

Why Jesus Died for a "Doubter"

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[0 : 00] This morning we will be in the Gospel of John. John Stott, the English evangelical theologian, believed that the most important question that man could ever ask is, why did Jesus Christ die?

This morning I would like to answer that question, but I want to do so through the eyes of one who knew Jesus, one who walked with Jesus, one who loved Jesus.

I'd like to answer this question through the eyes of an apostle, the one known as Thomas Didymus. He's also known in Scripture as Thomas the Twin. Perhaps you best know him as Doubting Thomas.

In answering this question, why did Jesus die, we really need to begin in John chapter 10, verses 24 and 33.

[1 : 12] Allow me to read it to you. So the Jews, being the Jewish leaders, gathered around him, being Jesus, and said to him, how long will you keep us in suspense?

If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not a part of my flock.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?

[2 : 25] The Jews answered him, it is not for good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you being a man make yourself God.

Jesus replied, responded in verse 37, If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.

The people who are speaking with Jesus in this text are no strangers to him. In fact, when Jesus began his ministry three years ago, the Bible records that many Jewish, the Jewish leaders, religious leaders of the day, came to hear, listen, and see Jesus.

Many of them, even going back to Mark chapter 2, we see them appearing, we see them in John chapter 3, having conversations with Jesus.

And the fact of the matter is, they had seen Jesus make a lame man walk. Paralyzed were healed. The blind saw, the deaf heard.

[3 : 45] Leprosy, which was a horrible disease, cured by the words of his mouth. He had fed 5,000 people on many different occasions.

They had even seen Jesus drive out demons from possessed men. Yet, they made a choice.

And that choice was to not believe. Verse 39 says, And again, they sought to arrest Jesus, but he escaped from their hands.

At this moment in time in Scripture, Jesus then disappears to the wilderness. It was there in the wilderness that Jesus remained. He continued to teach.

He continued to baptize. He continued to have a wonderful time of ministry. Then he got this notice. And it was from his very good friends, Mary and Martha, that his friend Lazarus was about to die.

[4 : 58] This was six days before the Passover, or what we call Thursday before Good Friday. You may remember Mary as the woman who poured out expensive perfume at Jesus' feet and wiped away his feet with her hair and her tears.

Their brother Lazarus was ill and was now dying. And they requested that Jesus returned to the town of Bethany, which is outside of Jerusalem, to heal him.

If you look at your Bibles in John chapter 11, beginning at verse 7, it simply states, Then, after this, he said to his disciples, Let's go to Judea again.

Now this is where the Pharisees were, those that wanted to stone him. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?

Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, that you may believe and let us go to him.

[6 : 12] And then we learn this insight of the apostle that I want to focus on this morning. Take a look at verse 16.

This is the response to Jesus as he informs them that he's going to go to Bethany to heal Lazarus. So Thomas, called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus. We know Thomas only through three mentions of his name in the other gospels. But in this verse, we learn something about Thomas' character and his personality.

The fact of the matter is, although history calls Thomas, Thomas, doubting Thomas, Thomas is no doubter. Thomas is what we would commonly call a pessimist.

A pessimist. You see, at this stage of Jesus' ministry, he's in the wilderness. People believe. People are being baptized. They are not being harassed by the religious rulers.

[7 : 34] There's safety. There's fellowship. There is a joyous time. So the question that the disciples are essentially asking Jesus, Why rock the boat?

These people here want you. They're here. They want to be with you. There's no negativity. There's nothing bad going on. Yet you want to go back into the lion's den where the religious rulers are trying to heal you.

Kill you, sorry. Yet Jesus made a decision to go raise Lazarus from the dead. Thomas, knowing full well that the Jewish leaders were planning to kill Jesus, he makes this amazing statement.

He simply says, Let us also go that we may die with him. Thomas is not simply just a pessimist.

I believe that Thomas is what we would call a heroic pessimist. Thomas knows what's at the end of that line.

[8 : 58] It's death. Yet he is willing to go with Jesus. Thomas is convinced that Jesus is heading for certain death by stoning at the hands of the Jews.

Yet as the Lord indicated his determination to go, Thomas was going to find the courage to follow Jesus unto death himself.

Thomas is what does the optimist say? The optimist would say, Let's go. Everything is going to be all right. Let's go. Thomas simply says, We are going to die.

We are all going to die. The reality is, It is easy for an optimist to be loyal, but a pessimist, that is another thing altogether.

