

Thomas

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- [0 : 00] Thomas was a twin. His nickname is Diademus, which means the twin.
- Who his twin brother was, we don't know. It doesn't really matter because, as I see it, he could be my twin or your twin. Of all the so-called minor disciples of Jesus, Thomas is the one with whom we may most readily identify because he asks the kind of questions we would ask.
- And he says the kind of things we would say. There's no use pointing the finger at Thomas and doing him down by calling him Doubting Thomas because for every one finger you point at Thomas.
- There are four pointing back at you. Thomas is our twin. And he's aiding just the same kind of doubts we have and issuing the same kind of challenges to Jesus we do.
- And so of all the minor disciples, perhaps it is Thomas whose shoes we can most readily walk in. And so even though I'll be using the name Thomas rather a lot this morning, why don't you substitute your own name for his?
- [1 : 25] After all, we are identical twins and we think the same way. If bringer is the word we use to describe Philip, and if looker is the word we use to describe Bartholomew, then dramatist is the word we use to describe Thomas.
- Dramatist. Everything about him is dramatic. If he's like anyone in the band of brothers we call the disciples, he's like Peter, capable of great outbursts of faith and loyalty, followed by disappointing whimpers of doubt and denial.
- Everything about Thomas is big. Big words. Big actions. Big achievements. Big mistakes.
- There are some of us in Glasgow City who, let's face it, are dramatists. Nothing about us is ever mediocre. Everything is hyperbolic and exaggerated.
- Life is lived to the max, and it's right in front of all of us. And that's good. It means you're more like Thomas than anyone else.
- [2 : 42] And never forget that Jesus loved Thomas, and Jesus took delight in Thomas' faith. Jesus loves you this morning.
- And he takes delight in your big words. In your big actions. And your big achievements for him. Even if, at the end of the day, all that's big about you is the big gift of grace he's given you in the first place.
- So bearing in mind that Thomas was a dramatist, we want to consider part of the public record of his ministry in three ways. A dramatic confusion, a dramatic challenge, and a dramatic confession.
- Yes, Thomas is your twin. So for both you and him, there is good news in the story of his life. First of all then, there is a dramatic confusion.
- A dramatic confusion. Life was somewhat of a drama for Thomas. Never let it be said that he painted the picture of his life in dull, faint colors.
- [4 : 03] It's all loud. It's all bright. In John chapter 11, the writer records the events surrounding the death of Jesus' friend, Lazarus, and how Jesus went to give him life again.

The death of a friend is one of life's biggest dramas. There's no one way to react, and we must be quick to listen, and slow to judge.

For Thomas, having been told of Lazarus' death, he instantly jumps to make an astonishing statement in John 11, 16.

Let us also go, that we may die with him. Let us also go, that we may die with him. Rather than becoming subdued and turning in on himself, Thomas adds to the drama of the situation.

Speaking words that you might expect to find in a Victorian novel, let us go also, that we may die with him. Never let it be said that Thomas hides his ignorance behind closed lips.

[5 : 15] He opens his mouth. He proves himself to be rather confused. And yes, we're quick also to do that, when we don't understand what God is doing in our lives, rather than place our hand over our lips, rather than be patient, rather than wait for an answer from God, we blurt out to him our confusion.

Well, in verse 11 of chapter 11, having heard of the death of Lazarus, Jesus says to his disciples, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going there to wake him up.

The disciples think, of course, that Jesus means Lazarus is recovering from his illness by sleeping it off, we might say. Seeing their confusion, in verse 14, 15, Jesus tells them straight, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake, I'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

We need to put the two statements, in verse 11 and verse 14, 15, together to get Jesus' meaning. Our friend Lazarus is asleep, in verse 11, is connected with, Lazarus is dead, in verses 14.

I'm going there to wake him up, in verse 11, is connected with, so that you may believe, in verse 15. If they had really been listening to Jesus, the disciples would have added two and two together, and made four.

[6 : 57] Lazarus is dead, but Jesus is going to bring him back to life. Jesus is going to perform a miracle of life, in order that his disciples may believe in him.

He's going to bring Lazarus back from the dead. The disciples don't understand, that they're going with Jesus, to give life to Lazarus, and not to die with Lazarus.

