

Doubting Thomas

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Date: 15 May 2022

Preacher: Phil Stogner

[0 : 00] I want to invite you to turn once again to John 20. John 20, and John as a gospel writer is the only one that records this in the scripture.

He's the only one that gives us any information about the apostle, disciple Thomas. And I find that very interesting. That he was known as the beloved disciple.

And as was read, we read in verses 30 and 31, the very purpose of his gospel was that we would have evidence to believe.

That Jesus Christ would be presented to us in such a way that he would be seen as the son of God. God, meaning a living God.

You can't kill him. You can't stop him. And the resurrection proved that. But Thomas missed it initially. And so he had doubt.

[1 : 09] So if you're online or you're here in the congregation, there are immediately two things that are striking to you about me. Number one, I have an American accent. I'm an associate pastor here on staff at Glasgow City Free Church.

But yes, I'm from America. And number two, that guy needs a haircut. I have neglected to do that. But don't worry.

I'm not going to become a hippie on you. But today marks the death, the anniversary of a man who ministered to hippies primarily.

His name was Francis Schaeffer. He died on May the 15th today in 1984. Francis Schaeffer was a Presbyterian pastor.

He had become a Christian at university after reading the scriptures for himself. And in reading those scriptures, he saw Jesus.

[2 : 11] And at the age of 18, he became a believer. But not only a follower of Christ. He said, I want doubters to know that this, the Bible, is true truth.

It's the only truth. And it's a living truth. That Jesus is not simply a historic figure, a philosopher or a teacher, or even a savior, dead.

But he's a living reality. And so he preached for around 15 years. He would later go on to teach and preach at the seminary that I would attend.

And then he would move to Switzerland. And in 1948, he established Labrie, which was known as the Shelter.

And bohemian, vagabonds, European hikers and travelers from America, hippies, would sit around his table at Labrie.

[3 : 23] Anyone was welcome to come. And they would discuss Christianity. They would discuss philosophy in light of the truths put forward of the scriptures.

They would discuss the culture that they were coming out of and how history was changing around them. And where does Christianity fit into that? He would answer from the very start in 1948 in Labrie.

Doubters, those that struggled with unbelief and disbelief. He would begin to answer their questions. But in 1954, something happened.

And I'll quote him, use his own words. He said, It gradually grew on me that my reality was less than it had been in the early days after I had become a Christian.

I realized that in honesty, I had to go back and rethink my whole position. I told Edith, his wife, that for the sake of honesty, I had to go all the way back to my agnosticism.

[4 : 41] Those days, agnosticism is, you believe in God but not a personal God. And think through the whole matter.

He then goes on to say that he walked a lot. He would walk in the evenings. He would walk in the mornings. He would walk in the rain. He'd walk in the sun.

And as he walked, he would pray. And he was systematically going back to the beginnings.

Because his walk with Jesus had plateaued.

God was real in his mind but not in his experience. He began to review every reason he had for becoming a Christian and remaining a Christian.

He said he searched through all of the Bible. Regarding what it meant to become a Christian and stay a Christian. And he realized something.

[5 : 46] He said, quote, I realized that the problem with all the teaching that I had received after becoming a Christian, I had heard very little about what the Bible said about the finished work of Christ on the cross for my present life.

And he said, gradually, the sun came out. I found again the sweet reality and truth of Jesus in my present life.

And though I had not written poetry for years, I began to sing. I experienced a new joy. And I began to write poetry again.

You see, Francis Schaeffer was a doubting Thomas. Maybe you can identify with the problem that Francis Schaeffer encountered in his life.

It wasn't unbelief that I reached the point in my life as a Christian that I do not believe that God exists.

[7 : 14] But you get to the point in your Christian life that you're saying, where is God? Where is he in this situation?

This challenge, this struggle, this trial, this suffering. What is God up to? And I want to tell you that the big idea is that every one of us in this room has and is yet dealing with doubt in our life in relationship with God and Jesus as a living presence.

And I want to encourage you to see and come to the place this morning where you doubt those doubts in the very presence of a living Jesus who presents himself to us.

