

Stop doubting and believe John 20:24-29

The true meaning of the word 'doubt' used here is 'unbelieving', which is the direct opposite of 'believing'. Both words are put together in Jesus' command to Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe" v27. For when the disciples told him, just as Mary Magdalene had first said to them, "I/we have seen the Lord!" Thomas' immediate response was "Unless I see and touch his wounds **I will not believe.**" V25 Which is more than a simple expression of doubt, but one of unbelief and Jesus was addressing Thomas' unbelief with regards to his resurrection.

Now there is real irony in Thomas' words because when we look back and review his journey of faith we learn that he had left everything, his possessions, his friends, even his family to follow this man, the messiah, Jesus. And with faith enough to leave everything behind, in this situation, he still did not believe. It was only two to three months before that Thomas along with the disciples witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus, who had already been dead for four days, from the dead when he called him forth from the tomb in Bethany. In fact, it was Thomas who had stood out among the twelve disciples at that time when he said, "Let us also go with Jesus, that we may die with him." [John 11:16]. At this time in the ministry of Jesus, it was dangerous for them to be near Jerusalem because of the Jews. Yet, here was Thomas so full of devotion displaying courage, wisdom, and faith. So, how then after watching Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead after four days could he now place a limitation on Jesus to do the same for himself?

Perhaps it was human his logic mixed with doubt. After all, Jesus was the physician, but who heals the physician when the physician falls ill or dies and has to be resuscitated or in this case resurrected from the dead?

Thomas it seems had forgotten Jesus' very own words and teaching. Jesus had taught and spoken many words to the apostles. In describing Heaven he said, "My Father's house has many rooms... I go there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me." John 14:2,3

Further, he told them, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matthew 12:40

A most memorable occasion was immediately following Jesus' outburst when he drove out all those who were selling and exchanging money inside the Jerusalem Temple Courts. There the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus resolved to teach them even then, he sat on the temple steps, and as he pats a huge building stone says to them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." John 2:18-19.

Frankly, Thomas might have thought him a bit mad because it had taken until then 46 years to build the Temple and it was not finished yet, how little they knew then. They had no idea Jesus was referring to the temple that was his body. Thomas who spent three years with Jesus actually missed many clues during that time John 2:18-22. Which lends the question: What are you and I missing today in our walk of faith, our Christian life, and belief?

Another irony is this. Thomas by separating from the gathered disciples and heading off on his own for a while, probably somewhat depressed, in order to process his grief and come to terms with the traumatic and disheartening loss of Jesus. When he did this, he missed out on what was happening in the fellowship of believers, in this case the first appearance of Jesus to them. We human's, including Christians, have the tendency to separate ourselves out from the flock or other people and attempt to go it alone when we are a little down or blue in our thinking and emotions. When depressed we shut down and close ourselves off and refuse to be with others, including the church. Which is the very time and circumstance that we should be seeking out the love, care and support of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Thomas had just lost his friend Jesus, so he thought. With dashed hope It is hard to make faith fit in with the painful realities of life even for ourselves today when a loved one suffers, becomes ill, infirmed or dies, when children in this world are starving, or when we loose our job, or our marriage falls apart.

However, Thomas did return sometime within that first week after the resurrection, to the fellowship of believers, the place where he, and we for that matter, are most likely to meet with the presence of Jesus who dwells in his people, the church. Which is constituted whenever two or more believers are gathered together in his name, there Jesus is with them Matthew 18:20 and has promised to be so always, to the end of the age Matthew 28:20.

Thomas' period of doubt and unbelief didn't mean that things were all bad for him because he also displayed some incredible positive attributes going for him including honesty and integrity when he declared what he did v25. He did not try and play along or give tacit agreement by saying nothing. He openly confessed his unbelief. He did not act as if his doubts did not exist and were not important to him. Instead, he confessed that he really did not understand or believe what had happened. This open and honest confession of doubt and expression of unbelief was helpful for Thomas in that in the end it actually served to help him arrive at the certainty of not only Christ's resurrection, but his belief in him as God too.