You see, we find something remarkable in Thomas in this moment. We find a man who is devoted to Jesus Christ, a man who did not want to live without Jesus, and a man who decided in his heart, if Jesus was going to die, he was going to die with him.

[10 : 19] We know what happened next. Jesus went to Bethany. He raised Lazarus from the dead. People reported this to the Jewish rulers.

And then as we see in 11:53, or John 11:53, the Pharisees and the ruling council made a decision. And that decision was, Jesus needed to die.

So Jesus returns, and there's this incredible celebration, which we commonly call Palm Sunday.

The people rejoiced. They wanted to make Jesus king.

The physical king. But that wasn't God's plan for his son. His son was to rule a universe, not a simple tiny nation.

So now we find ourselves at this last supper. This is the other words that we hear from this man called Thomas. In time for the feast of the Passover, Jesus and his disciples make their way to what we commonly call the upper room.

[11 : 28] It was somewhat of a different night for the apostles. To begin with, there was no servants in the room. So Jesus, their master, covered himself with a towel and humbly washed all their feet.

You see, it wasn't something that any of them thought to do, but it was the son of God. And then what Jesus did was remarkable on that night.

He actually gave them instructions on how to carry on after he was gone. Now what's remarkable about what Jesus taught in remembering him, he does not tell them to remember his life. He does not tell them or instruct them to remember his works or to remember his deeds or his words.

He does not tell them to remember his birth, but he instructs them to remember his death.

[12:41] The Gospel of Matthew 26, 26 states, Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat, this is my body.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

It was his death that he wished above all else to be remembered by. What could he be meaning? Thomas was there that night. He heard the words of Jesus. This Jesus, his brother, his rabbi, his teacher, his master, this Galilean peasant, this carpenter by trade and teacher by vocation.

What could he mean by calling us to remember his death? We read in John 14, verse 5, Thomas speaks again.

[14:04] Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Again, we see Thomas' pessimism.

Pessimism. What is he essentially saying is, you're leaving. How are we going to know where to go?

We don't even know how to get there. How are we supposed to get there? It is a better plan for us to die with you because at least we would not die apart.

If we all died together, we would all be together. But if you go, how can we find you?

We don't even know how to get there. The only person who would say such words that Thomas said, Lord, we do not know where you are going.

[15:07] How can we know the way? Is a man who has a deep love for Jesus. Again, we see in his words a deep desire to be with Jesus.

And the idea of being apart from Jesus is something that creates a negative response in him. The fact of the matter is, many who think about this verse and comment believe that his heart was broken, that Jesus was leaving them.

The thought of being without Jesus is too much to bear. And Jesus simply responds in this well-known verse which he speaks to Thomas, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. As we all know, we understand the Gospels.

The disciples still did not understand what was going on this day. They were mighty in their faith. If you remember, Peter had stated he would never ever forsake Jesus.

[16:33] And as we will soon see in the Garden of Gethsemane, they all fell asleep as Jesus prayed to his Father. But here we have on this last moment of this last supper that Jesus had to go away in order that a place would be prepared for them in heaven.

That Jesus had to go to this cross. You see, Jesus promised to them a new covenant, a new pact, as it were, a contract with man and God, if you will, which would be sealed in blood, the blood of God, the Son.

Jesus then takes his disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane where prayers are prayed, disciples sleep, and Jesus is eventually arrested. And Thomas and the rest of the disciples who said that they were willing to die with Jesus scattered and are nowhere to be seen.

we all know what happens after this. Jesus is taken. He's brought before these sham trials.

Jesus was charged. Witnesses were brought forth. He was cross-examined and the judge then reached a verdict.

[18:17] and pronounced that Jesus was not guilty of the charges laid against him. However, in order to please the crowd, a man named Pilate, the ruling authority washes his hands of this man and sends him before the people.

One author describes, the flogging administered by Pilate was merely the beginning of a long series of physical and emotional tortures that would finally culminate in the death of Jesus.

It was accompanied by cruel mockery which the pagan Roman soldiers apparently administered purely for their own amusement.

Matthew describes the scene. then Pilate released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus delivered him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole battalion before him and they stripped and put a scarlet robe on him and twisting together a crown of thorns they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand and kneeling before him they mocked him saying hail king of the Jews.

[19 : 48] They spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. Despite the fact that these soldiers had no reason whatsoever to heap such scorn on Jesus one author describes it they evidently took great delight in doing so.

