

A Doubting Believer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 June 2018

Preacher: Rev David Meredith

[0 : 00] Well, again, can we open our Bibles, please? John chapter 20. Reading again verse 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. Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Well, you know what they say, it takes all sorts. And one of the marks of a healthy church is that there are all sorts of people in that church. And that whoever you are out there in the community, that you will find someone like you in that church.

It's always a very bad sign of people in a particular church all behave the same, talk the same, even look the same. Like Russian dolls, you know, one inside the other.

The only difference being that of signs. If you read the end of Romans, the very last chapter, you read there a list of the most diverse people. And that is a wonderful thing about the church.

[1 : 18] That as our society, even as our islands become more diverse, that so the church represents that diversity that we see in the community.

But diversity, not just in terms of the way people are, but the way we are constructed, our personalities, the way we look at the world.

And John's gospel is a tremendous example of so many different types of people. Very often folks say, well, I'm just not the type to become a Christian, or I'm not just your typical person that goes along here to Garibas.

Well, what is that typical person? You read in John's gospel, and you read there of Nicodemus. Now, Nicodemus was very, very clever, very, very smart man, PhD, a teacher, very erudite, a man with status in the community.

Someone who would really be flying off to the mainland in a plane every Monday morning.

Someone who would be in a suit. Someone who really would be one of the ruling elite.

[2 : 24] Chapter 4, we see the woman at the well. Very much married many times, used by many men, and yet both of these personalities were looking and had met Jesus.

And then you have the young couple at the wedding there in Cana of Galilee. Very, very ordinary. And if you like that, it's typical of the number of people who become followers of Jesus.

You have the elitist, Nicodemus. You have the poor soul, the woman at the well. And you've got those in the middle, the young couple at the marriage of Cana and Galilee.

And of course, one of the great joys of church, one of the great joys of the family of God, is to see all these different personalities brought together.

Well, here we have this morning to one of my favorite characters in the whole of the Bible, Thomas. And I think he is unfairly called doubting Thomas, because it's as if he was the only one that doubted.

[3 : 34] And yet the truth is that they all doubted, apart from some of the women. They all doubted that Jesus had been raised from the dead. It's just that poor Thomas was a week later in expressing his doubt.

And yet we have from Thomas, yes, he's not given a very good press. No one would like to be called doubting Thomas. And yet there in verse 28, we see certainly the first post-resurrection declaration of who Jesus was.

And we see one of the most theologically accurate descriptions of the Lord Jesus, my Lord and my God. Breathtakingly simple, and yet emerging from one whose life was seen to be ravaged by doubts.

Before we look at Thomas, I just want to notice two little almost provisional things. We speak about the seven last sayings of Jesus. Well, there are the seven last sayings of Jesus on the cross. But there's also the as interesting last sayings of Jesus after the resurrection. But before we look at that, let's just notice a couple of little interesting pointers.

[4 : 52] You see there in verse 26, it says that the disciples were in the house again, though the doors were locked. Two things.

Number one, the doors were locked. Number two, the disciples were full of fear. It's not a very good start, is it? What's the point?

The point is that bad conditions do not stop the growth of the church. And that's wonderfully encouraging. You've got two bad conditions there.

You've got a bunch of fearful disciples, and you've got locked doors, bolted, chained, whatever. And yet the Lord Jesus Christ moves through the fear, moves through the bolted doors.

And so very often we think, well, conditions are not perfect in the church. We look around the church in the islands, we look around the church in the world, and we can see many things that would put people off the gospel.

[5 : 51] We see many things in our strategy, which mitigate against gospel growth. And yet in spite of our sin, our weakness and our failure, bad conditions do not stop the growth of the church.

In fact, if you read the Acts of the Apostles and study the history of the church of God, it is through persecution, it is through hardship. It is when the background culture is very often at its most dark that you see the glorious gospel in all its beauty.

I'm not a big admirer of jeweler's windows. I looked through a jeweler's window, I think twice in my life.

They're a few months apart, once for an engagement ring and once for a wedding ring. And that was very expensive, so I've not looked through a jeweler's window since. But one of the things you notice there is that how rings are displayed.

Rings are displayed against dark backgrounds because it reveals the glory. And that's exactly the same with the gospel.

[7 : 09] The darker the culture, the brighter the light. And we also notice a second little thing here, and that is the impact of the first day of the week.

It's interesting that in the New Testament, big things happen, of course, on any day, but big things often happen on the first day of the week.

Sunday, you know, Sunday, what's Sunday all about? Well, Sunday's all about resurrection, isn't it? That's why we don't, you know, observe the Jewish Sabbath anymore.

