

Christ

John 20:24-31

The story of Thomas is a cautionary tale. There is very little we know about the Apostle named Thomas. The main thing we know is documented here in his statement, "Unless I see the marks of the nails... I will never believe." And so Thomas has lived through history as **DOUBTING THOMAS**. You have to *be careful what you say* - someone just might write it down!

Here is one of the other statements Thomas made when Jesus and the disciples set out to the tomb of Lazarus, who had died four days before:

*"So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, **that we may die with him.**'" John 11:16*

So add to his reputation for doubt, his **PESSIMISM**; seems he was *the Eeyore of the group*. "Might as well die with him now. At least it won't drag out the suspense."

History indicates that **Thomas brought the gospel all the way to India**, with many churches still active today tracing their roots back to his ministry nearly 2,000 years ago! **So what happened that transformed** this gloomy, doubtful and defiant man into a bold missionary and gospel preacher?

How do you move from Doubt-Filled Defiance to Faith-Filled Devotion?

- *An Encounter with the Risen Christ*

"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" John 20:26

The answer, as we see in our text today, is *an encounter with the Risen Christ*. In John 11 Thomas gives away the roots of his unbelief - he knew Jesus' plan was to die. But he could not conceive of what would happen after that - other than that all of them would die too. Then in John 14 when Jesus was talking about leaving them, Thomas again revealed his confusion:

*"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, **I am the way...**" John 14:5-6*

At the tomb of Lazarus Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Then in John 14 he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through

me.” Thomas had all of this teaching, all of his experiences with Jesus over three years of ministry.

But it wasn't **until he SAW JESUS** for himself, alive and risen from the dead, that his whole life changed. When the Risen Christ showed up in front of him and said:

“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” John 20:27

Imagine this was **YOUR encounter with the Risen Christ**. Suddenly Jesus Himself is standing in front of you - 100% aware of your fears and doubts and questions. He knew exactly what Thomas' struggles were. He knew all about Thomas' demand to see his hands and side. What would Jesus call you out for?

“Stop doubting, and believe.” Stop your doubting and trust me. Can't you see me right here in front of you? Jesus could have said to Thomas:

“Didn't you see my power to heal and drive out demons and even raise the dead? Didn't you hear me talk about the Father and catch on to my faith in the Father's plan? Didn't you see all the miracles and start to realize that I actually AM the Son of God - the Messiah and King of Israel - the Lord of heaven and earth?”

What would Jesus say to you?

- Don't you remember how I forgave all of your sins? Don't you remember what it felt like when I took that burden from you?
- Don't you know that I'm faithful? Haven't I taken care of EVERYTHING you need?
- Haven't I shown you that I'm your Good Shepherd? Hasn't the Father proven to you that He knows what you need before you ask?
- Haven't you seen my hand at work in your life over and over again?

“Do not disbelieve, but believe.” You say you trust God - so trust in Jesus. The Risen Christ speaks directly to you and says, “Trust me. I'm here for you.” Let's walk through this experience with Thomas as we explore the pathway of faith, the process of faith and the product of faith.

First - the Pathway of Faith. Three principles to keep in mind.

The Pathway of Faith:

1. We all have a Unique Timeline

“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.’” John 20:24-25

Imagine how frustrating that must have been! Peter, James, John, Andrew - all the other guys, and even a handful of the WOMEN - are jabbering on about having seen Jesus up close and personal. But Thomas WASN'T there.

What do you think he was feeling? **“It’s not FAIR.”** Right? Why does Peter the DENIER get to see Jesus? Why do the women get to see him? Why not ME?

We know God has a customized plan for every one of us - but it is so hard not to compare. Why do I have these health challenges? Why do I have these financial challenges? Why can't I look like that? Why can't I have that job? Why didn't I get that opportunity? ***Why don't things work out for me like they do for other people?***

Comparison is a deadly trap. No doubt Thomas struggled with resentment. Then, v. 26:

The Pathway of Faith:

1. We all have a Unique Timeline

“Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, *and Thomas was with them.* Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.” John 20:26

Eight long days. All of them in HIDING - locked away, afraid for their lives. Eight days listening to everyone else who had their own little magical Jesus experience. “Oh, I was in the garden! Oh, we were walking along the road! Oh, we saw two angels! Oh, we all saw Jesus at one time!” Thomas must have been so annoyed by these stories.

We all have a unique timeline. God's plan for you is customized for YOU.

- For Thomas it was eight days without an experience.
- For Abraham it was 25 years waiting for a baby.
- For Joseph it was 10 years in a foreign land, 2 of them in prison.
- For Moses it was 40 years as a shepherd in the wilderness.
- For David it was 15 years on the run.
- For Daniel it was a lifetime in Babylon.

Comparison will just lead you to resentment. Faith will lead you to peace. Trust in God's unique plan for you. Secondly:

The Pathway of Faith:

2. We all have a Unique Temperament

“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.**” John 20:25

Thomas was an I-S-T-I. All about the details. All about SEEING FOR HIMSELF. He had a LIST. Today he would be an engineer or an accountant.

