

Thaddeus

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[0 : 00] Please turn again with me this morning to John chapter 14 and verse 22. John chapter 14 and verse 22, where we read, Then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to the world, to us rather, and not to the world?

To achieve the degree of PhD confers upon you the title Doctor. It allows you to put the name Doctor before your name on bank cards, driving license, and everything else.

It fools people into believing that you are intelligent and perhaps somewhat important. The truth is, as I have recently said, to have a PhD means that you know only rather a lot about rather a little.

If you go to the university library and sift through tens of thousands of theses written by PhD students, you're going to find that their areas of interest were tiny, and most often of little relevance to the world as it is today.

What about this subject for a PhD? Do woodpeckers get sore heads? Or this one. Do humans swim faster in water or in syrup?

[1 : 22] Yes, I suppose it takes all sorts, even people rather like us. No doubt someone somewhere has completed a PhD in the subject of Thaddeus, the disciple.

It would not, however, have been particularly a long thesis, nor would it have been established on many known facts at all. Because the truth is that we have very little we know about Thaddeus, other than sometimes he is called Labaius and sometimes Judas of James.

The thing is, I'm fairly certain that Thaddeus wouldn't thank us for drawing overmuch attention to himself and spending tens of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money on PhD studies about him.

Rather, he lived as we do surely, to draw attention away from himself and toward Jesus Christ, so that those who study our lives closely will see Jesus in us, through us, and from us.

He of all people shouted the loudest Amen when John the Baptist said of Jesus, He must increase, I must decrease. Never mind having doctor in front of your name, Thaddeus would tell us.

[2 : 46] Just make sure that your name is written in the book of life. Now, it seems to me that from the Gospels, we can learn two lessons from the life of Thaddeus.

First, playing your part is more important than making your mark. And secondly, living with questions is more important than dying of doubt.

Listen carefully to this study on this minor disciple. The Lord himself will test you on it throughout your lifetime. And for all that a PhD is hard work, you will be rewarded with something far better.

First of all then, playing your part is more important than making your mark. Playing your part is more important than making your mark.

To make your mark is, according to the dictionary, to do something that will be remembered, or that makes one famous or successful, to do something that is very important or meaningful.

[3 : 53] Google the words, make your mark, and you'll get millions of hits. Basically because, as human beings, we all aim to do something that will be remembered, or that will make us famous.

We want heads to turn when we walk into a room. We want to be the hero of the epic tale. And after we've gone, we want people to talk about us for thousands of years with admiration in their hearts.

From an early age, we're all taught make your mark. Be a cut above everyone else. We only need to scratch the surface of famous Scots who have made their mark.

Robert Burns, Alexander Fleming, James Clark Maxwell, and so on. Perhaps you want your legacy to be somewhat different.

Yes, you do want to be remembered, but really and truly, you want to make your mark for Jesus Christ. You want to do great things for him and his kingdom. Great things like Hudson Taylor did, and St. Augustine did, and Martin Luther did.

[5 : 03] Is that not a praiseworthy ambition? To be famous not so much for who you are, but for what you've done for Jesus? Well, I guess that by this reckoning, Thaddeus would be close to the bottom of the pile of the disciples.

The disciple Peter, well, he made his mark on the world. He wrote Bible books. He preached life-changing sermons. He led the early church. But Thaddeus wrote no Bible books.

Thaddeus didn't, as far as we can tell, preach to thousands, or even play a prominent role in the early church. The disciple John, I mean, he made his mark upon the world.

He was Jesus' closest friend. He did mighty miracles in the name of Jesus, and to him were given apocalyptic visions of heaven and the future. But Thaddeus wasn't Jesus' closest friend.

He did no miracles in Jesus' name, as far as we can tell, and received no supernatural visions of glory. Now, I'd always thought it was important to make your mark, but now I'm not so sure.

[6 : 16] I'm not even sure that making your mark for Jesus is any more noble or holy an ambition. Far more important than making your mark for the kingdom of God is playing your part in the kingdom of God.

It's not the most important thing that at the end of days we hear the voice of our master Jesus saying to us, well done, good and faithful servant, rather than the voice of the world or even the voice of the church saying about us, well done, famous celebrity or celebrity Christian.

Listen to that again. Is it not the most important thing that at the end of days we hear the voice of our master Jesus saying to us, well done, faithful servant, rather than the voice of the world or even the church saying about us, well done, famous celebrity.

Far more important than making your mark for the kingdom of God is playing your part in the kingdom of God. Many years ago now, the Scottish writer Jock Purvis wrote a biographical account of his missionary work on the Afghan Indian frontier in the early 1930s.

His concern in writing was not to draw attention to himself, not to make a name for himself, but to draw attention to the hundreds of Christians and Christian missionaries who over the years have lost their lives for the sake of Jesus and his gospel in that turbulent and hostile region.

