Power of Doubt
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THE POWER OF DOUBT

by

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The story of a man who overcame his doubts and eventually recognised their power to change his life
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The Story of Thomas

If I was to involve you in a word association game, what would be your response?


Most people associate Thomas with doubt – and I suppose for years I did have the same as a knee-jerk reaction to his name.

Thomas came into my focus as one of those particular characters of the resurrection with whom I can relate. I must confess that I think I might owe him an apology when I see him in heaven. Thomas the Doubter? Perhaps you may have judged him too harshly – I think I did.

Have you ever doubted? Of course you have! Everybody has experienced doubts. Have you ever used Thomas to justify your doubting – even as an excuse to allow you to feel better?

When you think of some of the most passionate, persistent, and eloquent advocates for social change – William Wilberforce, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr. – you think of men who were confident in the rightness of their cause.

A new study was published in *Psychological Science* says that it’s doubt, not confidence, that leads individuals to advance their beliefs and attempt to persuade others. [http://pss.sagepub.com/content/21/11/1701]
"After all, Thomas was one of the Twelve – and he was close to Jesus – and if he doubted – surely, there is some excuse for me!" you have said to yourself. If you have ever doubted, you are in good company.

**John the Baptist doubted**

As he looked out of the bars of his prison cell in Machaerus, his rustic hands gripped the bars. He thought to himself, "Why should my life be suddenly stopped at the end of only six months of preaching?" He is unsure whether or not Jesus is the Messiah.

Even after he had identified Him to Israel, baptised Him, seen the clouds open and witnessed the dove descend and heard the voice of God saying, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!"

He sends his own disciples with the question, "Are you the Coming One, or should we look for another?"

**The Psalmists doubted**

Their words are filled with statements of honesty and integrity as they wrote and sang their songs. They didn't stay too long with their doubts – they re-affirmed the promises of God – but for a while they doubted. They did not repress their doubts; they threw them out into the open and addressed them.

**Elijah the Prophet doubted**

Under his juniper tree, he lay down wishing to die because he doubted that the God who had recently sent down fire from heaven to accept his sacrifice on Mount Carmel was able to protect him from the wrath of Queen Jezebel who wanted to kill him.

Today, we live in an age of scepticism. There are many honest doubters and most of us have experienced the agony of doubt.

Thomas a Kempis said, "I have never known anyone so religious that he has not felt at some time a withdrawing of grace, a decreasing zeal."

A sermon title of an American preacher was "The Importance of Doubting Your Doubts." He said that the capacity of doubt is one of humanity's noblest powers. It has fostered much of the progress in today's world. Honest doubt ministers spiritual growth. It helps us outgrow our old concepts. Sometimes it is pulling down the old house of faith in order that we might build a bigger and stronger house."
With these thoughts in our minds, let us turn to the life of Thomas. We know very little about him – nothing about his background and earlier lifestyle is recorded for us in Scripture. What we do know of him comes from a few biblical records and traditions of church history.

In an attempt to focus on his life, we will see reasons why he doubted. And these will give us an understanding of how this man can help us in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

**DISCOURAGEMENT CAN CAUSE US TO DOUBT!**

I wonder if Thomas began his life under pressure. He was known among the disciples as Thomas.

However, some traditions indicate his personal name may have been Judas.

Then, why was he known as Thomas?

Read the list of the Twelve in Matthew 10:1-4 and you make some interesting discoveries:

“And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

Did you notice anything about this list?

Did you see how Matthew recorded the list?

Six before Thomas and five after him!

Mark’s record of the list places seven in front of him and four after him.

Luke records it the same way.

In other words, Thomas was always in the middle – never first, never last – but always in the middle.

Have you ever wanted to be first?
I mean, you gave it your best in that race and finished up in the middle of the pack? Most people remember who was first in race and who came last – but not too many people record the order of those who came in the middle of the pack!

Did you also see that the record lists brothers together?

- Peter – and Andrew his brother
- James – and John his brother;
- Philip – and Bartholomew [Nathanael] – certainly spiritual brothers as Philip had introduced him to Jesus
- Thomas – and Matthew the publican are mentioned together perhaps because they were friends – friends of a tax collector?

