

Doubting Thomas

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at the passage that we read earlier. We're going to focus on verses 24 to 29. The word should come up on the screen as I'm going through it so you can follow along there.

Alternatively, if you do have a Bible open, then do follow along as we go through it. I'm just going to pray and ask for God's help as we look at the passage together.

Lord Jesus, we do thank you once again for your word. We thank you that it is the primary and designated way that you have decided to speak to us.

We pray for our own hearts that you'd help us as we look at this passage, that you'd help us by the power of your Holy Spirit to understand what it means and to teach our hearts so that we would be taught and challenged, corrected, and that we would be equipped to serve and to love you all the days of our life.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now I don't know if when you were growing up you had a nickname, being called Robin.

[1 : 10] I had quite a few. Sometimes it was just catchphrases that people said, but as you can imagine, I quite often from a very young age I was Robin Redbreast.

And then as I got a little bit older into my sort of 11 or 12, it was here Robin. Where's Batman? As you can imagine that kind of it was funny the first time after a few times it gets quite tired.

But yeah, also for some reason I got called Rambo. It's nothing like Robin. And I still get, people still call me after the footballer, I still get called Rabinio.

Now I don't know if you had one of those but I think while at school we all remember nicknames that people had, that people got called. Thankfully a lot of my nicknames they sort of died after I left school, which I'm quite relieved as an adult.

I don't get called Robin Redbreast as I'm sure you can imagine. But here in this passage there's a character trait of the guy that we're looking at, Thomas. And we know what this guy is famous for.

[2 : 17] He's famous for doubting. He's given a nickname that has stuck with him for over 2000 years, Doubting Thomas. And not only that, it's still used as a phrase today, isn't it, about someone who doubts, or is a little bit cynical or perhaps pessimistic.

You're a bit of a Doubting Thomas. Don't be such a Doubting Thomas. Anyone who expresses any kind of doubt, poor old Thomas from 2000 years ago gets lumped with them.

Which, let's be honest, it's a little bit unfair on him, isn't it? Because really, really, I think the truth is we need to change this guy's nickname.

We need to change him. Instead of doubting Thomas, he should be called Honest Thomas.

Because the reason, the real reason I think he should be called Honest Thomas, is he articulates something that we've all at one point, or another thought, especially about Christianity.

We've all doubted at some point about the truth of Christianity. Why am I saying that? The reason I'm saying that we've all doubted is because the central claim of the Christian faith of Christianity is that a dead man, a dead man, who by the way was definitely dead, that is beyond doubt, was no question, he was definitely dead.

[3 : 43] Just a few pages before in the Gospel of John that we're looking at in chapter 19 verse 33, we read, but when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. In our modern understanding of the human body, we know that when a dead body, we know that the separation of blood and water scientifically is when the red blood cells and the plasma separate, which only happens in the stillness of a dead body.

John writes, water, which to those, for him at the time, plasma would look like water. So from the description we have, we know that Jesus was dead.

But the central claim of Christianity is that a dead man walks out of his own grave. That is the central claim of Christianity. It is not surprising that Thomas doubts.

It is not surprising that Thomas doubts. So we're going to be thinking about that this morning because I know that we're in the same place as Thomas sometimes.

[5 : 00] We all have been and experienced the same thoughts that Thomas had. So we're going to be thinking that. Three things we're going to be thinking about. Jesus meets us where we're at. Jesus' resurrection proves who he is and that Jesus promises eternal happiness.

He meets us where we're at. His resurrection proves who he is and he promises happiness. So firstly, Jesus meets us where we're at. The first thing I want to think through is really that Jesus is meeting Thomas where he's at.

Quick reminder, what I've just said about Christianity, just to remind us, just said this. The central claim of Christianity is that a dead man on the third day after he died, when rigor Mortis would have set in, Friday day one, Saturday day two, and then third day, Sunday, Easter Sunday, a dead man stood up and walked out of his own grave.

He was resurrected, raised a new life from death, this man being Jesus Christ. This is the moment that defines the Christian faith and we refer to it as the resurrection.