They were men hardened by having witnessed numerous executions. So the pain of such torture no longer made any impact whatsoever on them as far as they were concerned Jesus was merely another religious fanatic with whom they were free to amuse themselves as cruelly as they pleased. It seemed as if the whole world was against Jesus. Jews and Gentiles alike were now willfully even gleefully participating in his murder determined to see him die in the most agonizing way possible. we know from there that they took this bruised battered bleeding body of Jesus and put a cross on his shoulder and asked him to carry it up to the place called Golgotha.

Physically he was no longer able to do it. The gospels record that a man named Simeon or Simon was watching from the crowd and they pushed him out to help Jesus lift this cross where Jesus could no longer do it.

[21 : 25] From there his hands and feet were nailed to a cross and he was hung there to die. Why the cross?

Why the cross? If you look around today we see many symbols of the cross. it symbolizes something to our Christian faith.

But did you know that the cross was not the earliest symbol used? Christians used the sign of the fish or a dove or a throne. They actually chose to use anything but the cross.

You see the cross was to be avoided for fear of persecution. It meant direct association with Christ and in that world it meant death.

It was also perhaps the most shameful of associations because it was associated with the death of common criminals. You see what's amazing about the cross it does not point to his birth, does not point to his youth, it does not point to his works, it does not point to his teachings, it does not point to his resurrection, it doesn't even point to his reign, it points to his death.

[22 : 57] It is believed that crucifixion was actually invented by the Persians and then perfected by the Romans. The purpose of this cruelest form of life, of death, is that was designed to deliberately delay death so the maximum amount of pain could be inflicted on the victim.

As they nailed his feet in, he would have to hold himself, push himself against the nail in order to even get air. So eventually he would die of not being able to breathe.

He literally suffocates on the cross. To the Romans, this punishment was deemed so cruel that it was reserved for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion, and armed robbery, and only if they were a slave, a foreigner, or considered a non-person.

on that third hour, Jesus Christ died as a non-person.

And at that moment became sin for us. Scripture tells us that on the sixth hour, darkness came upon the land, almost as if the sins of mankind blotted out the sunshine of his father's faith, there was stillness in the land.

[24 : 35] As Christ laid upon that cross in total agony, as God, his own father, poured out the sins of all of mankind onto his perfect son.

At the ninth hour, the Bible records three different statements that Jesus made. The first statement was, I am thirsty.

As if he had suffered all that he could physically endure. The second statement that Scripture records is he said, it is finished.

In the Greek language, it is simply one word, and it simply means it has been and will forever remain finished.

And the third statement that Jesus makes on that faithful day is, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

[25 : 48] death. The Roman centurion witnessing Christ's death as the earth shook simply stated, certainly this must have been the Son of God.

One commentator writes, Christ's death. Christ died only a bodily death. It would have been ineffectual unless his soul shared in the punishment.

He would have been the redeemer of bodies only. He paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering. In his soul, the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.

At that very moment, the curtain in the temple, for which for centuries had symbolized the alienation of sinners from God is now torn in two, from top to bottom, in order to demonstrate that the sin barrier had been thrown down by God.

And the way into God's presence had now been opened by Jesus Christ. So whose sin was it that put Jesus on the cross?

[27 : 17] Was it the greed of Judas who betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver? Was it the envy of the religious rulers of the day?

Was it the cowardice of Pilate that placed Jesus on the cross? was that the sin that put Jesus there?

You see, my friends, Jesus was placed on the cross for our greed. Jesus was placed on the cross for our envy.

Jesus was placed on the cross for our cowardice. Jesus' body was removed at his death.

It was placed in a tomb and it remained enclosed with a giant stone. Easter Sunday.

[28 : 25] Mark describes the resurrection in this way. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices so that they might go and anoint him.

And very early on the first day of the week when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb and they were saying to one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?

And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was very large and entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.

And he said to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where he used to lay him.

But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. there you will see him just as he told you.

[29 : 34] What's interesting is that when we read the recording of Scripture, when it says that the disciples were there, there was one disciple missing.

Thomas. John 20, 24 says, now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. Why wasn't Thomas there? Perhaps because he was so negative, so pessimistic, that he was absolutely destroyed and probably off in his own misery.

Perhaps Thomas felt like a failure, for in fact he did not die the death that Jesus died, which he said he was going to die with him.

He may have been thinking this whole time that he would never ever find a way to get to Jesus. I don't know.