So I want you to come to that place this morning where you can doubt your doubts for you will find an answer when you meet the living Jesus and on the other side is joyful confession and belief.

I want to show you three things. First of all, I want to introduce you to Doubting Thomas. Who is Doubting Thomas? Secondly, I want to tell you or ask the question, what was Doubting Thomas' doubts?

[8 : 54] And then thirdly, how does Jesus treat doubters? How does Jesus meet us in our unbelief?

Now, I want to urge you that this is important. This is important because you want to know how does God treat doubters such as Thomas?

How will God treat me in those times of doubt and unbelief? So first of all, who is Doubting Thomas? Well, we read in verse 24 that Doubting Thomas is one of the twelve.

Actually, in this situation, he is now one of the eleven. Judas has already left and killed himself. And so, there are eleven disciples.

And Thomas is one of the disciples. It's important that you recognize right off the bat, he's not an unbeliever. And he's not someone that followed Jesus from a distance so that when the going gets tough, the tough get running.

[10 : 17] It's not that. It is, he's one of the twelve. For three and a half years, he's been at Jesus' side. So this is a believer in Jesus Christ whose doubt we're looking into.

In John eleven, the only other mention that we have of Thomas, Jesus has invited the disciples, he says, we're going to go to see Lazarus who has fallen asleep.

Lazarus, my friend, another follower has died. And Jesus is going to, he's taking them to their first resurrection. They've got front row seats to see the resurrection.

But the disciples know that already there's a plot afoot to kill or capture Jesus. And they know that they'll be in the roundup. And so they're a little anxious about that.

But Thomas comes forward in John eleven and he said, well, in essence, Phil Stogner paraphrased, we can't talk him out of it, boys. So let's settle up and go and die with him.

[11 : 36] I love that about Thomas. Thomas was very much a realist, maybe a stoic, but it's like, I will die for this guy.

I will die following Jesus. Jesus. So he's not a coward. Secondly, one of the things we learn about him is he's called the twin.

And you might have a footnote in your Bible if you're following along, and that's Didymus. Now imagine that he's got a jersey. He's got his nickname on it, the twin. I think that's a bummer of a nickname. You know, it's like the twin. Well, where's your other? It's like you don't have your own identity. I always in high school, I always wanted to choose my own nickname, which you don't get to do, by the way. Others give you the nickname. You don't get to choose it. You better hope it's a good one. But I always wanted to be bare. But I was never big enough, strong enough, and tall enough to be bare. [12:47] But I always wanted to be bare. But can you imagine being the twin? Oh, well, you don't even have your own identity apart from your brother.

Can I just take preacher's license here and interject? I have a twin in my faith. I'm full of faith. I'll die for Jesus. I'll fight for Jesus. I love talking about Jesus. I love Jesus. But there are points that are embarrassing even to me that I struggle with doubts. Lord, what are you doing in this situation? Why now? why are you doing this? And others. So I have a twin. Faith and my twin of unbelief that I carry around with me. Doubting Thomas has that third nickname, Doubting Thomas. It's not in the Bible, and we give that nickname to him. And it stands for anybody that is a skeptic. [14:03] Anybody that carries around with them a doubting temperament, they've got to see it to believe it. We have 50 states in America and one of them, Missouri, has the strapline, the show me state.

And Missourians are classified as a culture, unless they see it, they don't believe it. it makes politicians, it gives politicians a really tough time there. Show me first. John MacArthur in his book, Twelve Ordinary Men, says it's unfair. Doubting Thomas was his, doubting was not skepticism. It wasn't like he had to see every little thing to be convinced and that he would only believe if his eyes told him so. He was a man of faith. He was a follower of Jesus. So why the doubt? What caused doubt to bubble up in this situation? John MacArthur, and I agree with him, said, it's despair and it's grief. [15:25] Imagine putting all your hopes in a situation or another person and your love and then it's shattered. Maybe the situation goes south and you'd put everything in it.