And so when I say we read about Thomas' initial response to his friends, we understand why he says that. We understand because we probably thought that too.

[6 : 20] The apostle Paul acknowledges that Christianity hinges on the resurrection being true. Earlier in chapter 20, before we even get to Thomas, Mary meets Jesus, then we see his friends meet Jesus, two of his particular friends, John and Peter, and then we see other of his friends meet Jesus.

But what do we know is Thomas isn't there. Verse 24, you can look with me, it should come on the screen now. Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. Verse 25, the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. And you look, just look with Thomas' response to them, but he said to them, unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Thomas once had evidence. He has a list of conditions that have to be met for him to believe and wear a bit like that.

And are there things, conditions, that you would need God to do for you to believe and trust in him today?

[7 : 46] Thomas' conditions, they are a bit strange out there, slightly gory. He wants to touch his wounds. It might seem slightly strange to us why you'd want to do that.

But what he's really saying to his friends that he's talking to, what he's really saying is, I want to know if this man, the one they claim is risen, is the same man that I saw die.

That's what he's saying, I want to know if this man, the one they claim is risen, is the same man I knew who died. Now before I started following Jesus myself, there was a time when I was in the same place as Thomas.

And I'd express my doubts to other Christians, maybe you've done that. But if you've ever voiced your doubts, you can get a whole mixture of responses from Christians, can't you?

I had that sometimes when I questioned people, they were approachable and listened, which was great. But other times, and maybe you had this, that my doubts were met with a bit of hostility.

[8 : 58] I don't know whether they felt like I was attacking and trying to undermine them, maybe I was. But I remember the distinct feeling like I was being told to be quiet, that I was a bit simple, that I didn't know what I was talking about.

Quite honestly, if you've experienced that, it's patronising, isn't it? Honestly, those responses, when people respond to you like that, doesn't help you in your doubts.

This is really important, because the way a Christian or a follower of Jesus talks about their faith, it does say something about the religion that they claim to be a part of.

If you meet a Christian who is angry, hostile, condescending or impatient, it stands to reason that you'd probably think, maybe that's what Christianity is all about.

If Jesus is real, maybe he's like that as well. Can I just reassure you, I want to reassure you, whatever experience, whether you've been here, whether in this church you're part of the furniture

or whether you're coming here for the first time, whatever experience you have with church or with Christians, that Jesus is not angry if you have doubts or questions?

[10:15] You know how I know that? Because when he meets Thomas, we read eight days later, look how he speaks with him. Peace be with you.

Verse 27, then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe.

He's not angry. Thomas had lived alongside Jesus as one of his closest friends for three years and had heard Jesus say to him repeatedly he was going to rise.

You might expect, you might expect that perhaps Jesus would demand belief from Jesus. But he doesn't flip out.

He doesn't tut or sigh. He doesn't say, you idiot Thomas, don't you remember what I said, weren't you listening? That's not what he does. He doesn't humiliate him in front of everyone or try and win an argument or put him down or make him feel small.

[11:19] There is something here very special and beautiful about the way he draws faith and belief out of it. Simply, simply by meeting Thomas where he's at.

See what he's saying? Yes, Thomas. It's me. It really is me. I'm here, look at me. My hands, my sides. Thomas, will you dare, will you dare to believe?

Because Jesus loves to reassure the doubters. He's not stern, demanding or unsympathetic. And whatever thoughts you have about Jesus today, he is prepared to meet you where you're at today.

If you're a doubter, he comes to reassure you. But equally, whatever the issue that's going on in your heart, if you're suffering, he comes to comfort you. If you're weak, he comes to strengthen. If you've got low self-esteem, he comes to acknowledge and accept you.

He's not stern. He meets you with where you're at with what you need. He actually comes to meet you in the dance and the complexities and the struggles of life.