But John records something also of Thomas. He is known as "Didymus" or "twin." The name comes from the Aramaic "teoma" meaning "twin." John uses the name three times in the Greek language.

We do not know who his twin was. It would appear that he had either a twin brother or sister – possibly a twin brother. Imagine that for a pressure?

I have watched twins over the years and have been fascinated with their reactions and responses. I knew twin girls who were so much alike; they could date each other's boyfriends and get away with it.

Now, I have never had a brother with whom I grew up, but I have watched people with their brothers – and do you know what I have seen? One of the two is slightly ahead of the other in intellect, sporting prowess or looks.

We had a guy in my class when I was at Boarding School who could do anything – tennis, cricket, scholastic – you name it, he could do it! When a large group of us agreed in our class to fail our mid-year history exam, because we didn't like the teacher, we did so – except this guy – he got 98%!

His name was Barry. One year, I played against him in the first round of a tennis knockout. I served – I knew I had only one chance as this guy was in the school tennis team and tennis was not one of my sports. I aced him on the first serve and crowed about it. "Look out Barry, there’s more to come!" There was – he beat me 6-0! I don't think I scored another point!
Imagine having a brother like that.

Thomas had a twin. I wonder what he was like?

Apart from that, he is not known as Thomas the miracle worker – but Thomas the Twin – and by we who have stereotyped him – Thomas the Doubter!

Imagine growing up with that handicap. Now, golfers brag about their handicap. I was asked once, "What is your golf handicap?" Now I used play golf regularly – once every three years on average. "My handicap is myself," was my response.

Thomas had a handicap.

- He was neither first nor last.
- He was linked with a tax collector.
- He had a twin brother and was known by that fact - talk about self-esteem.

But you know something? He is a classic illustration of most of the population of the world today. He gives me comfort because I don't think I have ever come first in a race; I don't ever remember winning First Prize because of my academic achievement – I got a second prize once! Close, but missed it by "that much!"

Have you ever been discouraged and doubted as a result? Of course you have. We all get discouraged with the way things appear to be going.

Sometimes, we put too much confidence in our feelings and our assurance dips and dives in proportion to how we feel. Sometimes we feel good and other times we feel bad. Feelings are unreliable and can fluctuate like the Melbourne weather.

If our confidence is to be based upon our feelings, then may Heaven help us – because we are going to need help beyond ourselves!

Feelings can change in a moment.

A Minister was called to the bedside of a dying man who had just won 5 million dollars in a lottery and didn't know about it. He had suffered three heart attacks and his family didn't want to put him under any sudden shock or excitement.
So the Minister was called. Following the usual formalities of the visit, the Minister asked, "And John, what would you do if you won 5 million dollars?" "Why Pastor, I'd give half to you and the church and live off the other half."

The minister dropped on the floor with a heart attack! Yes, it’s only a story!

Don't base your life on feelings!

Thomas had as many reasons to be discouraged but he placed his confidence in the fact that Jesus had called him to be his disciple and day by day he was learning all he could to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

**DISILLUSIONMENT CAN CAUSE US TO DOUBT**

Thomas appears to be disillusioned on a number of occasions.

Disillusionment can cause doubt. I don't know if Thomas had a streak of the Zealot in him. It seems at time he did not really understand. He takes his authority in Christ and preaches the gospel, casts out demons and heals the sick. He returns with The Twelve rejoicing that even devils are subject to him.

But there are times that Thomas wants to address his doubts.

John records the first scene. Jesus is informed that His friend Lazarus is sick. After some discussion, Jesus informs them that Lazarus has died. I have no doubt that Thomas wondered why Jesus had delayed His departure from the north to visit His friend in Bethany. We pick up the story in John 11:14 -16

“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that you might believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, who is called Didymus unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

Thomas knew that death awaited Jesus in Jerusalem and Bethany was not far from Jerusalem.

The contract on Jesus' life was well known. Three years of public ministry and opposition from the Jewish leaders had sealed His fate. He had faced the leaders many times over those three years and He Himself knew what was waiting Him on that last visit to Jerusalem. Death!

The disciples knew it too.
But only Thomas was prepared to make the statement!

Here he displays pessimism and intense loyalty – he is prepared to lay down his life for the cause of Christ.

