

"Why is it that if someone tells you that there are 1 billion stars in the universe, you believe them, but if they tell you a wall has wet paint, you will have to touch it to be sure?"

If we are honest with ourselves, we are a lot more like Thomas than we want to admit. Thomas gives us some important lessons about what it means to have faith. Seeing is believing, isn't it? Most people have to see something before they can believe it. My Mother used to tell me: don't believe everything that you hear and only half of what you see. This is often how we describe the apostle Thomas but is this really accurate?

- Let me ask you a few questions:
 - Have you ever felt like you missed something big that everyone else seemed to know?
 - Have you ever felt like you were not spiritual enough because of your past failures?
 - Have you ever felt like you could really believe even more in Jesus if you could just catch a glimpse of Him?

If you have ever felt this or anything like this you would be in good company with Thomas.

Thomas has been given a fairly difficult stereotype through the centuries because he so often is referred to as doubting Thomas but I do not believe that the title truly fits this man. So let's take a few moments to clear the air and see what we really know about Thomas

What do we know about Thomas?

1. Thomas was likely a fisherman (Jn 21:2)

Thomas may have been a fisherman by trade, John includes Thomas with several other disciples who join Peter fishing all night. Now this was no casual fishing trip but rather it was a means of trade and income. In other words, it was work. It also makes sense that Thomas could have been a fisherman because many of the early followers of Jesus came from the area of the Sea of Galilee. Fishing would have been a major source of work in that area.

2. Thomas was a **follower** of Jesus (Lk 6: 13-16)

Thomas was a disciple of Jesus from the earliest days of Jesus' public ministry. Thomas had made a choice to follow Jesus and invested his life into seeking more and more of Jesus.

3. Thomas was an **apostle** (Lk 6: 13-16)

Thomas was chosen by Jesus to be one of twelve leaders within the larger body of disciples. Thomas had become one of the core leaders and spent a great deal of time with Jesus.

4. Thomas was **loyal** and **committed** (Jn 11: 16)

Jesus was facing increasing hostility from the religious leadership and as He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead there was great concern that there might be an attempt to kill Jesus. Look at the words Thomas uses when he talks with the other disciples: *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* These do not sound like the words of a skeptic.

5. Thomas was **confused** (Jn 14:5)

As Jesus was preparing the disciples for His coming death and resurrection He told them that He was going to prepare a place for them and that they would know the way to where they were going. Thomas very clearly shows that he does not always understand what Jesus was teaching them. Look at what he says: *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

If Thomas was such a loyal follower of Jesus what happened to him? How did Thomas go from follower to famous skeptic?

I. Thomas was in a **downward spiral**

- a. Thomas had **deserted** Jesus... On the night that Jesus was arrested, all of the apostles ran and deserted Him. Thomas was no exception. Can you imagine the kinds of emotions that Thomas was experiencing? He was afraid, confused, ashamed, dismayed and distressed.
- b. The desertion led to a **delay**... Thomas does not go back to be with the other apostles right away. We don't know where Thomas was, what he was doing or why he stayed away. The result is that Thomas loses out on the fellowship of the apostles and he does not see Jesus on the first Easter.

- c. **The delay led to a denial** When Thomas does return to the apostles he hears that Jesus was raised from the dead and Jesus appeared to them. The greatest event in all of history and Thomas missed it. Jesus was alive and Jesus knew that Thomas deserted the fellowship. Thomas doesn't know what has taken place, how any of this took place, if Jesus will appear again or anything else about the resurrection. All he knows is that he missed it. Thomas begins to deny the testimony of the apostles because it was easier than facing the truth about himself.
- d. **The denial led to a demand** Thomas denies the testimony of the apostles and this leads him to demand proof. Thomas tells the others that he will not believe until he gets to see Jesus for himself. Then he goes a step further, he wants to touch Jesus, put his hands where the nails were and where the spear was put into Jesus' side.

Thomas was quickly caught in a dangerous, downward spiritual spiral. The fact is that he was slipping quickly and no one but Jesus could get him out.

II. Thomas was given a **specific demonstration**

A week goes by and there was no appearance of Jesus and we have no idea what Thomas was thinking but it could not have been a good week. Just when Thomas may have been ready to give up hope of seeing Jesus then Jesus finally appears.

When Jesus appears He greets the entire group and turns His attention on Thomas. At this point Thomas has to be thinking here it comes Jesus is going to tell me how horrid and rotten I am.

Jesus knew the heart of Thomas because He offers exactly what he was asking for and Jesus gives him the proof he needed. It is important to note that Jesus was not offended or angered by the request Thomas made. Jesus responds with love and kindness.

Jesus then begins to speak to Thomas about the real issue and cuts right to the chase. Jesus tells Thomas to stop doubting and believe. **What does it mean to doubt?** There are **two key definitions** for doubt; the **1st means** to be double minded or to have **a lack of commitment** and the **2nd** means to have **no faith** at all. Jesus was telling Thomas that was moving toward having a faithless life.

There are times in life when doubt is healthy and reasonable. For instance, a few weeks ago I saw a tabloid with a story on the cover about Elvis being alive and in Hawaii. Now I seriously doubt the reliability of that story because it is just not reasonable.

There is more than enough reason to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus was crucified, He was dead and buried, the tomb was empty, He was seen by many people and the apostles were changed in radical ways after that first Easter.

Doubt is not negative until it leads you to choose **not to believe**. This was exactly what Jesus was warning Thomas about. Literally, Jesus was saying: “Thomas, you are acting like a person who has no faith, stop it and believe.

The only way to survive your doubts is to believe. Now we don't believe everything that comes our way like that story about Elvis but we are called to believe the account of the gospel and that Jesus is alive.

Believing means to put your complete trust in something or someone. To believe in Jesus means to depend totally on Jesus and place your trust in Him 100%.

Do you believe in Jesus? Have you put a complete trust in Him or just a partial trust?

III. **Thomas gave a dynamic declaration** Thomas falls before Jesus and proclaims: **“My Lord and My GOD”**. Thomas goes from demanding evidence to declaring truth. This is one of the greatest statements of faith in the entire New Testament. Thomas made a personal declaration of trust in Jesus.

Where are you in that process? Have you made your declaration of Jesus being your Lord and your God?

Maybe you have been caught in a downward spiral and things have been slipping in your spiritual life. **Maybe** you have never made the claim to put your trust in Jesus. **Maybe** you are just waiting for the chance to see some proof. Jesus is with us now by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. He is here waiting for you to turn from your lack of focus and faith to proclaim Him as your Lord and your God. **I do not know what it is that you need this morning but Jesus does.**