[12:37] Can I suggest something? Can I suggest something whether you've known Jesus for a long time or not at all, or the very early days of your faith? But if you're struggling with doubt, why not challenge Jesus, not in an irreverent way, not in a testing way, but with reverence, come to him and ask him to meet you with where you're at.

Ask him to come and show himself to you. It might go something like this. Really simple. If you're real Jesus, show me.

Show me. Will you dare to believe like Thomas did?

Okay, secondly, Jesus' resurrection proves who he is, proves who he is. Recently, I've been working my way through a series. I've actually stopped watching it now because it gets a little bit dark.

I was working my way through a series called Breaking Bad. I know I'm a little bit late to the party, but if you've watched any of it, I'll just tell you, if you haven't, I'll tell you the premise, because it's a fascinating story.

[13:53] It's about this guy called Walter White, and the premise for the series that he finds out in the very first episode that he has stage 3 lung cancer and it's spread to his lymph nodes.

But because of the way that his health insurance works in the States, this guy, Walter White, he doesn't have any money either to pay for his treatment or to provide for his family after he's died, and his wife's also pregnant.

But he wants to provide for them. He desperately wants to have enough money so that after he's gone, he knows that he's got this illness, he wants to make sure that after he's gone that there's going to be enough money for his wife to live off.

But instead of going through respectable means, he decides after seeing one of his relatives do a drugs bust that he sees that there's a lot of money to be made in making and selling illegal drugs. So he goes into it, he's a chemistry teacher, and he goes into making these drugs and then selling them. But the interesting thing is right from the first episode, the issue, the whole series, I think there's like 8 series or something like that, but when you think about the issue, the whole series begins because it's the prospect of Walter's death right in front of him.

[15:15] That's the whole series is about that, that's where it starts. And what we see is how in his life is how the fear of death, what it can do to a man and what it can do to his family, and it tears them apart.

And it touches something as you watch it because when you watch it, you understand something of the pain that Walter and his family experience.

Because we know that, that death and the prospect of it, the grief and the pain, doesn't just affect you internally but actually tears you apart. That's why as a people, as humanity, we have a universal hatred, and I think that's the right word to use, we have a universal hatred of death.

Nobody wants to talk about it. You want to kill the atmosphere in a party, start talking about death, you'll get, people will leave you, people will start just moving away from you because everybody hates it and will do anything to avoid it.

But here's the interesting thing about it. We've lived for so long with that as what we assume to be our natural trajectory, that we think that that's the natural order of the world.

[16:33] We've come to believe that the natural order of how things are supposed to go is that you die. But if that's true, why are we still struggle to accept it?

Now, lots of people will say it's because of the pain and the suffering, and don't get me wrong, of course that's a part of it, but the real reason deep down is that we all know that this isn't the way things should be.

We know that. We know that there is something wrong in our world and that the death, pain, suffering, corruption, war, disease, famine, natural disasters, those terminal diagnoses, that there is something wrong and we know it.

The reason we know it is because we were made for something more. And the answer to what we're made for is right here in this passage we're looking at.

The answer comes in Thomas' response to seeing the resurrected Jesus. Jesus just said, Thomas, look it's me, I'm here. Thomas says, verse 28, my Lord and my God.

[17:41] It's really important what this means. It means that Jesus is risen from the dead. And it means that death itself can be overcome.

That's what it means. It means that actually the intuition that we have that we were made for something more, we're actually right about our world, that there is something wrong with it and that death is not the natural order.

Because Jesus puts death in a place, he beats it with his own death by rising above it. Death can't do, do your best against Jesus.

Do your best. When Thomas makes the risen resurrected, Lord Jesus, when he sees the thing that he fears the most, just like us, death itself being defeated by this man who stands before him, he sees Jesus for who he really is, Lord and God.

My Lord and my God. And there's two things I want us to notice. Firstly, did you notice that Thomas just has to see him? Did you notice actually that there's no indication that Thomas actually does touch?

[18:48] Remember the thing he asked for? He said, I want to touch. But one look is enough. He sees Jesus and acknowledges him that sight is enough. And we know that's why the case, because I said at the start, dead people don't normally walk out the grave, but here is Jesus stood with Thomas, with the holes in his hands and his feet.

