

JOHN 20: 19-31 4-4-10
Doubt, Reason and Faith

John 20:**19-31** *So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." ²⁴But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." ²⁶After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." ³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Well, good morning and Happy Easter! For our Easter sermon this year we are going to look at the wonderful story of the disciple named Thomas. Who in here shares a name with this man? How many Thomases are with us this morning? Let's hear it for all the Thomases. Do you guys like your name? I mean, the name of Thomas gets some pretty bad press out there. Most every Thomas would trace their name back to this disciple, but what is the nickname we give this guy? "Doubting Thomas." Is that the adjective you want before your name? Doubting? It may be better than "Peeping" Tom, but still, not so great. Just before Easter a few years back a woman in our church gave birth to a little boy whom they named Peter Thomas. "Peter" - now there is a name we associate with faith. It was Peter who walked on the water. It was Peter who said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." But the baby's other name gets associated with doubt. Thomas, the skeptic. Thomas, the disciple from Missouri. Thomas really has gotten a bad rap, and it is not fair (R). Thomas is a good guy in Scripture. He is a neat brother whose failings and whose temperament many of us can relate to. I don't know about you but I have a lot in common with Thomas. Today we are going to look briefly at his story, focusing on two things Thomas did wrong and two things Thomas did right.

The first mistake we see Thomas making in our story is a big one. At least I think it was a big one. Any preacher would think this was a big mistake. His mistake was that of missing church. Listen, there is a danger in missing church. Verse 19 says that the disciples had gathered together on the evening of Easter. And as they were gathered what happened? Jesus showed up! Jesus appeared before them. He modeled his resurrected body for them. He gave them some important instructions, and then he was gone. Now, let me tell you, that is my kind of Easter service.(R) Now, maybe what you want in an Easter service is a big pretty building, and wonderful music, and an inspiring sermon. But as for me, I want a service that Jesus attends. I want to be where my Lord makes His presence, power and love known to His disciples. That is what Jesus does here. 24 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came* What a tragedy! God does some of his greatest things for His people when we are gathered together. And if you aren't here you are going to miss it. Now, missing church in itself is no big deal. The problem is that in missing church you are likely also to miss Jesus and that is a disaster of the first order.

Now, what are the reasons people have for missing church? Oh, there are lots of reasons but I think I know why Thomas wasn't there. I think I understand Thomas enough to say this with confidence. Thomas didn't show up because he was depressed. When you get to know Thomas you understand that he is not the kind of guy you want to lead a pep rally. I heard a preacher recently that I described as being a cheerleader for God. That is not Thomas. Frankly, Thomas was sort of a negative kind of guy. Let me show you what I mean. In the tenth chapter of John the Lord starts getting in big trouble with the Jewish leaders. He had made the outlandish claim in John 10:30 that He was one with God the Father. John 10:39-40 *Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.* ⁴⁰ *And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there* So, Jesus had sort of escaped the anger of the Jerusalem leaders by moving away. He was out ministering in the region beyond the Jordan when word comes that his friend Lazarus was about to die. Now, Lazarus lived just outside of Jerusalem. But when Jesus heard about him he said, John 11:7,8 *Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?"* You get the drift of this don't you? "Hey, we just escaped from there. They were out to kill you Jesus." But in verse 11 *This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep."*

Now, look how Thomas responds, **16** *Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."* You gotta love his courage don't you? But you also have to see in Thomas a classic case of the defensive pessimist. That is what Thomas was - a defensive pessimist. I'm one of those. The philosophy of a defensive pessimist runs like this. Expect the worst and you won't be disappointed.(R) This kind of person does not get his hopes up easily. He sees clearly all the bad things that may happen and he prepares emotionally for them. Ole' Thomas here, he was brave. He was willing to go, but he also had to spread his cynicism. "OK, let's all go die in Jerusalem." They go to Jerusalem and what Thomas feared does happen. Jesus has died. And Thomas is crushed. He is depressed. He is probably wondering how he could have been so misled as to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The last thing Thomas wanted at this point was to be with people or to pray. So he stayed away from the meeting. William Barclay writes, "When sorrow comes and sadness envelops us, we often tend to shut ourselves up and refuse to meet people." As a pastor, I have seen this phenomena over and over. People get depressed and then drop out of church. But, dear friends, that is the very time we need to seek out the fellowship of God's people the most, for it is there we are likeliest of all to have our sadness wiped away by the presence of Christ. The first bad thing Thomas did here was to miss out on church. Don't you make the same mistake.