Don't criticise Thomas here – He is a little pessimistic – but he is honest.

Too many people cover up their doubts by dishonesty. What they say is really not what they believe! Their language may sound spiritual and flowery, but the first pressure of persecution is going to see them flee to safety in their doubts – "I knew it would never work anyway!"

Thomas is prepared to die for what he believes, even if there is a shadow of doubt in his heart! I can handle that kind of honesty.

I find it difficult to handle hypocrisy – which is the wearing of a mask to cover up the real feelings.

Thomas was not a hypocrite. He doubted that Jesus knew what He was doing, but he was prepared to die because of His commitment to the One He loved and followed!

And I don’t think a man or woman can be condemned with that kind of attitude!

The second scene is during the Passover in Jerusalem

Jesus has washed the feet of the disciples and conducted the Passover and instituted the Communion Service.

What we have come to understand as the 14th to 16th chapter of the Gospel of John occurred in the upper room around the Passover table.

In John 14:1-7 Jesus is speaking:

“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house [dwelling place] are many mansions [abiding places]: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I am going, you know, and the way you know.”

Immediately this created a response from Thomas who is hanging on to every word of Jesus.
He has followed Him for three years and listened to His teachings, witnessed His miracles and has committed himself to Him – even to the point of dying with Him and for His cause.

But his mind is reeling under the impact of this information. He finds it difficult to understand.

“Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where you are going; and how can we know the way?”

Only two questions -

"Where are you going?"

"How can we get there?"

He is open and honest enough to openly confess his ignorance!

Jesus answers the second question, first:

**Jesus said to him: I am the way, the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.**

Thank God, Thomas had the courage to ask the question, because if he didn't, we wouldn't know the answer!

In that moment, Thomas and all who would ask the question as to how they could find eternal life would know the answer – the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus answers the first question, second – "Where are you going?"

**If you had known me, you should have known my Father also, and from henceforth you shall know Him and have seen Him.**

Thomas understood, but Philip questioned,

"Lord, show us the Father and that will satisfy us!" Jesus said to him: Have I been so long time with you, and yet you haven’t known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; then why do you say, "Show us the Father?"

The spotlight turns back to Thomas.
He is sitting to the side, contemplating the response he received to his questions.

He is working through his doubts. Disillusionment is about to go - he is working through the issues of the discussion.

- His loyalty? It is not in question!
- His honesty? It is commendable!
- His questions? Thank God for them, or we might be lost!

He thinks through the issues – "So this Man whom I have followed for the past three years is the only way to God!"

He hears the answer to Philip’s question, although it was not his own, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father!"

- His conclusion? "...that means Jesus is God and the only way I can know the fullness of the Father’s love and be assured that I have a mansion in heaven is to accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and my God!"

He makes his decision – he is disillusioned no longer!

Suddenly, things get out of hand –

The betrayal, the arrest – he flees with the other disciples – the mockery of a trial – the whipping and a lacerated body – he looks from a distance; the Via Dolorosa – Golgotha – Jesus dies!

Three days of darkness – not in Jerusalem but in his heart – did he make the right decision? Were his facts right? Was Jesus really God? Now comes his third trial:

**DISAPPOINTMENT CAN CAUSE US TO DOUBT**

Perhaps his melancholy personality means he has to withdraw from the crowd. He needs solitude – he must work through all the issues!

He contemplates the Scriptures:

Isaiah 7:14 – "a virgin shall conceive..."

Isaiah 9:6 – "and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace..."
Isaiah 53 – "...and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth ... but he was wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities, chastised so I might have peace, striped so I might be made whole.

He recalls the teachings of Christ. "...Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it remains alone...”

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son....”

"Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house [dwelling place] are many mansions [abiding places]: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also....

"... Destroy this temple [body] and in three days I will raise it up..

Will Jesus rise from the dead?

Thomas has witnessed the crucifixion; the nails through His hands and feet; the spear thrust of the Roman soldier; Jesus has died!

And now it is past those three days of darkness and Thomas is visiting the other disciples. He hears that Judas Iscariot has committed suicide -- the 10 attempt to convince him that they have seen Jesus.

John 20:

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days passed and Thomas lived with his disappointment. I can understand his doubts – he had seen Jesus die – he had heard the dull blow of the executioner's hammer – the spear thrust – he had seen it all!

