

LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part twenty-two - Sunday, July 14th, 2024
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THOMAS - Personal Doubt and Encountering the Risen Christ

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Like Nicodemus, Thomas is described only by John. John's gospel is the gospel of *belief*. It's all about how we can *know* Jesus Christ and life eternal through Him - **John 20:31** - "...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

In his gospel of *belief* John specifically includes the story of *doubting* Thomas. So learn that belief is not unchallenged in this world. There will always be *push-back* to faith in Christ Jesus. And, perhaps more importantly, we learn that moments of doubt don't *disqualify* anyone from being a person of faith in Christ Jesus as Risen Lord.

All of the references to Thomas are significant in that they take place within the last month of Jesus' life. The cross and Resurrection, supreme objects of faith, were the very things that created Thomas's doubts. So a particular *kind* of understanding of Christ and His kingdom is needed. Although much is said about Thomas in legend, he is never mentioned again in the New Testament.

Although he is most remembered for his doubts about the Resurrection of Jesus ("Doubting Thomas"), as we will see, this may not be a totally fair or complete assessment.

- 2) **DETERMINED TO REMAIN WITH JESUS TO THE VERY END - John 11:14-16** - "Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, [15] and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." [16] So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

While remembered for his doubt, Thomas is mentioned first for his ***courage and determination***. As other passages will show, Thomas may not have had a very complete understanding on the ***eternal nature of Christ's Kingdom***. But his faithfulness to Jesus is clear and unquestionable.

Jesus makes it clear from the surrounding verses (**8-15**) that He will not be taken by force until His time is complete. He also points out that the purpose in going to Bethany is to ***raise Lazarus from the dead*** and ***reveal His glory***. Even in the face of these great revelations of Jesus' power and promise, Thomas can think only of everything going wrong and laying down his life with Jesus.

- 3) **THOMAS WAS CONFUSED ABOUT THE CENTRAL TEACHING OF JESUS - John 14:1-6** - "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4] And you know the way to where I am going." [5] Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" [6] Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Whatever Thomas did or did not understand at this point, it is clear that he and Jesus are not on the same wavelength in this conversation. Thomas obviously enjoys Jesus' teaching and is moved at displays of supernatural power. But something about ***where Jesus is "going"***(5) - the destination and ***meaning*** of Jesus' coming - has escaped him. To be fair, Thomas wasn't alone in this lack of comprehension:

John 7:32-36 - "The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. [33] Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. [34] You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." [35] The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? [36] What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"

It seems that Thomas, like these Jewish leaders, had some other ***earthly destination*** in mind when Jesus was explaining a life beyond this earthly existence. Teachers gave great instruction and prophets had come before and worked miracles but neither of these roles accounted for the goal and destination of what Jesus had come to do on earth. Teachers and prophets ***pointed*** to the way. Jesus ***was*** the way.

In His clarification to Thomas Jesus makes several very important points - **John 14:6 - "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

- a) **"I am the way"** - Jesus deliberately separates Himself from every other guru, prophet, master or religious leader. This truth is central to everything. Others pointed ***to*** a way. Jesus said He ***was*** the way.

Notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun **"I"**. The nature of our salvation is spelled out. We are not saved by a force, spiritual principle, or religious system. Man needs personal redemption in Christ's death.

- b) **"I am the truth"** - Jesus points to Himself as the ***only dependable source of redemptive revelation available***. To whom do we turn for reliable information about our souls? Who is the one to believe about God, sin, salvation, and eternity? Those are the biggest issues of life itself. Jesus ***pinpoints Himself*** as the very embodiment of accurate information about the heart of God.
- c) **"I am the life"** - Jesus seems to use the term "life" (apart from the ordinary sense of physical existence) in two prominent ways: ***First, to describe communion with God - John 17:3 - "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*** And ***second, to describe a nature of existence that lasts eternally, that is, beyond the grave - John 10:28 - "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."***

The apostle John uses these terms a great deal in his gospel. See also **John 3:16** - **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** The nature of the kind of life Jesus brings is defined by its opposite - **“perishing.”** Even those who believe in Jesus physically **die**. So just as perishing is something beyond physical death, eternal life is something beyond a great quality of life in this present age.

In both senses, to look for life apart from the Person of Jesus Christ is clearly futile, foolish and ultimately sinful. The reason for this is spelled out in **Acts 17:30-31** - **“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”**

The message of **John 14:6** is crystal clear - **“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Remove Christ from the scene and there is no knowledge of redemptive truth, no sure way to the Father, and no hope for eternal life.

4) **THOMAS CONFRONTS THE RISEN CHRIST - John 20:24-29**

“Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. [25] So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” 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.” [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.”

It's important not to be too hard on Thomas at this point. Luke is faithful enough to tell us that *none of the other disciples believed what the women told them about the Resurrection at first either* - **Luke 24:10-11** - **“Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, [11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”** It appears that they did not have much more confidence than Thomas.

Also, there are ***different kinds of doubt***. Notice how Jesus described the kind of unbelief He encountered in the Pharisees in **Matthew 16:1-11**. This was not the heart of Thomas. Thomas was not ***hard-hearted*** or ***unwilling*** to believe. He simply ***did not want to be misled*** in this area of such importance to him. Thomas is an important argument against those who say that the reports of the Resurrection of Jesus were merely the results of the blind-minded optimism of the disciples. ***Thomas, at least, was convinced by evidence he wasn't even expecting.***

Notice that the resurrected body of Jesus was real enough to be both seen and touched (ghosts and illusions can't be handled).

- 5) **THE BEATITUDE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN** - **John 20:27-29** - "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."

How does this passage compare with the faith Jesus so highly praised in **Matthew 8:5-10**? **“When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, [6] “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” [7] And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” [8] But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. [9] For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” [10] When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”**

Jesus was truly overjoyed that this man could trust in Him with no visible evidence for the healing of his servant. But why is it still important for us to have at least **some** recorded examples of people like Thomas in the development of our own faith in Jesus? Because while nothing worthwhile of spiritual substance will flourish in our hearts apart from faith in our Lord, faith is never to be confused with mere wishful thinking or gullibility. Faith, to be sure, presses into truth that can never be measured in the glass vials in a laboratory. But the Resurrected body of Christ isn't a fairy tale like Snow White. Faith rests down on historic reality, not emotional states or magical wishes. Thank God.