The second bad thing Thomas did was make a verbal commitment to radical skepticism (R).25 *So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."* Now that was a stupid thing to say. But that is the kind of stupidity some of the most brilliant people are prone to fall into. Thomas was probably among the brightest of the disciples don't you think? He had an analytical mind. He was a critical thinker. Hey, listen, some of you here think that Christians are, by nature, just very gullible people. You think that all religious people just have this inclination to believe whatever they are told, no matter how fanciful it sounds. And I want to tell you, that is a bunch of baloney. That contradicts my experience; that contradicts history; and that contradicts the Bible. You read the Bible Mr. Skeptic, something you probably never have done. You read the Bible and you will find God telling Abraham and Sarah they are going to have a son in their old age. And what did Abraham and Sarah do when God said that? Have you read it? Abraham and Sarah did not say, "Oh sure, God, whatever you say." They laughed at God. (R) They knew enough biology to understand that at 90

years of age Sarah was no candidate for childbirth even in those days. They laughed. Then they took matters into their own hands and tried to help God out. But eventually Sarah did conceive and they had a little Isaac whose very name means, "laughter." You read about Moses. God came to Moses and told him to go speak to Pharaoh. Moses doesn't say, "Oh sure God, whatever you need me to do." Moses said, "Come on Lord, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" So, God showed Moses a few of his attention getting miracles, but then Moses says, "Yeah, well I still can't go, cause I don't speak well." You see, these are real people. They have the same basic skepticism that you and I have. In Luke chapter one we read about a man named Zacharias who is visited by an angel in the temple. And this angel tells him that his wife Elizabeth is going to have a son who would be a great prophet of God. Now, you would think that anyone who meets an angel in person, there in the temple, would believe what the angel had to say. Especially you would expect this of Zacharias, after all he was a righteous, godly priest in Israel. But no. Zacharias was not an easy sell, even by an angel. His first response is not worship and thanks. Luke 1:**18** *Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."* Zacharias the skeptic. And then you have Mary. Same chapter of Luke, the angel tells Mary the virgin, that she will bear a son who will be the Messiah. And what does Mary say? **34** Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" You got a problem with this virgin birth stuff? Mary had a problem with it too. She was the original virgin birth skeptic. Look at Matthew 16:**21** *From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.* Over and over again we read in the gospels of how Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. But did the disciples believe Him? When he died, were they thinking, "Wow, it's working out just like he said?" Not at all. Instead, they were heart-broken. They were dismayed. They were depressed. They didn't wake up on Easter Sunday with expectation. In a sense they were all doubting Toms. Let me tell you something. If you believed someone who told you that Christians are suckers, that Christians are just easily led, that Christians are gullible, then you were the gullible one. Thomas here was the exact opposite of gullible. He not only said, "I have to see to believe" he said, "I have to touch to believe."

There are some things so amazing that we require visual, sensual proof in order to believe. Every month for our newsletter I write a column called, "Did You Know" in which I include some of the world's most amazing facts, all of which are absolutely true. For instance, in this month's

piece it says that the silkworm has 11 brains, that frogs cannot eat with their eyes open, that water temperatures in Iceland are warmer than those in Boston. You believe this stuff? How can you doubt your own church's newsletter? These are all amazing but true. Still there are times that I have run into trivia I just could not believe. For instance, did you know that Reno Nevada is actually west of Los Angeles California? This is no trick. Reno is further west than LA. That was a claim I just could not believe. I asked a friend named Scott who used to work with us about it because Scott knows everything and he confirmed this. But even with Scott's testimony I couldn't believe it without seeing it for myself, so I hunted down a map and saw that, sure enough, Reno is west of LA. How many of you find that hard to believe? There is, and there ought to be, some skeptic in all of us. But honestly, this Thomas guy takes the cake. Think about what he said. Here is a man who had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle. He had seen Jesus raise the dead. He had heard this Jesus prophesy of his coming death and resurrection many times. Then, Thomas encountered the testimony of his best friends, everyone of whom, to a man told of the fact of the resurrection. And Thomas still was a doubter. Talk about being hard-headed! Talk about being slow to believe! Do you see what a major league skeptic this Thomas guy really was? Some of us take our skepticism to the extreme. We get so set in our thinking that no matter what happens we won't be changed. And you reach a point where your skepticism becomes stupidity. Thomas was there already. Don't follow him in this. He made two mistakes: He skipped church, and he made a verbal commitment to radical skepticism.

Now, for the good news. Now for the good part. Thomas could have been a lot worse. Thomas could have walked off in his skepticism and forsaken all his deluded friends but he didn't. We read in verse 26 that there was another church meeting going on, and this time Thomas was there. He was not so closed to the resurrection message that he wouldn't attend the meetings. Thomas was a doubter, but not totally close-minded (R). How different from most of the religious skeptics I have known in my life. Most people who dismiss the truth claims of Christianity are the sort who would never darken a church door except maybe on Easter, and then only to appease the wife. They are the kind of people who will criticize the Bible but not read it, who will attack the church but never check it out for themselves.