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas was with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then he said to Thomas, Reach here your finger, and behold my hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into my side: be not faithless but believing.
It is amazing to know that Jesus responded to Thomas' questioning and statements of what he would do and wouldn't do!

That tells me that even if I don't see Him or hear Him – He sees me and He hears me and at His own timing will come to meet me at my point of need.

Thomas falls to his knees and without the need for further proof makes a statement concerning the identity of Jesus Christ that no other had made to this point in time.

Peter had revealed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"

But it is Thomas who uses his doubts for the last time – and makes his declarations:

**And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God!** [v28]

What a revelation! What a statement of understanding!

And Jesus uses this opportunity to express to the world – for all mankind to read and understand –

**Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.**

But it did not end here – John records in v30-31 the whole purpose of his gospel and how faith is required to believe.

**And many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life in his name.**

But the story of Thomas does not end there. He is mentioned in Acts 1:13 by Luke as the scenes of the Day of Pentecost unfold.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he testifies as a witness for Christ!

Thomas the doubter? Never! By the same rational we would call, Peter the Denier, Philip the faithless and Andrew the doubter!

According to church tradition, Thomas laboured in India and left many converts to Christianity. At the end of his life, idol-priests tortured him with red-hot plates, and then cast him into a burning oven.
This had no effect on him. So they pierced him with spears while in the furnace until he died!

St Jerome says that his body, unconsumed was buried in a town called Calamina by the people he had won to Christ!

Thomas the Doubter?

Never in a million years!

Doubt is good for us – there is a real power in doubt. It's like lifting one foot from the floor – where we place our foot determines our destiny!

Backward means we lose ground. Forward means we continue on our journey through life into eternal life! You determine where you place your future! The choice is yours!

George Matheson, a young Scottish preacher was once so beset with doubts that he wanted to give up the ministry. His friends counselled him to go on living to the best that was in him, just as if he still believed. Matheson held on and became one of Scotland's greatest preachers.

Believing when we cannot see makes faith – faith!

Thomas the doubter – never!! Thomas the giant of faith A man who was honest enough to use his doubts to get answers – and when he got his answers – he went forward!

Stay with your disappointments; disillusionment and discouragements and you'll go nowhere!

Use your doubts – there is a great power in doubt – as long as you place your foot and your faith into forward – and not reverse!

You choose the gear – God will do the rest!

'Take away assertion and you take away Christianity.'—Martin Luther

"The opposite of faith isn't doubt—it's certainty," wrote Pastor Peter Marty in the August 2010 issue of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's magazine,

That would have been news to Martin Luther, who also disliked self-righteousness.
In his Preface to Romans, Luther wrote, "Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace."

In a 1525 debate with Erasmus, who praised doubt and accused Luther of seeking certainty, said, "To take no pleasure in assertions is not the mark of a Christian heart; indeed, one must delight in assertions to be a Christian at all. Take away assertion and you take away Christianity."

Luther pointed to the words of Paul, who so often called for "full assurance," or the highest degree of certainty and conviction.

Does that mean that with the sure knowledge of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that we won't face doubts? Not at all!

It’s what we do with those doubts that counts – there is great power in doubts that, when answered can take us on a fruitful journey of faith. Thomas actually went further with the Gospel than any of The Twelve.

India still celebrates him as their Apostle!
According to church tradition, this is the tomb of Saint Thomas the Apostle located in the little town of Ortona in the Abruzzi. Thomas was stabbed with spears and martyred in about 68–72 in the south of India, in Mylapore, a suburb of Madras. Before that he preached the Gospel to the Parthians, Medes, Persians and Hyrcanians before he arrived in India. By order of the king he was killed and his remains were later brought to Edessa in Mesopotamia and then here to Ortona in the year 1258.
A Prayer

“Lord, forgive me when I have lifted the foot of doubt and not placed in down again into a position that I might walk forward into your promises. Help me to realise that it is not a sin to doubt. To ask intelligent questions of a God who loves me can provide a path for growth and maturity. Beyond that, may my obedience to your commands and not my doubts be the motivation for this day and the rest of my life. I ask this in Jesus’ name.”