Do you hear the DEFIANCE in what he said, “Unless A-B-C-D, I will NEVER believe.” Whoa. Never. That is quite the list of demands. Aside from this story there is no reason to believe that anyone else got to inspect Jesus’ body that closely. Mary, alone in the garden, didn’t even recognize the risen Christ - until he said her name.

Mary was an E-N-F-P. She was probably the exact opposite of Thomas. She didn’t need to touch the scars. She just needed to hear Jesus say her name, “Mary.” Then she grabbed onto the man she had thought was the gardener.

Whatever your temperament, just know that ***God is the One who made you that way.*** He gave you your personality - whether you are an introvert or extrovert; whether you are a thinker or feeler, a type A leader or more of a worker, a planner with lists or a spontaneous responder to opportunities. Jesus knows your temperament and He will meet you exactly where you are.

Isn’t it amazing how merciful Jesus is to come directly to Thomas? Now, keep in mind - not all stories in the Bible are EXEMPLARY. This one is NOT. Just like **Gideon**. Remember in the book of Judges how Gideon kept demanding another sign, another sign. He was basically the COWARD of the Bible. He wouldn’t obey God’s direction unless his sponge was wet and then dry, and the ground was wet when the sponge was dry and then vice versa.

Gideon is NOT an exemplary hero and his story is NOT an example for us to follow - any more than Thomas’ story is. They are stories of UNBELIEF - and are in the Bible to show us HOW NOT TO BEHAVE. But they do demonstrate for us the wonderful grace and mercy of God to meet us in our fear and exactly in our place of weakness.

The Pathway of Faith:

3. We all have a Unique Testimony

“Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:28

Thomas was unique in his timeline, his temperament and therefore his testimony was unique among the apostles. He wanted all the facts in front of him - but once he had those

facts, he fell down before Jesus with **one of the clearest and most powerful statements** of the Lordship and Divinity of Christ!

Here was Thomas' personal declaration of faith "MY Lord and MY God."

How has God worked uniquely in YOUR LIFE? You have a one-of-a-kind story. No one else has a story just like yours. Sure, there may be similarities, but just like your fingerprint and just like your face - there is no one like you. Your experiences and childhood and opportunities and everything about your life has been custom designed for you and you alone. God does not operate with an assembly line approach. **Every one of us is a custom job.** You are no exception.

That is the pathway of faith. Now let's take a look at the process of faith.

The Process of Faith:

1. Turn from your Unbelief

"Stop doubting and believe." John 20:27 (NIV)

The first step toward real faith in Jesus is called **REPENTANCE** - a turning away from your unbelief and sin. You cannot take hold of Jesus in faith until you first let go of your old life of sin.

Thomas was **stuck in his doubt and defiance**. He could have stayed there for the rest of his life. No doubt he felt very justified in his bitterness and resentment. Everyone else had a dramatic experience or two or three with Jesus - but not him. "Woe is me."

Then Jesus showed up and said, **"Stop it. Enough of that.** Their story is not your story. Quit moping around and get to work. I've got things for you to do. But you cannot do them while you hold on to your doubt and defiance. Let go of that and come, follow me.

This is certainly true when you first get saved. You have to make a firm and decisive break with your past - turn from that rebellion and unbelief and come to Jesus. But it is also ***applies to the believer in areas of growth.*** We can get stuck like Thomas.

- **Comparison** with others will get you stuck in a cesspool of resentment and self-pity.
- **Doubts and demands** will get you stuck in a holding pattern. God does not negotiate with terrorists. Don't be a terrorist and give God ultimatums. He doesn't like them.

- **Idolatry** will get you stuck in strongholds of sin - anything you come to love more than God can become an idol in your life. Until you LET IT GO you will not be able to fully take hold of Jesus.
- **Distractions** and secondary things will get you stuck in a pattern of ineffectiveness. There is nothing wrong with a little sports, a little TV, a little shopping, a little travel - but when those things become your LIFE you will be stuck until you STOP and make a change.

That is called REPENTANCE. It is the first step in the PROCESS of faith - which is a lifelong process. We need to repent every day. We need **to live a life of repentance** - constantly letting go of our selfishness and sin so we can get a better grip on Jesus. B:

The Process of Faith:

2. Profess the Truth of Jesus' Identity

“These are written that you may believe that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” John 20:30

We have spent the last few weeks studying the Triune nature of God. We have spent this whole year walking through the Bible to see ***how the whole Bible points to Jesus*** - the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is the central truth in the universe. This is the great mystery revealed by the New Testament. This is the key that unlocks the whole Bible: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

The Gospel can be summed up in just four words: ***“Jesus Christ is Lord.”*** That’s how Paul does it in Romans 1. It’s how John sums it up here and how Mark opens his gospel. It is the consistent message of the apostles as they preach in the book of Acts. Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of Israel, is the Lord of heaven and earth. He IS the covenant God of the Old Testament. He is the Creator and Sovereign King over all things.

This is what you must ***PROFESS to be saved*** AND it is what you must believe and hold on to in order to grow in your faith. Romans 10 says

The Process of Faith:

2. Profess the Truth of Jesus' Identity

“If you *confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

It is NECESSARY to VOICE your faith - to SAY it out loud; to SING the truth and PRAY the truth. This is true to be saved initially, but brother, sister, we NEVER graduate from the

gospel. The whole Christian life is one of repentance and faith. We increasingly turn away from our sin so we can increasingly TRUST in Jesus. The more you know who Jesus is the more of yourself you can give to Him.