We observe the Lord's Day. The New Testament church changed the day from Saturday to Sunday. Why? Because it celebrates resurrection.

It celebrates life. It is on that day that the church of God have to come together. It is on that day that we come to be inspired through the Word of God.

[8 : 10] But, Carol Barth, a famous theologian who had good points as well as bad points like the rest of us, said this.

He says, if you cannot keep the fourth commandment, you can't keep the others. And he says, if you do keep the fourth commandment, then you get a gateway into keeping the others. Well, this isn't a Lord's Day that gathered together.

Let's look at Thomas. Three things. There's always three things, aren't there? We'll look at three stages in Thomas' life here. Number one, Thomas the doubter.

And we see it there. He says, unless I see the nail prints, I will not believe. They had told the story that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And this is a profound doubter.

Just feel the import of these words. 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.

[9 : 15] Imagine you. You visit a friend in hospital and they're describing the trauma of their operation. And you think, listen, unless I put my finger into the wound, I will not believe.

It's extreme skepticism here, isn't it? Thomas the doubter. What made him doubt? Three things. Number one, his personality.

It's just the way he was wired. Isn't the fact that that's the way many of us are. It's just our personalities.

And we all have different personalities. Now, what makes up personalities is very, very interesting. Isn't it? It could be our genes.

You know, we have an expression, it's in the people. It's just the way they are. That's the way they're wired. Their father was like that, their grandfather was like that.

[10:22] They're happy people as a family. They're positive. There are other folk who are just miserable. My children always tell me that I look miserable.

I don't smile a lot. I don't like smiling. It's a bit of a waste of time. So, people assume I'm miserable because I kind of look miserable. It's just the way I am.

It's my personality. Thomas, every time he's mentioned, he's mentioned, for example, in John 11, verse 6. The scenario is this, that the disciples had escaped the people of Jerusalem wanted to kill them.

The high priests wanted to kill them. They get word that Lazarus has died and Jesus says, we've got to go back to Bethany, which is just beside Jerusalem, and we've got to intervene in Lazarus' situation.

And Thomas says, hey, we go back there, we're going to die. You read him again there in John chapter 14. Jesus has just given the disciples the great promise of heaven and the glory that awaits them.

[11:31] In John 14, 5, Thomas says, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? Every time you read of Thomas, he's negative.

Every time you read of Thomas, he is fearful. He's kind of, you know, like that man in the dad's army. We're doomed. We're all doomed. That's the way he was.

It was his personality. We have personalities. It's not just all spiritual. Some of us see the glass half empty.

Some of us see the glass half full. Some of us are just optimistic. Others of us are just pessimistic. It's the way we're wired. I don't know if you've ever read Pilgrim's Progress.

Someone said that in Thomas we have fearing, despondency, and much afraid rolled into one.

[12:32] And there are some folk here saying, that's exactly the way I am. My personality is that of pessimism.

I'm fearful. I have doubts. Now, that doesn't explain or excuse everything. We cannot blame our personalities for everything because there's other things at work.

We can't say, well, I'm angry because I've got red hair. That's just the way I am. It's ridiculous. Of course it is. Our personalities ought not to mask our sin.

And there were elements of sin here in Thomas' doubt. It wasn't just personality, but personality was an element. Thomas, a doubter, we see his personality.

And he was a doubter secondly because of his position. in verse 24. Now, Thomas 1 of the 12 was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

[13:38] Now, there's no reason on earth to believe that this was sinister. We don't know why he wasn't there. There are hints that he ought to have been there. The disciples were a very close group of people and became even closer after the death and calvary of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They kind of bound together. They were in the upper room. They found strength in unity. They found strength in togetherness. But Thomas, for some reason, wasn't there.

Now, this is a Sunday in John 20. It's a Sunday morning. I don't know when it was. But we find here that they're all together, but Thomas was not there.

Now, the application is not get to every single meeting. you can. No, no, no, a thousand times no. We can identify sanctification with the number of meetings that we attend.

That's totally wrong. That's pure legalism. And that's tick-box sanctification. That's not how it works. However, there's a point here.

[14:51] And the point is, the general point is that those elements of our personality, which are bad and negative, are fed when we neglect coming together with the people of God.

When we neglect fellowship, and fellowship, beloved, is not simply turning up at a meeting.

It is bigger than that. These people were discussing the risen Jesus. these people were with the risen Jesus. And I noticed over a long pastoral ministry of some 35 years, that doubts and fears grow amongst those who are isolated.

We need each other. We need to encourage each other. We need to dispel the mythologies and the mistrust that happens within us.

