

“The Doubter”

(Thomas)

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I. Introduction

A. Poor John the Baptist

1. Things had started out so well
 - a. The crowds flocking to the wilderness
 - b. Announced that Jesus was the Messiah
 - c. Told all his followers to follow Jesus
 - d. Expected great things to happen
2. What went wrong?
 - a. It had now been 18 months since he introduced Jesus
 - b. John was now in a filthy dungeon
 1. Facing death
 - c. The people were turning against Jesus
 - d. He didn't look much like a Messiah now
3. Doubts started to cloud his mind
 - a. Was Jesus really the Messiah?
 - b. Had he gotten it terribly wrong?
 - c. Wanted proof

B. What kind of doubts sneak into your mind?

- a. We all have them...including me

1. About some of my most fundamental beliefs
2. Where did that come from?

b. Is there something wrong with you when you have doubts?

C. Today... A man dubbed “Doubting” Thomas

II. Review

A. Calling of the Twelve....Luke 6:12-16

(12) One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (13) When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: (14) Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, (15) Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, (16) Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

B. I know I skipped Matthew

III. Background

Name: Thomas

1. Also called “Didymus”
 - a. Means “twin”
2. “Doubting” Thomas

Family

1. From the Galilee
2. He was a twin (John 20:24)

Occupation: Carpenter

1. According to tradition

Personality:

1. Pessimist

2. Doubter (John 20:24-25)
 - a. Doubted Jesus rose from the dead
3. Courageous (John 11:16)
 - a. Encouraged disciples to go to Bethany
4. Faithful to the end (John 20:24-29)

Ministry: Southern India

1. There is to this day a small hill near the airport in Chennai (Madras), India, where Thomas is said to have been buried.
2. There are churches in south India whose roots are traceable to the beginning of the church age, and tradition says they were founded under the ministry of Thomas.
3. Tradition says Burma and China also

Death:

1. Martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear

IV. Why we call him “Doubting” Thomas

A. After the resurrection (John 20)

(24) Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came

1. Jesus had appeared to the disciples
2. But, Thomas wasn't with the others
3. Why wasn't Thomas with the others?
 - a. The magnitude of his grief and sorrow
 - b. Totally disillusioned
4. Later the others tell Thomas that Jesus is alive

(25) So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

B. His doubt

(25) ...But Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

1. Reasonable
 - a. Had seen Jesus die
2. Wanted physical proof he was alive
3. In all fairness...the others had doubts earlier

(Mark 16:9)

(9) When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. (10) She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. (11) When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

4. Thomas wasn't the only “doubter”
 - a. ...and neither are you
 - b. The men Wednesday night

C. When Thomas finally saw Jesus (John 20)

(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!” (27) 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.” (28) Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (29) Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

1. “Come here Thomas!”
2. “My Lord and my God!”
3. Those of us who have not seen Jesus

V. A closer look at doubt

A. Do you ever have doubts?

1. Doubts that you have never shared with others?

- a. Afraid they might question your faith
 - b. And yet there are times you question your faith
2. Some of your doubts may include:
- a. ***Is there really life after death?***
 1. Heaven?
 2. Eternal burning hell?
 - b. ***Is there actually an invisible God out there?***
 1. ...and did he really create everything?
 - c. ***Is the Bible really the inspired word of God?***
 - d. ***Was Jesus truly God?***
 1. And did he actually rise from the dead?
 2. Easter is coming
 - e. ***Is Jesus the only way of salvation?***
 1. Are other religions really going to Hell?
 - f. ***Am I absolutely sure of my own salvation?***
 - g. ***Does God actually hear me when I pray?***
 1. ...and does prayer make a difference?
 - h. ***Did God really forgive my sin?***
 1. The story of David last Sunday night
 - a. The magnitude of his sins
 - b. What God had given to him
 - c. His cry of confession
 - d. How God forgives

e. II Samuel 12:13

(13) Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin...”

2. How we are to forgive those who sin against us

i. Does God really love and care about me?

1. Does he have a plan for your life?

2. Doubting his plan for your life

j. How can a loving God allow so much suffering?

1. Haiti....Chile

2. Kay Cook

a. When I first met her—date

b. Had just lost fiancée to a drunk driver

c. Her family had suffered

d. Married my roommate – Bob Bolhuis

e. His success

1. President of Hudsonville school board,

2. Successful businessman

3. State Representative

3. Kids, etc.

f. Then, disaster while speaking at a school meeting

1. Coma!

2. Alone in the room with Bob

3. Why Bob and Kay?

3. Was this the will of a loving God?

B. Is it a sin to have such doubts?

1. God isn't afraid or offended by your doubts

- a. He'd rather see people have honest doubts about what is true...than accept what isn't true
- b. The process of taking ownership to what you believe

2. There's a difference between doubt and unbelief

- a. It's not doubt that disqualifies but unbelief
 - 1. "I believe Lord...help my unbelief"
- b. An honest doubter
 - 1. Isn't afraid to ask the right questions
 - 2. Seeking answers