You'd invested everything in it. Now what? Where do I go from here? or maybe it's a loved one and even a loss of broken relationship or even death, separation. How can I do life without him? I suspect that's more what Thomas is indicating here. If I were a stage manager or a director of a movie scene of this, it comes to the words in verse 25, 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 to his side, I will never believe. I wouldn't have an angry tone of voice. voice. I would have a grieving, despairing, sad voice. I saw him every day and now I see him not. Unless I can see him again, unless I can experience him again, life just isn't worth living. I am so glad that this disciple and John included this account in the Bible. [16:57] Bible. I love doubting Thomas. I get it. I understand. Now, I've got to go on here, but I do want to apply this before I start, before I talk a little bit more about what his doubt was.

But understand the context. That's verses 19, through 23. The disciples are together again. One week earlier at church on a Sunday, the first Sunday on record that the disciples assembled themselves in the upper room, Jesus appeared. word. And in verse 25, I'm going to geek out on the Greek for just a second here. So the other disciples told him, it's an active, it's an active participle, it's an active word. [18:16] It means they kept telling him in the marketplace. Oh, Thomas, hey, did we tell you we saw Jesus last Sunday in church? Oh, hey, Thomas, Thomas, hey, can I tell you again, you ought to come along to church this Sunday.

Man, we saw Jesus last Sunday. We're expecting to see him every Sunday in church. church. I don't think it's going too far. And Thomas comes. Notice Thomas is very honest and he owned his doubt. That's the application of the first point as to who Thomas is. Maybe you can chalk that up to courage. Maybe you can chalk that up to his despair that he just didn't care who knew it. But in the fellowship of his brothers, he was honest.

He says, unless I see Jesus again, life is just not worth living. I don't know where I go from here. For three and a half years, we were intimate with Jesus and now I haven't seen him.

[19 : 29] My hands haven't touched him. And he told his brothers. The reason this is important is because culture the non-Christian culture applauds Christians or so-called Christians who were once authors, singers, preachers even, spiritual leaders who have said, I've chucked all of Christianity.

I don't believe that way anymore. But culture loves to put these guys forward as, see, see, see, you ought to doubt. Your doubt is a good thing.

It'll lead you away from Christ. The church historically has not treated doubters and skeptics and unbelief very well. We've forced many people to hide it like a skeleton in the closet.

But here, I love it. it's as if we could put a sign up saying, all skeptics are welcome here. This is a safe place.

This is where, this is where you can doubt your doubts. So, secondly, what kind of doubt? So, there are three types of doubt or unbelief.

[21 : 01] The first one is, I don't believe in God anymore. I don't believe. I have no faith. The second one is, I have faith, but it's just so small.

I don't have a large quantity of faith. I don't, it's little wonder that God is so distant or far because I'm just not a good enough Christian.

I just don't, I just don't believe like other people do. And the third is a mix. It's that twin that I said earlier exists not only in me, but every one of us.

There's certain things, my faith is really, really strong, but then there are other things that my faith is either weak or non-existent. faith. I think you can see this, these types of faith in the stages of life.

When I was a young man, I came out, I became a Christian university, and I came out of a very sinful lifestyle.

[22 : 13] You didn't, nobody had to tell me that's sin, I knew it. What I couldn't get and believe was that not only was I forgiven in the moment, but I was forgiven every day, even with a repeated sin.

I couldn't believe that I was forgiven, and that just as it said, Jesus said, you've got eternal security that happens when you say, Jesus, forgive me.

It's everything past, it's everything present, and even what sin you will commit between now and your death is already forgiven.

That was not only mind-boggling, but it was unbelievable. So I always struggled, particularly when I was young, feeling like I needed to kind of help tip the scale, but the scale had already been tipped in Jesus' favor, and that for me.

I get into mid life, and I start to have with four kids, and Wendy, no problems with Wendy, but I just, boy, just in ministry, so busy, so many challenges, that in many ways, I just began to do ministry in my own, I was helping other people in their personal relationship with Jesus, but my own intimacy and experience of joy in Jesus began to plateau, and so I became, it became very religious, it wasn't the Christianity that I had once experienced, it was Francis Schaeffer saying the reality of Christianity, the living experience of a risen Jesus inside of you through the Holy Spirit, inside of our church, in all of my situations, that it began to grow cold, and I began to doubt, was it really real?