Thomas is saying in his words, this is the living God, because only the living God could do this. This is the living God, because only the living God could do this.

The second thing I want us to notice is the relationship Thomas has with Jesus. He says, my Lord and my God. You see how personal, how intimate this moment is between them.

It's not your Lord or a God, but my. My Lord and my God. In this one phrase, he acknowledges the identity of Jesus, but his relationship to him.

You're mine. You belong to me. You're my Lord and you're my God. What we witness here is that when Jesus meets the resurrected Jesus, it changes him from a doubting cynic to a man of trust and of faith.

[20:00] And the turning point is this moment. Now, I've mentioned before, we all have different levels of exposure to Christianity. Some of us a lot, some of us not so much, some of us will have grown up hearing about it.

Others, this might be relatively new, spiritually speaking, we're all in different places. But put into that to one side for the moment. Whatever your past, whether you're a goody two shoes or a rogue, whether you've come here with lots of doubts and cynicism or whether you're open minded, whether you think you've heard it all before and you know it already, or whether this is the first time

you've come to church, whatever your background, the living resurrected Lord Jesus wants to have the same relationship, the same friendship that he has with Thomas.

He wants to reassure your doubts. He wants you to know it doesn't matter if you know very little, he doesn't care about your past. Jesus Christ was both Lord and God once have a relationship with you.

And he actually offers you the same thing. In the same way he defeated death, he promises for all those who have a relationship with him to defeat death for them too.

There is something wrong. Death is not natural. Jesus promises you eternal life today. This is the good news of the Gospel. This is the Gospel.

[21 : 28] The Gospel of Jesus Christ and it's offered to everyone who would put their trust in him. So we thought, firstly, about Jesus meets us where we're at.

We thought about the resurrection proves that who Jesus is. Finally we looked at Jesus promises eternal happiness. I want to look at the final thing that Jesus says. He responds to Thomas' acknowledgement by saying something that, at first read it does sound a little bit of a put down. But what he says, it's actually for, it's for Thomas. What we realize is when we read it, it's for anyone who isn't privy to the same experience that Thomas had.

Because you might be thinking, perhaps. Well that was great for Thomas. I'm thrilled for him. What an experience. But how does that help me?

2000 years later, of course Thomas could believe he saw it with his own eyes. That's what I want. Jesus speaks into that very issue because Jesus says to Thomas, have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

[22 : 49] I take that to mean, I take that to mean that for those who trust in Jesus yet have not seen him, in the flesh, are in somewhere, in some way more blessed than Thomas'.

I take that to mean that. And so the important thing to consider then is what does Jesus mean by blessed? What does he mean? Very recently, in our own day and age, the word blessed has sort of lost its meaning.

It's become a popular hashtag on social media when people seem to announce anything. It has hashtag blessed. However, in the first century, the word for blessed was more, it's more of a state of being and it actually has the connotation it also means to be happy.

So we could read it. We could read. Happy are those who have not seen and yet have believed. I'm going to tell you a quick personal story. When I was 18, I went to university in Newcastle.

My mum and dad drove me to my new digs, helped me to unload and get myself settled. But then as I was leaving, my dad passed me a letter and said, open it once we've gone.

[24 : 09] So we said I could buy some, off they went and die. When upstairs opened it, now don't worry, I'm not going to relate everything that was written. It was very personal. But the last line he wrote was this, try and stay happy all your life.

It's pretty good advice, isn't it? It's pretty good advice. I think it's advice that we might want to tell all our children and young people. And it showed me what my dad wanted for me.

Jesus says, blessed, happy are those who have not seen and yet believed. And there is a difference between what Jesus and my dad says, because to try and stay happy, which still gave me wrong is good advice, but to try and stay happy suggests that I've got to do something to make it happen.

But what Jesus suggests is that if you have seen him in the flesh, if you haven't seen Jesus in the flesh and yet you believe you will have a, you'll be in a state of blessed happiness for the rest of your days, eternally.