[8 : 00] Purvis fittingly called his book *The Unlisted Legion*, the *Unlisted Legion*. We don't know their names, but they all played their part in the growth of the kingdom of God in that troubled region of God's world.

None of them made a mark, but they all played their part. Thaddeus is mentioned as being a disciple of Christ in all four gospel accounts, but that's as far as it goes.

He was a member of the band of 12 who Jesus sent out to preach the gospel. He was a companion of Jesus for three years, and after the resurrection, he was present with the other disciples when the risen Christ appeared to them.

But other than that, he left no mark upon the world. Whenever you ask someone the question, who would you most like to meet when you get to heaven? Nobody ever answers, well, of course, Thaddeus.

Far from being an A-list celebrity in the church, Thaddeus is somewhere down around S or T. But for all that Thaddeus failed to make his mark for the kingdom of God, he played his part in the kingdom of God.

[9 : 22] And that, it seems to me, is the more important ambition. Not that he is remembered for his fame, but for his faithfulness.

Not for his distinction, but for his discipleship. Not for his prominence, but for his perseverance. Faithfulness, discipleship, perseverance.

How we need these virtues in even greater measure in these complicated days. We've been told that we need a new generation of leaders. I would argue that while that may be the truth, it's not the whole truth.

What we really need are a new generation of Christians who are willing to be just like Thaddeus, refusing fame in favor of faithfulness, denying distinction in favor of discipleship, and rejecting prominence in favor of perseverance.

How is it with you today? Perhaps you want to reach across the bandwidth and slap me in the face. How dare you tell me that my greatest ambition as a Christian is merely to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 44] How dare you warn me away from making my mark and guide me only to playing my part. Are you not insinuating that we should pursue a path of boring mediocrity in life and achieve nothing of real significance?

You know, in a previous life, the Apostle Paul might have agreed with you. But when he was overtaken by the grace and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, everything changed.

So much more that now he could say, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

What needs to change about us isn't our desire to excel, but that in which we desire to excel. Brother and sister in Christ, excel at knowing Christ and serving Christ.

Excel at playing your part in the kingdom of God. Excel at being a member of the unlisted legion who do not so much make their mark for the kingdom of God as they play their part in the kingdom of God.

[12 : 00] I want to address anyone here today who's a Christian but is backsliding because you're struggling with doubt.

You're backsliding because you thought that as a Christian, you would get a real sense of significance from doing things for Jesus. That your self-worth would grow as a function of the ways in which you made your mark for him.

But it's really not been like that for you at all. Rather than striding forward into excellence in the faith, it seems to you that you've been plodding along in mediocrity.

You look at other Christians and they seem to be doing such wonderful things for Jesus. But all you've been doing is keeping your head above water while at the same time rather like a swan paddling madly underneath with all kinds of pressures.

and doubts. You've become disillusioned because you think you've been sold a lemon by becoming a Christian. You thought you'd find significance in what you do as a Christian but you aren't.

[13 : 14] And so the entire foundation of your faith has begun to crumble. Now in one sense, if you became a Christian because you thought you'd grow in your self-worth on account of all the good things that you do for Jesus, you are always going to struggle.

Always. Because our self-worth as Christians isn't based upon the good things we do for Jesus. But the thing Jesus has done for us it's his gospel not our good works which save us give us significance in the Christian life.

But in another sense, Thaddeus, not Peter, not John should be your inspiration. You will find your significance in playing your part in the kingdom of God not in making your mark for the kingdom of God.

Be a member of God's most powerful army the unlisted legion whose works are not known to the world but known only to God and whose battle cries the word of Jesus well done faithful servant.

You know it's a rather wonderful thing and something for which to be deeply thankful that God does not strengthen us to be exultant winners but to be faithful and persevering disciples.

[14 : 43] We may do nothing which in the eyes of the world or in the eyes of many of the church is particularly significant but in God's eyes faithfulness discipleship and perseverance is significant.

faith not fame is significance playing your part in the kingdom of God is more important than making your mark for the kingdom of God.

Believe it it's true so Thaddeus discovered for himself. second thing we want to notice about Thaddeus is that living with questions is more important than dying of doubt.

Living with questions is more important than dying of doubt. We don't really know very much about Thaddeus at all certainly not enough to fill a PhD thesis but we do know that sometimes he was called Judas.

Perhaps he didn't like that name over much because it carried associations with Judas Iscariot but it's as Judas that he asks his question of Jesus in John 14 22 but Lord why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

[16 : 10] What is Thaddeus sometimes called Judas famous for? Asking questions because he does not understand.

He's not the kind of man who has answers as much as he has questions. You know it's amazing how many of us have questions which we don't dare ask.

We think we'll look bad in the eyes of others if we come across as uncertain and not fully confident we think that no one else asks these kind of questions and that somehow if Jesus knew we were asking them he'd be very disappointed with us and perhaps even angry.