[24 : 31] C.S. Lewis says in his book, A Grief Observed, which he wrote on the occasion of struggling with doubt and even unbelief, disbelief in God for allowing his wife to die.

He said, my doubt was this, so is this really what God is like? Is this really the way it is?

Is this really what God is like? So has it really come after everything, has it really come to this? Not, I'm deserting God, or I don't believe in God, but it's just like, do I have to settle for less a God than I originally put my faith in?

In old age, I suppose once I hit 60, I began to realize that the light at the end of the tunnel is a little bit closer and a little bit clearer.

I began to sense my mortality, and they're questions like, when I enter into the valley of shadows, will you really be there to lead me through and shepherd me?

[25 : 57] When I stand before you in judgment, am I okay in Jesus? Is it enough? Or will you say, yeah, you're in heaven, but your record is rubbish.

Or will he go by Jesus' record alone, home? I go into old age, and I'll tell you, John Piper was interviewed in retirement for many, many years of ministry at Bethlehem Baptist Church, and they said, you've had some disappointments.

What was your greatest disappointment? He said, my greatest disappointment in my life has been that I'm not further along, I'm not further along in my faith and in my walk with Jesus than I thought that I would be.

He was saying, I still struggle with sin. If anything, I struggle with sin patterns or addictive behavior more than I've ever struggled. And I thought I'd be so beyond that. Doubts.

Well, I got good news leaving this point. You're, again, in the right place to have those doubts, to doubt those doubts.

[27 : 26] Theologically, we believe in something called the means of grace are, for those of us who are professional, mog. So we believe in mog.

We believe that God gives grace. He gives life. He gives a fresh experience of Jesus through the means of grace.

And what are those means of grace? Through the reading and the preaching of the Bible. through worship, through prayer, through the sacraments where the Lord's table set before us, but through the wounds, through Jesus crucified, acknowledging that, seeing it fresh anew.

But then there's another one, the final remaining one, the fellowship of the saints. You are, when you become a Christian, you're linked by family to every brother and sister.

And God uses that fellowship, your family, for your transformation. That's his transformation plan.

He meets my doubts and even if it's, I've not acknowledged it, honestly like Thomas, I hear things, I see things.

[29 : 03] I see you in struggles where you in as much say, where is God or why is he doing this now? And I learn and I'm encouraged in my battles and my doubt.

what I want to say is it can feel a little bit naughty to bring your doubts into church, but this is the only place.

This is the safest place. This is the place where your doubts are most welcome. This is where you doubt your doubts.

You bring them in and you hear things that you experience again, even mog the means of grace here. I love it that the brothers didn't say, hey, go work it out.

I love it that Thomas didn't shut himself off with his doubts and he didn't shut in those doubts. Instead, he showed up.

[30 : 15] He didn't let any struggles he had in his walk with Jesus keep him away from church, but he said, that's the place that I need to be in that fellowship. Finally, how does Jesus treat doubters?

Because that's the big question, isn't it? How does Jesus feel about it? How does Jesus treat doubters? God's house and God is in the house.

He's in the house. And these disciples have been talking to Thomas and they're expecting, they're expecting in that upper room for Jesus to show up.

They come as hopefully we can come on Sunday morning with a sense of expectation. This is God's house and God is in the house. house. But how will Jesus take me as I am in the kind of week that I've had?

Well, notice a couple of things. He comes at the end of verse 26 and he says, Shalom. I wish that we were Jewish and we really understood the full meaning and weight of that word.

[31 : 37] From the West, it can be challenging, but it's behold. It's a blessing. It's not just a courtesy and a social greeting.

Peace, brother. Peace, sister. Peace be with you. It's God's peace upon you. Know God's peace. Experience God's peace. Be whole. Be at peace. peace. And those words from Jesus are a benediction. They carry power.

So he's inviting. And I believe that, I believe he's looking right at Thomas. He's now back. Earlier he had spoken peace to the disciples a week ago in church, but now it's individual.