We must encourage one another to go on and to battle on and to grow up together. He doubted because of his personality.

[16:06] He doubted because of his position. He wasn't there. But Thomas the doubter doubted because also of his philosophy. verse 25, unless I see the nail marks in his hands.

His philosophy was he was a skeptic. He just didn't trust his friends. Now, I'm in a wonderful position. I hardly know any of you.

I don't know where you are spiritually. I don't know those of you who are following the Lord Jesus Christ, your disciples. I don't know those of you who have just stumbled in. I don't know the spiritual condition of any of you.

That's where I am. But I wonder, are you in this situation where unless I see, I will not believe, I will not commit until I see with myself, for myself.

Now, that's understandable. people, but here, Thomas didn't trust his friends. Mistrust often comes from a huge ego.

[17:29] Some months ago, I wanted to install a television, but I did not want one of those huge dishes outside the house.

I didn't want an aerial. I thought, we'll go subtle, so I bought an internal area, you know, the old school, the types you put on top of your TV. The only problem is that TVs don't have tops anymore, but you have this aerial, this internal aerial.

So it came, it was delivered by Amazon, and I had to go out. I went out, and when I was out, my people tried it, said it didn't work.

I came back, they said the aerial doesn't work. Oh, I didn't believe them. because my ego is so big that I thought I could get it to work, that I thought that they were raving incompetence.

So as soon as they went out, I unwrapped it, and I started to see if I could get it to work. Of course it didn't.

[18:34] But what drove me? Pride? Arrogance? unless I see it myself, I will not believe.

I'm going to open this out a little bit later. Well, not too late, but a little bit later. So is your philosophy keeping you from Jesus? Okay, so there are three elements to his doubt.

There was, let me just remind you again, there was his personality, he was my nature negative, there was his position, he wasn't there with the others, and there was his philosophy, he was a skeptic, unless I see, I will not believe.

So that's Thomas the doubter. But then we see Thomas the believer. Verse 26, a week later his disciples were in the house again. Let me just make one point here, Jesus is the Jesus of the second chance.

he came again. Aren't you thankful that the Lord Jesus is the Jesus of the second chance, and sometimes the third and the fourth.

[19:47] It's not limitless, but maybe there's someone here who has doubted before and Jesus is coming again, even this morning, palpably, and saying, I'm calling you again.

Here it's just a week later. Now, for some reason, Thomas had changed. I don't know what made him change.

Jesus going through the locked door, that was powerful. The doors were locked and Jesus appears. There's a kind of wow factor in that, isn't there? Thomas would have realized something has happened here, this is incredible.

The information in verse 27, Jesus seems to know what Thomas had said, put your finger here, see my hands. He wasn't there a week later and yet Jesus knew what he said.

That's two things. Through the locked door, knew what the previous conversation was. Was it the power inherent in the words of peace when the Lord Jesus says, peace be with you?

[20:55] I think that the word of Jesus brought with it power in itself. power. There's inherent power there. Now all these things restore our faith.

So we see here Thomas the doubter and now we see Thomas the believer and all these things are changing his mind. When the Lord says stop doubting and believe, Thomas in verse 28 says, my Lord and my God.

I think there was one dominant thing that changed Thomas and that is he got it. He got it. What did he get? He got the cross.

You see, before Thomas thought that the cross was an aberration, he thought that the cross was unusual, he thought that the cross was the end game, he thought that the cross finished the story.

And now as one author said, when Jesus Christ went to the cross, he was simply acting in character. He saw what Jesus was doing.

[22 : 12] And Thomas was the very first person in the Bible to look at Jesus and address him directly as God. My Lord and my God.

The disciples often didn't get it. The Lord had said to them, have I been with you so long and you do not understand these things? Who do you say I am? What sort of person am I?

And beloved, this is the essence of what a believer is. A believer is someone who sees who Jesus is, who understands who Jesus is and simply says, my Lord and my God.

Who is God? When I was at Smithnett, I did school assemblies and one year one of the parents wanted to get in on the act and she saw herself as a bit of a communicator and the head teacher says, listen, you've got to share the assembly with Mrs.

X. So, Mrs. X came along and her first words now, boys and girls, I want you all to draw a picture of God.

[23 : 38] Now, I don't know if you know that song, there may be trouble ahead, but that was going on in my mind. Why? There's a good reason when the commandment tells us not to draw an image of God.

There's a good reason for that. because you can't. An image reduces God. And so the children began to draw.

And we got these pictures of God. Largely old men with white beards and white hair.

And there's nothing wrong with old men with white beards and white hair. On that way myself, more salt, less pepper.