And so rather than pursuing answers and growing in our faith we let the doubt gnaw away at our spiritual life until finally we die. Thaddeus' example teaches us not only that playing our part is more important than making our mark but also that living with questions is more important than dying of doubt.

I don't really want to get into the nuts and bolts of exactly what Thaddeus was asking that's not the purpose of today's study but what I do want to do is to use the very fact that he asked Jesus a question to teach us that living with questions is better than dying of doubt.

[17 : 35] Now perhaps there are some of us thinking that the only one who's ever got questions to ask God is ourselves.

We're asking God about our own faith and particularly what God is doing in our lives. We look around and we think that every other Christian has all the answers and they have got much stronger faith than we do.

I've got questions you say to yourself therefore I must be a weak Christian. Well in John 14 Jesus is asked three questions by his disciples the first by Thomas second by Philip the third by Thaddeus three disciples three questions each of these disciples was utterly as puzzled as the others but they took the opportunity to ask Jesus their questions.

I can't tell you whether they understood any more having received an answer than they did before but what I can tell you is that Thaddeus wasn't the only disciple of Jesus with questions.

You need to know this. You really do. You aren't the only Christian with questions for Jesus. In fact I have yet to meet a genuine Christian who has no questions for Jesus.

[19 : 00] The second thing I want you to notice about this is that as well as the different disciples having questions for Jesus they were different questions. Notice again with me Thomas asks one question, Philip another and Thaddeus yet another.

They're not the same question they're different questions. Some of the questions that we might have for Jesus are very general but some of them are very specific to ourselves.

They may be about something extremely personal to us, our own life situations, our own mental health, our own relationships or they may be more theological questions which are shall we say a bit off the beaten track.

We all have our questions but likewise we all have different questions. The third thing I want you to notice about all these questions in John 14 is that with the benefit of hindsight, of looking back, the disciples should have known the answer to them all.

It became clear to them after the event what Jesus had been talking about. After Pentecost Thaddeus understood exactly what Jesus meant by appearing to his disciples but not to the world.

[20 : 20] Perhaps after 20 years of experience of being Christians we might wonder why we ask the questions we first did when we became Christians. But then our vision is always 20-20 in hindsight and the truth is that just like normal children pester their parents with questions so we as children must ask Jesus question after question after question.

In fact asking questions is a normal activity for a child. Therefore it is also perfectly normal for us as Christians. questions. The fourth thing I want you to notice about these questions is that they do not represent weak faith.

They do not represent weak faith. That's what we think they do. That because we're asking questions our faith must be weak. Clearly we think Thaddeus must have been weaker than Peter because it's Thaddeus who was asking Jesus questions not Peter.

we mistakenly think that only weak Christians ask questions. We forget that the Psalms are filled with questions. We also forget that all these three disciples who asked questions in John 14 persevered in their faith.

Thomas, Philip and Thaddeus were all present in the upper room in Acts 1 when the Holy Spirit came. So asking questions however basic is no reflection on the level of faith we possess.

[21 : 55] And then the last thing I want you to notice about Thaddeus' question and those of the other two here in John 14 is that Jesus does not rebuke them for asking them. He is not disappointed nor is he angry with his disciples for asking him the questions they did.

Jesus doesn't sigh and say to them, I can't believe that you're asking me such a stupid basic question. Don't you know anything? No, Jesus didn't become angry.

He calmly takes their questions seriously and he answers them with dignity. Jesus welcomes the opportunity the question gives him to explain more about who he is and why he has come.

Tell me, do you have any evidence that Jesus is angry with the questions that you have for him? Not at all. All the evidence points the other way.

So what are your questions? Well, perhaps they're about situations you're facing in life right now and why God is allowing them to happen. perhaps they are more basic. Perhaps they're as basic as, is God real?

[23 : 18] Or, how do I know that God loves me? You are not the only Christian asking questions. It's entirely normal to ask them.

It is no sign of a weak faith. And more than anything else, let me suggest to you, based upon Thaddeus, that living with questions is far more important than dying of doubt.

There are many Christians who have died of doubt, but to live as a faithful Christian is to live with questions, many of which will remain unanswered until we get to heaven.

Live with them. And yes, even be content that you won't know the answer, but live with them and keep on asking, nonetheless. Thaddeus didn't have a PhD.

To my knowledge, no one has or ever should have written a PhD thesis about Thaddeus. He did nothing of great significance for Jesus other than ask him a question which he should already have known the answer to.

[24 : 30] But hold on. Perhaps the most significant thing Thaddeus did, and certainly the most significant thing any of us can ever do, is to put our faith and our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and follow him as his disciple.

Who cares for academic qualifications compared to the greatest title of all, sinner saved by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Amen.