And he's meeting Thomas right there with those other ten disciples around, but he's addressing peace, brother. Hold this, sister.

[32 : 41] You have every reason for peace with me, Jesus says. I don't squash doubters. I don't squash questions. I'm the answer. I love bringing your questions to me.

Christianity is a secure religion. You've got questions. We've got answers. Will you put yourself in the way of them? Will you put yourself in the way for Jesus to give you the answers?

And that's one of the ways that we see him in the scripture. Particularly, I see it in the Psalms, but just every emotion that I have, God speaks to, and he has answers for that.

Secondly, he continues to speak, and he begins to disrobe. And he would have had to take in his robe off and get down to an undergarment to lift it up to show this scar, this wound.

And I like, I like in the original, in the Greek, the word is for put is reach. Some of you may have a Bible, like an NIV, and it says reach, not simply put.

[33 : 55] it. And I like the image of that, that Jesus is saying, Thomas, with your doubts and unbelief, doubting your doubts looks like this.

I was thinking this, but now I'm reaching out to Jesus. I'm reaching, you know, I don't know what your face looks like now.

it's dark to me, but in the dark I'm reaching out. I can't, God, I just don't understand you right now. You are dark to me.

Your face is dark to me, but in the dark I'm going to reach out. John of the cross, one of the mystics, wrote a treatise and it was called The Dark Night of the Soul, where basically his heart had become very cold and God was very silent and he was suffering greatly and he said it was in the dark night of the soul that I reached into the darkness and held on to God.

That's what Jesus is inviting. He's saying, you know, bring it to me, but include me, reach to me. And then he gives a command and yes, it's a command in verse 27.

[35 : 17] He says, do not disbelieve, but believe. In other words, stop. This should end your doubting.

It will end your doubting at this point. And believe. Stop disbelieving and go forward and believe. Trust. Put your weight now on me. Stop trying to deal with this on your own. Stop trying to shut it in. Stop trying to shut me out.

But now, believe. Trust. trust. I love it that the greatest confession in the New Testament of faith in God comes from one who is the biggest doubter, Thomas.

When he says, my Lord and my God, there's nowhere else in the New Testament that a follower of God says, you're mine and you are my God and you are my Lord.

[36 : 33] You are my God and I will worship you. You are my Lord, you are my King and I will follow you. But it came from that collision of his doubts and the very wounds and voice of Jesus.

I, if I were to do a part two, it would be really focusing on those wounds. But Thomas, as we do, if you are Christian for any time, you know that those wounds tell a tremendous story.

They don't tell the story of a fallen hero that we memorialize. They tell the story of a savior who fought for us, wounds that we rightly deserved.

And those wounds are still with Jesus. Those wounds were not on a dead corpse. Those wounds were on a living Jesus.

I invite you, along with me, to draw near and look at those wounds. Take some time. look at those wounds and those scars that he bears proudly.

[37 : 58] For they won us and they won peace with God. They won the forgiveness of our sin and they won our union with Christ such that we have a living Jesus to experience now, every day, in eternity.

It's a fun conversation during T Fellowship. Do you think Thomas reached out and touched? Do you think that he handled those wounds and stuck his hand in the sign?

What do you think? Or do you think maybe just seeing, beholding, meditating, contemplating, those wounds on his behalf was enough to elicit his confession and even joyful worship?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you. I thank you that at Glasgow City Free Church and Partick Free Church, we have found a shelter.

we have found a shelter like Labrie that no matter where we are with you, Lord, perhaps we're seeking but not believing.

[39 : 23] Perhaps we're young in our faith. Perhaps we've believed for a long time. but we can keep growing in this safe place, even worship, bringing our doubts, meeting with you, Jesus, and being answered, our heart being answered, that the fruit of that is joy, worship, a stronger confession of you.

For we adore you, Jesus. You are our Savior. You are Lord. You're the Son of God. You're the object of our worship.

You're the King of Heaven for which we're destined. And you are the living reality now and forever. Amen. Amen.