There is no room for pessimism, in a world, whereby the power of his word, Jesus calls forth, a dead Lazarus, from the tomb.

There is no pessimism, in a world, where everything that happens to us, has been carefully designed, by our loving father, so that we may believe.

Now you know, and I know, that being confused, by God's work in our lives, isn't a matter of, being good, at his cryptic crosswords, or his mathematical equations.

[8 : 04] It's a matter of listening carefully, to his word, and then lovingly, and patiently, trusting him. Not knowing what's happening to us, does not justify, the pessimism of Thomas, but the realism of Jesus.

For in a world, where Jesus raises the dead, to new life, there is nothing, he cannot do for us, so that we may believe, and rely more upon his grace.

There may be some of you here today, who are confused, about what God is doing in your life. It may be conflict in the home, it may be conflict in the workplace. You're finding it very difficult, to control your disappointment at God.

You thought, that being a Christian, would immunize you, against conflict, with your spouse, and conflict with your colleagues.

So now you're confused, because, well, home is not a safe place for you now, nor is work. Let's face it, it's only natural, that you're tempted, to become downhearted, and pessimistic.

[9 : 20] Let us also go, that we may die with him. The clear counsel of the word of God, to you today, is that you need to listen, very carefully to his word, and then patiently, and lovingly trust, in your heavenly father.

Everything he does, is in order that you may believe, that you may learn, to more heavily rest, in his grace, and more deeply depend, on his strength.

God's word teaches you, that you are not, on a mission of death, but on a mission of life. And that the Jesus, who is working in you, by his spirit, is doing something, which, though at present, you do not understand, will result, in new life, new faith, and new growth in you.

Hindsight is, is a wonderful thing, but look back, at previous times, in your life, where you were confused, about what God was doing. But eventually, in these situations, God worked out, that situation, for your good, and for his glory.

He gave you new life, new faith, and new growth, even when you did not, understand what he was doing. That's what he's doing, with you right now.

[10 : 52] So rest in his gospel, and trust, that your father, knows best. A dramatic confusion. Second, a dramatic challenge.

A dramatic challenge. challenge. For all the other things, Thomas did in his life, he is best known as, he is best known, not as Didemus, the twin, but as Doubting Thomas.

In John 20, verse 24, and following the verses, we read together, we read the account, of his doubt. But we pick up the story, from verse 19.

It was the evening, of the first day of the week, that Sunday, and the risen Jesus, had appeared to his disciples. He had showed them, his hands on his side.

They were overjoyed, to receive his peace, and to see him in person. But Thomas, had not been with them, on that particular occasion. After, when the other disciples, told him, that they had seen, the risen Jesus, Thomas was slow to believe.

[12 : 05] He said, unless I see the nail marks, in his hands, and I put my finger, where the nails were, and put my hand, into his side, I will not believe.

Perhaps we can spare Thomas, our ridicule for a moment, for if we had been, in the same situation as he, would we have said, or done any different? Thomas had not been there, at the cross.

But he did not need to be. Thomas was familiar enough, with what happened, during the process, of crucifixion, and with what the end result, of crucifixion was.

He didn't need to be persuaded, that Jesus was dead. And nor would we have been, had we been in his situation. It was not the death of Jesus, Thomas was doubtful of, but his resurrection.

Again I say, put yourself into Thomas' shoes, and you probably wouldn't have reacted, altogether differently. Add to this, Thomas' dramatic pessimism, and you end up, with a toxic mix, of doubt and sadness.

[13 : 16] Thomas. Well, if in the previous point, we saw Thomas, demonstrating, a public confusion, then surely we see him here, issuing a dramatic challenge.

Unless I see, the nail marks, in his hands, and put my fingers, where the nails were, and put my hands, into his side, I will not believe. Now if you like, we can deconstruct, Thomas' doubt.

We can point, to how he had neither, listened sufficiently, nor believed enough, in Jesus' own prediction, of his resurrection, from the dead. We could also point, to the testimony, of the other disciples, and ask, why did Thomas not believe, on the basis, of what they had said?

Or perhaps, even more basic, we could point, to his lack of understanding, of the glory, and the power, and the love of Jesus, we could, beat him mercilessly, but remembering, that his name, means the twin, and we are his twin, we'd only be, beating ourselves up also.