3. Faith doesn't need absolute proof

- a. It's no longer faith if absolute proof is attained
- b. Faith is different from proof; proof is human, faith is a gift from God (Blaise Pascal)
- c. Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time. (Oswald Chambers)

4. Doubt can lead to a strengthening of your faith

- a. As you seek greater understanding
- b. Has driven me to tireless study
- c. Wrestling with God
- d. Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith (Paul Tillich)

C. What causes doubt?

- 1. The example of John the Baptist

VI. Text...Matthew 11:1-12

A. The plight of John the Baptist

1. Eighteen months since he baptized Jesus
2. Remembered the glory days in the wilderness
3. Yet his world had caved in
 - a. In prison for rebuking Herod Antipas
 - b. And things not going as he had planned for Jesus
 1. Growing opposition
 2. No longer looked like a Messiah
 3. Had surrounded himself with 12 misfits
 - c. Was Jesus really the one?
 - d. John was starting to have doubts....Matthew 11:1-3

(1) After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. (2) When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples (3) to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4. He sent two disciples to question Jesus.....v.2
 - a. Are you the one?
 - b. Or do we keep looking for another?

B. Why doubt sneaks in

1. Painful Circumstances

- a. John's dream had turned into a nightmare
- b. Painful circumstances can lead us to doubt God's love
 1. Cancer

- a. “Can’t get it all”
- 2. Out of work
- 3. Sick child
 - a. Doesn’t get better
- 4. Deep in debt and no relief ahead
- e. Most can take lots of pain for a short period better than small pain for a long period
 - 1. When hope is gone
 - 2. “Why me?”
- f. Jesus shows John how much He cares (**Matthew 11:4**)

(4) Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: (5) The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. (6) Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

2. Wrong Expectations

(7) As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? (8) If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. (9) Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. (10) This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ (11) I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist;”

- a. John didn’t understand the plan
 - 1. Kingdom later
 - 2. But first....salvation from sin
- b. What the Jews expected from the Messiah
 - 1. Overthrow Rome...not Sin
- c. What are your expectations for life?

1. Life is tough
2. Rick Warren's comments
 - a. His wife's struggles
 - b. The "hills and valleys"
 - c. The railroad tracks
 - d. Pain and pleasure side-by-side
3. You think others aren't suffering
 - d. When our world gets shaken
 1. We turn to God for help when our foundations are shaking only to learn that it is God shaking them. (Charles West)
 - e. He is the God of the tough times

I will have nothing to do with a God who cares only occasionally. I need a God who is with us always, everywhere, in the deepest depths as well as the highest heights. It is when things go wrong, when good things do not happen, when our prayers seem to have been lost, that God is most present. We do not need the sheltering wings when things go smoothly. We are closest to God in the darkness, stumbling along blindly (Madeleine L'Engle)

3. Impatience with God

- a. It had been 18 months and still no kingdom
 1. How long, Jesus?
 2. Started to doubt
- b. Don't let impatience cloud your mind with doubts
 1. "God's wheel grinds slow, but it grinds fine"
 2. He may not be following your schedule
- c. Answers to prayer

1. George Mueller
 - a. Prayed for 4 unsaved friends
 - b. After 52 years of praying three of the four had accepted Christ
 - c. As he lay on his death bed, George Mueller was unaware the final friend was accepting Christ

4. Devilish Attacks

- a. Doubt is one of Satan's most effective tools
- b. When God has made something clear to you
 1. Then the doubts creep in
- c. Recognize doubt as a powerful tool of Satan

5. Natural Curiosity

- a. We want all the answers.....proof positive
- b. Yet we are told to in faith believe

VI. Summary

A. Doubting what God can do with you

1. Your full potential in Christ
2. Recognize how Satan uses doubt to hold you back

B. Dealing with Doubt

1. Honestly bring your doubts to God
 - a. God isn't afraid of your doubts
 - b. Spend more time talking to God
2. Let your doubts stir you to dig deeper and grow stronger
 - a. Seek godly counsel

3. If you doubt your salvation...settle the issue right now
4. Don't confuse your faith with your feelings

C. Look for God in times of suffering

1. Running into Bob and Kay's graves
 - a. Influence on me
 - b. And on you
- 2.. Kay Bolhuis' chapel address at Cedarville College

I can't pretend that this had all been easy, that the lessons learned have been worth it all. There are times of depression, overwhelming loneliness, insecurity, and disillusionment. There are times when God seems very far away, silent, and even cruel. Times when I cry out to the Lord to teach me in another way and take the pain away. There is a grief that never ends. It's hard to admit to these down times because I feel like I fail to live up to my responsibility to let others see Jesus in me. But Psalm 94:18-19 says, *"When I said 'my foot is slipping,' Your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought joy to my soul."*

The bottom has dropped out of my life—the life that I have known. But it was a false bottom, and now I am standing on the firm foundation—Jesus Christ. And that is how God has been able to turn my first sobs of “Why Bob? Why us?” into “Why not Bob? Why not us?”