If you feel stuck in your faith journey, study the character and claims of Christ. Rehearse the truth of who Jesus is and **SPEAK THAT TRUTH** in your home, in your Community Group, in your relationships with non-believers - every chance you get! Sing the truth - in your car, in your bathroom, wherever you go - and especially here in church!

Of course you also have to believe it in your heart as Romans 10 also says.

The Process of Faith:

3. Trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord

“For it is *with your heart that you believe and are justified* and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Romans 10:10 (NIV)

Speaking and believing mutually reinforce one another. If you don't SAY IT aloud very often your internal faith will grow weaker. And if you don't believe in Jesus sincerely in your heart, you won't speak about him very often. Conversely, if you DO speak and sing and pray often about Jesus you will find your faith in Him growing. And as your faith in Jesus grows - you know what will happen? You'll speak more about Him!

Here is the powerful profession of Thomas when he finally got to see the Risen Christ:

The Process of Faith:

3. Trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord

“Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:28

Notice how **PERSONAL** this is. MY Lord and MY God. The statement completed the internal faith. The sinner's prayer does not include any magic words - but for a sinner to be saved he does have to say some words. It could be as simple as these four - “My Lord and my God!” It could be the faith of a child, “Jesus, forgive me for my sins.” It could be the simple cry of the thief on the cross: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

The words themselves may and do vary - but the heart behind them is always **a heart that trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord**. You cannot trust in Jesus as Savior without also trusting Him as Lord. He will not, indeed He cannot forgive your sins without making you His Own. And Jesus cannot make you His own until you turn from your sin and old life and fall down before Him, begging Him to make you anew.

Turn from sin. Profess the Truth of Jesus' identity. Trust in Him as your Savior and Lord. This is the process by which you get saved in the first place. And it is the process by which you grow in your faith every day, every week, every month.

"Stop doubting and believe." How do you need to trust in Jesus as YOUR savior and Lord today? Where are you doubting in His grace or power?

Look at the Product of true saving faith:

The Product of Faith:

- The blessing of Peace with God now

"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" John 20:26

When you have an encounter with the Risen Christ, **these are the words He speaks to you. "Peace."** The peace of Christ removes your doubts. It removes your fears. It removes your unbelief and worry. And the reason all of those things go away is because ***the peace of Christ REMOVES YOUR SIN.***

Our deepest fear and our biggest problem in life is our conflict with God and the fact that we all deserve His wrath and judgment for our sin. Only Jesus can speak PEACE into this conflict. **Only Jesus can RECONCILE us to God** - because only Jesus has given up His life to pay for this peace. Listen to Colossians 1:

Jesus Purchased our Peace

"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Colossians 1:19-20

Jesus Purchased our Peace

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him." Colossians 1:21-22

Jesus died to absorb all of God's wrath against sin. All of it. That's what the cross was about. Jesus made peace for us through the blood of His cross. He was forsaken by the Father so we could be accepted. "He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our sins - the punishment that brought us PEACE was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53).

That is the blessing God promises **all believers RIGHT NOW**. You can have peace with God immediately. Again, this is true when you first get saved - but it is also God's promise to the believer every day of our lives.

He is working - right now - to present you HOLY AND BLAMELESS. That can be a painful process of refining, chipping away our many rough edges. But in the midst of whatever refining and pain we're going through we can and should have PEACE. Hear Jesus saying that to you today - ***"My peace I give you."***

Saving faith gives us the blessing of PEACE with God now and:

The Product of Faith:

- The Promise of Life with Jesus Forever

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed... by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:29,31

We can not only experience the joy of reconciliation with God right now as our loving heavenly Father, but **we are promised that experience FOREVER**. By believing in Jesus we can have LIFE in His name. John 17 says, "THIS IS eternal life - that they KNOW YOU, the One True God." We begin to experience that life now, but only as through a dark and clouded window. One day we will see God face to face. And that will be true and unending joy.

This is our blessed hope - our wonderful assurance. ***We will live forever with the Lord***. We will enjoy His glorious presence for all of eternity. All of our sins will be completely washed away, every tear wiped from our eyes, every illness and ache and pain totally gone FOREVER.

Every good thing we experience in life now is just a tiny foretaste of the joy that will be ours forever.

As we close today I want to challenge all of us to ***consider how the Lord is calling us to strengthen our faith***. How is the Lord Jesus saying to you, "Stop doubting and believe"? Several of our leaders will move to the outside edges of the room. Men and women of faith will be standing all around us - praying for us.

- You may want to approach one of these leaders individually or as a couple and ask them to pray for you.
- You may want to go to the prayer board and write out a prayer of adoration, confession, thanksgiving or supplication.

- You may want to kneel where you are seated - or just bow your head and ask Jesus to strengthen your faith in Him - to help you to trust Him more.

Let's pray. Then we will stand together and sing:

In Christ Alone