As though Jesus, didn't have enough, to deal with. Judas had betrayed him, Peter had denied him, and now Thomas doubts him. But with what patience, and grace, Jesus treats Thomas.

[14 : 44] For we read, that a week later, Jesus appears, again to his disciples, and this time, Thomas is with them. Then and there, Jesus says to Thomas, Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand, and put it into my side, stop doubting, and believe.

Jesus meets Thomas' challenge, and more beside. His presence, answers doubt, and introduces, the possibility, of faith, and worship.

Where is God, when it hurts? If only God, would show himself to us, when times were tough, then surely, we'd believe.

I'm sure all of you, have said that, one point or another. In your heart, or in your mind, you've been where Thomas was. You're going through, difficult times, and your mind is, filled with doubts, as to whether God knows, whether God cares, whether God is in control.

And you say something, to the effect of, well, if only God, would show himself, to me in some way, give me some token, that he loves me, and that he's with me, then all my doubts, would disappear, and I'd believe in him more.

[16 : 19] The Old Testament, Judge Gideon, did it with a fleece. Are we any different? When I was a student, in Aberdeen, I was very privileged, to know an old Christian man, called Sam Will.

Some of you knew him as well. Sam was a Dundee man, and I clearly remember him, telling me a story, from his boyhood. So this is stretching back, into the early 1920s, nearly a hundred years ago.

It concerned a very old Christian lady, he had known, when he was a boy, who had never been outside, the city of Dundee. In fact, never outside the district, of Hawk Hill, in Dundee, where Sam was from.

A very, very old lady, she had become ill, and she had to go to Edinburgh, for treatment. To get to Edinburgh, she had to get the train, from Dundee.

But she was terrified, because she had never been, on a train, and she had never been, outside the city of Dundee. Her son put her, on the train in Dundee, but she spent, the whole journey, worrying.

[17 : 30] Because she didn't know, anyone in Edinburgh, and she had never been, in Edinburgh. She was worrying. She was filled, with doubts. But then, as that train, drew into Waverly Station, in Edinburgh, there was a man, standing on the platform, who she knew from home.

He was waiting, to pick her up, from the train, and to take her, directly to the hospital. I clearly remember, Sam's description, of her reaction.

Sam wore a monocle, and whenever Sam, would get caught up, by his emotion, his monocle, would pop out, and his eyes, would start misting over. Remember, Sam's talking about things, that happened nearly, a hundred years ago, now.

And Sam said to me, she got off that train, she saw that man, waiting for her. And she raised her eyes, upward, and she said, my bonnie Jesus, I'll never do it again.

My bonnie Jesus, I'll never do it again. We could answer, Thomas's challenge, by saying, that he should have believed, without having to see, that all the evidence, was contained, in the promises of Jesus, and the testimony, of his disciples.

[18 : 59] We could answer, our own doubts, by turning back, to scripture, and believing afresh, the promises of Jesus, and in the word, of his spirit inspired, disciples. But at the end of the day, let me tell you, from more than 30 years, of Christian experience, on my part, I find myself often, where that, dear old Christian lady, from Dundee was, when she got off that train, at Waverly station, in Edinburgh.

Having worried, about a situation, in my life, and doubted, God's ability, to supply, all my needs, there's been a man, waiting for me.

And I've said, in my own words, my bonnie Jesus, I'll never do it again. Well at least, until the next time. Are there any of you, here today, who are backsliding, because you are, privately indulging, a sinful course of thought, or a sinful behavioral pattern?

To the rest of us, you have it all together. You're well adjusted, you're respectable, you're doing fine. But in private, it's not like that at all. You're a public monument to grace, but a private mess of gloom.

There's a promise here for you to claim. Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts, but loved him enough to meet with him face to face, and deal with him.

[20 : 33] Jesus knows all about your private backsliding. He knows all about your private sin. But he loves you enough, to meet you, and deal with it, face to face.

The promise is here in black and white, that if you should come to him afresh, yes, even with your sin and your guilt, he'll deal with you, and with it. He'll lovingly wash you clean.

You worry he won't? He came through for Thomas, and he will for you too. Now come, in the privacy of your own heart, and return to him.