Personally, I don't mind skeptical people. Shoot, I am one. I don't even mind doubting people. I really don't. But I do get disgusted with the attitude of those who arrogantly and apathetically dismiss the gospel without any serious thought. Some of you who live in unbelief will find a way,

some way, any way to discredit the teaching of Jesus because you refuse to abide under the law of Jesus. No amount of evidence would ever change your mind. Learn something from Thomas. He put himself in a position to learn. He left his mind open and when Jesus appeared, when more evidence arrived, he didn't need to touch him. Thomas saw and Thomas believed. There was a limit to his skepticism. I wonder, is there a limit to yours? (pause) You know, they say that seeing is believing. And there is some truth to that, but it isn't the whole truth. So powerful is the effect of sin in the hearts and minds of men that it becomes possible to see the truth and still not believe it. You think of Judas Iscariot. He saw Jesus do things you and I can only imagine. Think of the guards who were there at the tomb of Jesus. They heard the earth quake. They saw an angel. They knew what happened, but when they were offered a large sum of money to lie about it, they managed to rearrange their memory. You see a polluted heart has a way of talking our minds out of those things that our eyes have seen and our reason affirms.

My friends, God doesn't expect you to believe things for which there is no evidence. What He says we must believe He gives us reason to believe. I can't tell you that He will do for you what He did for Thomas. The Lord works in diverse ways. But I see here in Jesus an attitude that gives me hope. He doesn't say, "Well, if Thomas won't even trust his best friends, then to hell with him." Jesus sees some sincerity in Thomas and so meets the need of his friend. *27 Then He said to Thomas, Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.*" The Lord is addressing some of you this morning in that same way. He has been showing you in recent weeks that He is alive and well, and now He is saying to you, "Be not unbelieving, but believing." That is a challenge to your mind but also to your heart. The gospel appeals to the heart but goes through the mind to do so. There are sound reasons for being a Christian. A dozen or more depressed disciples needed sound reasons. Men like Thomas needed more than sound reasons. A man who hated Christians like the Apostle Paul needed sound and overwhelming reasons. And the Lord supplied for them all. Look again at verse 30, "*Many other signs.*" Signs are attesting miracles. They are the verifications of the claims of Jesus. *30,31 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.* Here is the challenge I set before you today. John says he recorded his brief history of Jesus so that you would believe in Him. I challenge you to read it. It is only 40 pages long. Read it twice. Read it three

times. I dare you to read it. What are you afraid of? Why, I double dog dare you to read it because I know there is power in the story of Christ Jesus. As determined a skeptic as Thomas was Jesus took him past the limits of his doubt. How I pray he would do that for some of you.

I said Thomas did two things right. First he left his mind somewhat open. And secondly, when the truth came pouring through he drank it all up. When he saw the Lord, Thomas zealously entered in to resurrection faith and he said, "My Lord, and my God!" (R) Romans 10:9 *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved.* Thomas was saved. (R) We Christians talk a lot about being saved. What does it mean? Saved from what? We refer to being saved from the guilt, the power and the penalty of sin. The New Testament says the penalty for sin is death. Rom.6:23a *The wages of sin is death.* Not just physical death, but what the book of Revelation calls the second death, spiritual death, eternal death. This is where people are living. We live in a world dominated by spiritual death. That is why John writes his gospel, in the hope that many would read it and believe in Jesus and that believing they may have life, real life, eternal life in Jesus' name.

One more Thomas story and then we'll go. John 14:1-4 *Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. "And you know the way where I am going."* Once again Thomas found his mind wasn't big enough to fit all this in, so in verse 5 Thomas said, "Wait a second Jesus, what are you talking about? 5 *Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"* Thomas is always interested in epistemology, questions about how we can know. He is a man always in search of certainty. But what Thomas learned, and what Paul learned, and what Pascal learned and Newton learned, and a million other great minds have learned is that there is a limit to what you can know. But there is no limit to who you can know. We can't know all the answers, but we can know the One who does. Jesus loved this doubting disciple and He said to him and to you 6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.* Are you lost this morning? Jesus is the Way. Are you doubting? Jesus is the truth. Are you facing death this morning? John said, "I write that you may believe, and that believing you may have life in His name." For Jesus is the life.

Please join me, and let's bow together in prayer. As we go to prayer I want you to think about where you are today. God's word says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God really did raise him from the dead you will be saved. If you are sitting here today and you have never done that. You have never before believed from your heart in the resurrection, you have never invited Jesus Christ to be Lord of your life, but you are ready to do that right now, would you simply raise your hand as a sign or a witness to that? We aren't going to make you do anything embarrassing, but I believe it will be good for you just to lift your hand as a sign of your faith and as a prayer for a new spiritual life. Thank you. Father in heaven, take notice of our hands and our hearts as we humbly look to you now. As you did for Brother Tom, come and wipe away any doubt among us. Fill with faith many who this moment are filled with doubt. And as you fill with faith come and minister life in Jesus name to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Amen