

## THE STRANGE CASE OF DOUBTING THOMAS

**Introduction:** Sometimes we are tempted to doubt our faith; could it be that after everything, it's not true? If we have ever thought like that, we are in good company. The disciples who had followed Jesus for three years felt the same way after Jesus had been executed and buried. Nobody expected him to rise on the third day and the two disciples who encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus said, '... we *had* hoped he was the one ...'

The gospel reading set down for today addresses this very important question: how do we deal with doubts?

The setting is one week after the resurrection. Jesus had appeared to the disciples in the upper room a week earlier but Thomas had not been present and he did not believe what they told him. He wanted proof; '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 into his side, I will never believe.'

There are two ways of looking at this. It could be that he had given up all hope that Jesus was the Messiah and only absolute proof would make him change his mind. On the other hand, it could be that Thomas had the kind of faith we have when we think something is *too* good to be true and don't want to believe it only to find out that it was a hoax or a mistake.

Was he wrong not to believe his friends and was he right to demand proof? He should have believed his friends, after all, why would they make it up?

Nevertheless the New Testament *is* sympathetic to the need for proof that Jesus rose from the dead, after all, that is why this story is recounted in

## THE STRANGE CASE OF DOUBTING THOMAS

John's gospel in the first place. But what kind of proof would we, 2000 years later want? There were no cameras back then, no sound recordings. All we could ever have are the statements of eye witnesses, plus the circumstantial evidence of the empty tomb, the amazing transformation in those who claimed to have seen him, and the absence of any contradictory evidence to prove he was still dead.

Let's look at the eye witnesses. In 1 Corinthians 15, it says that he was seen by more than 500 people at one time and by many disciples close up as well, most of whom were still alive. Could they have all agreed to make it up? Why would they, given that they were afraid that what had happened to Jesus could happen to them?

If it was a conspiracy involving hundreds of people, how come nobody cracked under the pressure of persecution and confess?

What else could have brought about the transformation in their lives or made them willing to die for Jesus if they knew it was a lie?

If enemies had stolen the body, why did they not produce it and expose this exploding sect once and for all?

## THE STRANGE CASE OF DOUBTING THOMAS

Back to Thomas; he demanded proof, and he got it: verse 26: ‘A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”’

When Thomas saw that Jesus was alive and standing before him, it was as if everything fell into place. From being an unbeliever, he actually leapt far ahead of the others to make the most astonishing claim ever made about Jesus; verse 28, ‘Thomas said to him, “my Lord and my God!”’

In a flash, Thomas saw it; this man, this Jesus, the teacher, the miracle worker, this utterly perfect man, this friend, this victim of betrayal and execution, was not just a prophet, not just the messiah of popular expectation, he was actually, astonishingly, mysteriously, God himself; God in human form; God, despite what his enemies did to him.

People remember Thomas for his doubts, but really they should remember him for being the first person to see through everything to the greatest discovery of all, that our Lord Jesus Christ is God himself, possessing everything that belongs to divinity.

How did he come to this conclusion? Maybe his thoughts went this way: nobody comes back to life of his own accord. Only the power of the creator can do this. For that power to be exercised to bring this man to life can only point to God’s approval of him. But God could not approve of someone who did not tell the truth.

## THE STRANGE CASE OF DOUBTING THOMAS

In that respect, Jesus said of himself, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father.' He said, 'I and the Father are one.' He said, 'Before Abraham was, I am!' He said, 'I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Light of the world'; all attributes that belong to God alone.

Jesus is either all these things or he is a liar, or mad. But if a liar, how is he was standing there, *alive*?

The Resurrection of Jesus, shown to be true to doubting Thomas, is God's way of saying, all these words about Jesus are true, and you heard it first from – Doubting Thomas.

Thomas would not have understood how that could be. At that point he did not know that God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but one thing he *did* know – that the man standing in front of him was God.

Now what about us? Where are we in this amazing story? Verse 29, 'Then Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."'

That is us, if we have put our faith in Jesus.

Jesus is promising a special blessing to those who believe without actually seeing him. What could that be? It is the blessing that comes to everyone who responds, not to physical evidence, but to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to put their trust in Jesus to take away their sins and to be with them always. That is us!

## **THE STRANGE CASE OF DOUBTING THOMAS**

It may be that at times we might be tempted to doubt, but whenever that happens we can do no better than to go back in time to that upper room and Doubting Thomas. What he saw that night, and what it meant to him, is true for us as well. We can have all our doubts and fears removed if we fill our minds with the reality of God's love, expressed in the self-sacrificing death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus – our Lord and our God.