A dramatic challenge. And then lastly, and briefly, a dramatic confession, a dramatic confession. Isn't it amazing how Jesus uses Thomas' doubt as the backdrop for the most powerful confession in all history?

Thomas didn't need any more convincing than the words and the presence of Jesus himself. He didn't need to see the nail marks in Jesus' hand, put his finger where the nails were, or put his hand in Jesus' side.

[21 : 47] He saw, he listened, he believed, and he spoke. And what words these were, a greater speech has never been uttered by the mouth of a man.

My Lord and my God. Over the centuries, Christians have drawn that understanding of who Jesus really is from the words of Thomas here. It would have been unthinkable for a righteous Jew to have called anyone but the almighty God of Israel, the God of creation, the God of Exodus, God and Lord.

After all, Thomas, like all the other disciples, had been brought up to learn the Jewish Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one.

Thomas, by calling Jesus, my Lord and my God, is getting right to the heart of the Shema. Jesus Christ, the risen Messiah, he is Lord and God.

And we could spend hours and days and weeks, and I'm looking forward to doing so, on what this statement tells us about the love and the glory and the power of Christ.

[22 : 59] We could go back to the stable in Bethlehem, to the shepherds as obeying the instructions of the angels they saw and worshipped Israel's Lord and God as he lay in the manger. We could go to the Calvary where Israel crucified its Lord and God.

We could stretch back into the unknowable ages of eternity when before the sun began to shine and the river began to flow, the Lord our God was enjoying infinite pleasure in the fellowship of the Trinity.

We could and we should for the more we dig into the gospel glory of Jesus who gave himself for us, the more wonderful the gospel becomes. But what I want us to notice, even more than the starkness of Thomas' confession, is its double use of the word my, my Lord, my God.

For all that Thomas thought of Jesus as Lord and God, the beauty of his confession is right here in double form, my Lord, my God. Thomas is saying to the world, he may not be your Lord, he may not be your God, but he's mine.

Never do any of the disciples, it seems to me, rise to the height of this personal confession. Paul comes close in Galatians 2.20 when he says, the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me, but even Paul doesn't quite scale the heights of Thomas' confession.

[24 : 28] Jesus, my Lord, my God. Now we could apply this in a thousand ways, not the least being that instead of treating Jesus like our servant and him doing what we want him to, we need to understand that he is our Lord and our God.

He has every right to our love, obedience, faith, and trust. He has every right to our lives, our resources, our dreams, because he is the Lord, our King. Likewise, we could say that in the good times and in the bad, Jesus is our Lord and God, that we are his.

That he loves us and that from the throne of his grace, he prays for us and he will give us all we need and more to live as his servants and friends. But with this, I close.

As a young man, the American pastor, Jonathan Edwards, in the 18th century, wrote 70 resolutions which governed his life and character throughout the rest of his life.

God used Jonathan Edwards powerfully in the revivals in New England and recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of Jonathan Edwards. Now, of all his resolutions, I find number 63 the most challenging.

[25 : 50] You can find this online. Let me read it to you. Jonathan Edwards, as a very young man in his very early 20s, wrote this resolution. On the assumption that there never was to be but one individual in the world at any one time who was properly a complete Christian, I resolved to act as I would do if I strove with all my might to be that one Christian who might live in my time.

Are there any weak in the faith among us, fearful that you will not stand in time of trial or maintain your confession of faith when opposed by your family and your friends and your workmates?

Are there any doubting Thomases among us, resting on the grace which Jesus offers us in the gospel and believing in the promises of his presence with us and his power for us?

Let me challenge you this morning to make Jonathan Edwards' 63rd resolution your own. That on the assumption that there is only one Christian in the whole world right now, I resolve to be that one Christian in my time.

Amen. I resolve to be that one Christian in my time. In so doing, you honour the memory and imitate the faithful confession of Thomas.

[27 : 36] Thomas was a twin, our twin. His life was full of drama, dramatic confusion, dramatic challenge, dramatic confession. Walk in his shoes, let him speak into your ear the wisdom of one whose doubt was overcome, by the love and presence of Jesus.

He says to us this morning, I once doubted, but I doubt no more. Now I believe. My bonny Jesus, I'll ne'er doot you again.

Amen.