That's fine. But that reduces God. What does God look like? What does God look like?

[24 : 53] John's gospel nails it. That's why John's gospel was written. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

What does God look like? He looks like a man who went to a cross and was wounded for our transgressions, who died for our sins.

Two years ago I conducted a wedding and it was in an Anglican church. And the bishop was there, the local bishop. A lovely man.

bishop did not look happy.

His lips were sealed. And afterwards, over canopies, the bishop comes up to me and says, didn't like that song.

[26 : 06] Why not, bishop? Well, it says, in Christ alone my hope is found. And then there's that line, in him the wrath of God was satisfied.

God has no wrath. That's the gospel. What does God look like?

a man whose side was pierced and who took God's wrath. But a man for whom the grave could hold no longer, up from the grave he arose.

Thomas saw that. Men do not rise from the dead like that. Thomas saw that Jesus Christ is the definition defier. Jesus saw that Jesus Christ is the one who breaks every paradigm.

Thomas realized, Thomas saw that it was him. Yes, Jesus was alive. Thomas the doubter, Thomas the believer.

[27 : 17] Thirdly, finally, and reasonably briefly, Thomas, as a warning, Thomas said to my Lord and my God, he gets it.

warning, verse 29, then Jesus told him, because you have seen me and have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So it's a warning.

This is what we call the second beatitude of John. There's another beatitude, isn't there, in verse 13, in chapter 13, verse 17 there.

Now if you do these things, you will be blessed if you do them. There's blessings in Matthew, of course, the Sermon on the Mount, and there's blessings in John's gospel. Blessed are those who have not yet seen, but have not, and have believed.

We have not seen the risen Jesus. Blessed does not just mean happy, but it means accepted by God. Now, we've got to care for what this is.

[28 : 21] It doesn't say, blessed are those who have believed without evidence, it's very clear, it says, blessed are those who have not yet seen.

Following Jesus, having faith is not a leap in the dark. It's not blind.

It's not like the Loch Ness monster. That's not what faith is. I was Saturday morning in Uig, I came over Uig Tarbert.

I wasn't booked in a ferry, ferry was fully booked, so you go in Uig, you go in lane 7, that's the standby lane, you turn up early and if you get on, you get on. So there were four of us in the queue, four cars, three tourists, me, and another two behind me.

So the three tourists got out, and it's some ridiculous time, six o'clock in the morning, and I don't know if you've ever been in Uig and Sky at six o'clock in the morning, there's not a lot to do.

[29 : 37] And so we start to talk, and the tourists said, do you think I'll get on? I said, well, we'll see how it goes. And the ferry was leaving at 9.10, and 9 o'clock all the cars were there.

They said to us, do you think we'll get on? I said, yeah, I think we'll get on. And she began to talk, what do you do for a living? I said, I'm a minister.

She says, what do you think of the National Health Service? I said, I'm not that sort of a minister. I'm like a vicar. Oh, she thought I was a political minister.

Oh, you're a vicar. Ah, you're a man of faith, then? So you think we'll get on? And it led to a really interesting discussion about the nature of faith. And I said, yes, I do think we will get on.

I have faith, but I have evidence. So I surveyed the car park. It says, number one, there are no lorries. That's good.

[30 : 41] Statistically, there's always a dropout rate. There's always cars that don't turn up. hope. And William Archie had told me that there was a good chance of getting on.

So, yes, I did express hope, but it was based in evidence. Blessed are those who have not seen and have not believed.

Notice the next verse. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Pandas live in China. There is a couple of pandas in Edinburgh Zoo. Up until a few months ago, I had never seen a panda in my life.

Never seen one. But I was reliably told that they existed. There were even two of them in the zoo. I went to the zoo.

[32 : 01] I saw a panda. Do I believe in them more now? No. No. My belief in pandas is exactly the same having seen one as having not seen one.

That's what Jesus is saying. Clearly not about pandas, but about something more significant than that. Something which is of fundamental importance.

His existence, his truth, and the fact that we can have faith in him. And so Thomas believed.

And that was good, but his warning as Jesus says, that's good because you've seen. But more blessed are those who have not yet seen and have believed.

heard. Let's conclude. Where are you this morning? What's your status?

[33 : 11] Are you a believer as Thomas was, but doubting? the Lord mercifully doesn't try to kick us out because we doubt.

He understands us. He remembers we are dust. And he gently tries to say to us, I understand your doubts, but there's no need.

What about those of you who are still wanting more evidence, more evidence, more evidence? It's not evidence you need.

It's simply surrender. put up the white flag and say, I surrender Lord Jesus.

I'm going to follow you. Let's pray.