of spiritual light are so very important, because they allow us to get through many dark nights of doubt and despair, that come into the lives of every single one of us. In moments of light, God has told you that he will never desert you. don't ever doubt that. In moments of light, God has told you that resurrection is reality - don't ever let the darkness cause you to doubt that. In moments of light, God has told you that the very hairs on your head are numbered - don't ever doubt that in the darkness. Move beyond your doubts and put your trust in the resurrected Christ who will never leave you or forsake you!