Unhesitatingly, without any other words, explanations or apologies, he responds to Jesus v27 with an astonishing confession of faith: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas moves from a state of unbelief to instantaneous belief v28. There was no half measure employed here- just one big step. Thomas did not bother to pause and lean over and poke his fingers in Jesus' wounds. Just as he had openly doubted- he was now certain and sure! He had fought his way through the unbelief and doubts to arrive at this conviction, surrendering immediately to Jesus Christ, proclaiming that He is his Lord and God, the eternal and self-existent creator God who was there in the beginning. He is the first Jew ever to state this. It stands as the high point of faith for him, or anyone else for that matter who will profess Jesus as their Lord and God.

Thomas heard of the resurrection second-hand and had to have a personal encounter with Jesus before he came to faith. If we are honest with ourselves, we are a lot more like Thomas than we want to admit. To doubt the resurrection is not such an uncommon occurrence, dead people rarely get up and are alive again. But then Thomas can give us some important lessons about what it means to have faith. We learn from his experience that he was:

- Willing to risk his life;
- Willing to ask the hard questions [which incidentally is what participants on the Alpha course are encouraged to do];
- and lastly, Willing to accept the truth.

I have heard it said that 'Doubt is the sincere question whereas unbelief is the unwillingness to hear the answer' so we must be willing as Thomas was to accept the truth when we hear it. He never doubted Jesus, he doubted his fellow disciples. Once Jesus

showed him, he believed and admitted it.

I also came across this quote the other day that said, "Those who doubt most, and yet strive to overcome their doubts, turn out to be some of Christ's strongest disciples." Anon. These words sum up Thomas for us as one who stopped doubting and believed.

When Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." V29 he could only but take his Lord and God's words to heart and be inspired not only by his own profession of faith but with the desire to proclaim the good news of the resurrection to those who had never seen or met Jesus and were yet to believe.

Thomas turned out to be the apostle who travelled furthest from Jerusalem than any other apostle. He arrived in the south west of India in 52AD and laid the foundations of Christianity in this part of the world. This church is still in existence today making them one of the oldest groups of practicing Christians in the world. It is known as the Mar Thoma or St Thomas Church, which is a part of the Syrian Orthodox Church. He was martyred in 72AD and is supposedly buried in Madras at the Church of St Thomas. He stopped doubting and believed, and made the commitment to take Christ's message to the ends of the earth to those who were yet to believe. Today there are 1200 plus Mar Thoma Parishes or congregations, with up to one and half million members worldwide. There is even a Mar Thoma church here in Auckland in New Lynn. And these are the beliefs the Mar Thoma Church ascribes to

The goal and function adopted by the church is:

- To be the repository of the divine doctrines revealed by Jesus Christ and proclaimed by His Apostle
- To maintain these doctrines in their purity
- To promote the spiritual life of its members through the administration of sacraments and by the ministry of the WORD
- To make disciples of all nations by the proclamation of the Gospel to all the world, and through the administration of Holy Baptism in the name of True God.

Thomas would be well pleased to know that many have come to faith through the church he founded and was later named after him because those whom he discipled lived their lives with the same continued devotion and commitment to Christ as their Lord and God. We too can be like Thomas.

So why not [you and me] be like Thomas

[& how do we do that.... We begin by]:

1. Asking the hard questions of Jesus [and when we get a response we are to..]
2. Be willing to accept the truth when confronted with it!
3. Be willing to follow Jesus to death/to the end of our lives.

The Challenge remains:

Thomas was willing to put it all on the line in order to follow Jesus-

Do you have that same passion to follow Jesus?

Do you have that same desire to follow Jesus?

Do you have the same boldness to follow Jesus?

Stop doubting and believe in your Lord and God Jesus Christ!

Be willing to follow him to the end!

Let's do that and just wait and see what a glorious end that will be!