Jesus suggests that true happiness is not an emotive high or a plane that you're trying to reach from some experience. Now he's saying much more than that. He's saying, this is what you'll be.

[25 : 25] This will be part of your identity, that you will be eternally blessed and happy. That's what Jesus means by blessed.

That there is a greater blessedness, happiness for those who trust in him and put their trust in what the Bible says about him. But what the Bible says within, that is what we put our trust in.

Some people call religious faith blind faith because we haven't seen Jesus in the flesh. And therefore there must be something mystical or paranormal about what Christians believe.

But faith is not a mystical thing. It is not a mystical thing because it is based in historical fact and eyewitness testimony. Let me explain this briefly for us.

Everything you read in the Gospels is eyewitness testimony. In fact, later on in one of Paul's letters, we read that Paul writes that 500 people saw Jesus alive after his death.

[26 : 25] They were eyewitnesses. That's where the Bible gets its credibility. I just want to illustrate what this might look like, how we might understand that in today's world.

I want you to imagine, and this is a far-fetched scenario, so you're going to have to go with me on it. Imagine it's the Hebkele Festival next weekend. I think it's next weekend.

We've seen it on the TV or we've seen the adverts. We know they get loads of acts. But I want you to imagine in a very strange scenario that next week at the festival there is a surprise guest.

There's a surprise guest. It's all hush-hush. And there's only 500 allowed in to a special tent that's all closed. No phones allowed. The first 500 who were there were queuing up.

It's a risk, isn't it? Because who's it going to be? The first 500 are there and they're allowed in. The special guest is helicoptered in, and then they're helicoptered immediately after the gigs finished.

[27 : 25] And as they're coming out the door, people are asking, who was it? Who was it? And it says, you'll never guess who it was. It was Paul McCartney. They're like, wow, no way. Paul McCartney at the Hebkele Festival. I can't believe that.

And the second person comes through. The first person just told us it was Paul McCartney. Was it Paul McCartney? Yeah, it was Paul McCartney. Third person, Paul McCartney. Fourth person, you get the picture. We go through 500.

Every 500 people said it was Paul McCartney. Now, which one of us, after all 500 people came out, would say, I don't believe it was Paul McCartney.

You wouldn't say that, would you? You wouldn't say that to all 500 people who'd just seen him.

Even if two people, three people, four people, told you who it was, to me who it was, I've attempted to believe that that's who it was in the 10. 500 people saw Jesus alive after his death.

Faith is not mystical. It is based on fact. 500 people and Thomas is one of them. The dead man who has risen his Jesus Christ, he's still alive today. You can trust the Bible.

[28 : 44] It is through their testimonies that we come to know him. He's alive today and what he offers them, he offers each of us an eternal and forever blessed happiness, a relationship with your Lord and your God by believing who he is through what we read from what they've written.

And so as we come in for landing today through the pages of the Bible, as we've read through this, let me tell you, you have met with the Jesus of history. You have met him today through the pages of the Bible.

Will you be like Thomas and allow Jesus to reassure your doubts? Now maybe you're not quite at that stage and you still have questions. Can I encourage you to explore or investigate the truths of who Jesus is?

Maybe if you've been a Christian for years and you're going through maybe a time of doubt, that doubts have resurfaced, can I explore you to reinvestigate the truths of who Jesus is?

There are three options how you might go about that. Talk to a Christian you know. You could get hold of Mark's Gospel. Mark's Gospel, you could read it from cover to cover in 15 minutes.

[30 : 00] Why not do that? What is 15 minutes in your life? You could read it to cover to cover. We thought about that Jesus comes to reassure the doubtless. Jesus' resurrection proves who he is.

The faith is not a mystical thing. It is on fact and that Jesus promises a forever blessed happiness. He comes into this world. He came into this world to have a relationship with you and to give you life instead of death and he won that for you by rising from the grave.

By walking out of his own grave, he won that for you. That's right.