[30 : 55] Scripture doesn't record, but we can guess he probably felt alone, betrayed, rejected, forsaken. The one he loved so deeply was gone and it tore his heart out.

and he was in no mood to be with the others. Although we call him doubting Thomas, it's not true of him only.

In Mark 16, 10, 11, it tells us that the other disciples did not believe when they first heard that Jesus was resurrected.

You see, I don't believe that Thomas' doubt was any greater than the other disciples. What I believe is his sorrow was greater than the other disciples.

When he made the statement, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails and place my hands into his side, I will never believe.

[32 : 14] What an incredible statement that he made. It's because he just didn't want to love again, to care again, to be that invested, involved again.

Verse 26, we read of John 20, eight days later, his disciples were inside again and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, and here again, as he did in John 14, in the last supper, he's specifically speaking to Thomas, he now directs his attention to Thomas once again.

Put your finger here. See my hands. Put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. I want you to notice something here. I want you to notice how amazingly gentle Jesus is with him.

[33 : 39] We believe that his doubt is because of his grief, his broken heartedness, uncertainty, and the pain of loneliness. The fact of the matter is no one could feel the way Thomas felt unless he loved Jesus the way Thomas loved him.

You see, this is the most amazing thing about Jesus. Jesus understands our weaknesses. Jesus understands our frailties.

Jesus understands our doubts and sympathizes with our uncertainty. humanity. The fact of the matter is Jesus is patient with our pessimism and even our depression.

And because of the cross and because of Jesus' understanding of us, Jesus still transforms us. Jesus on this day is still desiring to transform you with all your doubts, all your depression, all your sadness and sorrow that might exist.

[35 : 02] And if you are willing to exclaim, my Lord and my God, then God will save you.

see, there's two things we take away from this story on this Easter Sunday. The first is what is the meaning of the cross?

You see, the cross took away our sins just as it did Thomas' sin. John Stodd in his book, The Cross of Christ, he simply says that the cross reinforces three specific truths.

The first truth is that our sin is extremely horrible. It is impossible for us to face the cross with integrity and not feel ashamed of ourselves.

The second thing, truth, we learn when we're faced with the cross is that God's love must be wonderful beyond compare, beyond comprehension.

[36 : 12] that he could have just left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrongdoing and perish for our sins. But Jesus Christ pursued us even to desolate anguish of the cross where he bore our sin, our guilt, and ultimately our death.

He laments it takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by a love like this. And the third truth of the cross is that Christ's salvation must be a free gift.

The purchased of it, the priced with his own life blood, there is nothing that we could contribute to this. And the implication of this empty tomb that we celebrate Christ's resurrection, that Christ conquered sin and death, the price has been paid.

You know this truth. The implication of this story is that the Pharisees, the religious rulers, all knew that Jesus was of God.

They knew the great and glorious things. Their eyes saw it, their hearts testified, to the truth, yet they would not bow down and simply state, my Lord and my God.

[37 : 47] Are you willing to acknowledge your own sinfulness and look to Jesus Christ for grace and salvation? Perhaps your sin takes the form of rebelliousness, foolishness, incapability.

It doesn't matter. God is willing to meet you with your grace. God is willing to meet you with your doubt. God is willing to meet you with your uncertainty.

And he brings mercy. He brings forgiveness. He takes the shame away. And he's willing to transform your life and glorify you in the name of the Father.

And he does this with those who truly trust in him. So getting back to the question I first answered or asked, why did Christ die?

it's so that you might believe and declare that you Jesus are my Lord and my God.

[39 : 09] Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, on this Easter Sunday, we thank you and we praise you. The reality is many of us are like Thomas.

We are insecure about our faith, insecure about our actions. We're unsure. We struggle with uncertainty, lack of faith.

But that still does not take away of your willingness to save us. to transform us and to make us a child of you.

Father, if there's anyone here who looks at their life and feels deep shame, that is the appropriate response we are to have before the cross. It is okay to feel shameful.

However, there is now salvation. There is now deliverance. There is now freedom. that your action on the cross takes away our shame.

[40 : 21] It brings your truth and your righteousness into our lives. Lord, I know that there is many people like Thomas who go in and out of their faith just struggling with some of these questions.

father, I pray that you would settle it for the here and for the now, that they would simply declare that you are my Lord and my God.

May we all be willing to testify in such a way to not only bring salvation to our lives, but ultimately to bring glory to the God who saved us, who washes us white as snow.

We ask you these great glorious things. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.