

# Followers of the Way

## Doubting Thomas-Seeing is Believing

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### John 20:19-31

Seeing is believing! We all know this phrase, we have maybe used it ourselves, and probably accept it as true.

Seeing is believing. This is what most people think, isn't it? But this passage from John's Gospel tells us otherwise.

It is the famous story of 'Doubting' Thomas. This is what made Thomas famous; Thomas is to doubt, what Judas is to betrayal. But I'm glad to say Thomas ended up a lot better off than Judas.

Can you just imagine the conversation among the apostles?

'Doubting Thomas, Doubting Thomas! That's all I ever get. I don't hear anyone say 'Foot in the Mouth' Peter, or 'Money Grabbing' Matthew. Oh no, but me - it's Doubting Thomas every time. It's not fair!

It's *not* fair, because Thomas is more than simply a doubter, as I hope we'll see.

Our passage begins on that first Easter day with the Disciples behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Yet Jesus was able to come and stand among them.

He offered them the familiar greeting - 'Shalom - Peace be with you.' In saying this he was allaying their fears, both their fear

of the Jews and fear that he might rebuke them for their behaviour on Good Friday.

But Jesus doesn't deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities, but always according to his grace.

After this assurance Jesus commissioned his Disciples - 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' (v.21)

He then empowered them for the task by breathing on them and saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (v.22)

The word translated as 'breath' and 'Spirit' is one and the same. This reminds us how at the beginning God breathed life into Adam. So here Jesus breathes new life into his disciples.

The Great Commission is found in all four Gospel accounts in various forms -

Luke says the disciples are to be witnesses;

Mark that they are to go into all the world and preach the gospel;

Matthew states they are to make disciples of all nations;

while according to John they are to be sent just as Jesus was sent by his Father.

The Great Commission, however, is not only for those first disciples, but for all who believe. The apostles were entrusted with the gospel and they passed it on. Each succeeding generation has had the responsibility to defend and propagate the gospel. We have that responsibility in our day and generation. Not just ordained clergy, but each individual Christian.

That first Easter Sunday evening Thomas wasn't with the other disciples. We're not told why and there's no point speculating. But we do know that when the rest told him they had seen the Risen Lord, he didn't believe them.

He demanded proof! **v.25 READ**

Thomas would not accept the word of others, he wanted the personal experience. He wanted to see the Lord for himself

Thomas had a nickname, no not the one we give him - Doubting Thomas, but Didymus, meaning twin. But whose twin was he? I believe I know -

Tom Deininger

*I am a twin of Thomas, and so are you. We all have our doubts. Don't we also at times refuse to believe and insist that God proves himself to us?*

I've had a Doubting Tomas moment. Young Christian in 1980s.. charismatic movement.. gifts of the Spirit.. John Wimber Derek Prince.. 'Blessed are those who have not seen..'

Have you had a Doubting Thomas moment? Perhaps you still do.

Can doubt and faith co-exist? They can, as long as you don't let doubt overcome faith. We've all heard of Billy Graham, the most famous and most heard evangelist ever. But how many know the name Charles Templeton?

Templeton and Graham began as partners in evangelism, and at one time it was thought he would outshine his colleague However, doubts about his faith and the reliability of the Bible

began to flood his mind. He shared this with Billy Graham, who also began to doubt.

Torn between faith and doubt, Graham went up on a mountainside to be alone before God. With a Bible in his hand he fell to his knees and cried out, 'Father, I'm going to accept this as Thy Word – by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.'

Billy Graham's faith was stronger than doubt and he became a world renowned evangelist. Charles Templeton's doubts overcame his faith, and he died a relatively unknown, broken man with no assurance of God's love.

Thomas has many twins!

He didn't have to wait long before his request for proof was granted. The very next Sunday he joined the others in the same house, again behind locked doors.

Once more Jesus stood among them and greeted them with his peace. This time he spoke directly to Thomas **v.27 READ**

Jesus knew about Thomas' demands for proof, and that alone should have been proof enough, but still he offered him his hands and side. 'Stop doubting and believe,' said Jesus.

The traditional translation 'doubting' as used in the NIV is apparently not the best one.

The word literally means 'faithless' or 'unbelieving'. The New American Standard version renders it 'be not unbelieving but believing.'

There is a subtle difference between doubt and unbelief.

Doubt is an intellectual problem.

Unbelief is a moral problem.

The doubter says, 'I cannot believe, I want to but I'm overwhelmed with problems and questions.'

The unbeliever says, 'I will not believe unless you give me the evidence I demand.'

Thomas got the evidence he required. He saw with his own eyes the Risen Lord. He was given the opportunity to touch Jesus' wounds, an opportunity he didn't need.

For Thomas seeing was enough. Seeing was believing.

And he made one of the greatest confessions of faith in the whole of Scripture - 'My Lord and my God.'

This was the high point of faith, Thomas dramatically moves from a position of unbelief to unbridled belief in the Risen Lord Jesus. This is the climax of John's Gospel where belief has been emphasised all the way through.

In the Prologue the promise is made to those who believe in his name that they have the right to become children of God.

The most famous verse - 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3:16)

And the purpose of John's Gospel is given in **vv.30-31 READ**

Thomas' confession of Jesus as 'My Lord and my God' brings us right back to the beginning - 'In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God.' (Jn 1:1)

So Thomas has moved from doubt to faith, from unbelief to belief. For him seeing truly was believing.

So does this mean that only those who saw the Risen Christ with their own eyes could believe?

Of course not! Jesus was soon to return to his Father, and then no-one would be able to see his resurrected body. As Jesus himself said **v.29 READ**

The vast majority of Christians have not seen the Risen Christ and yet have believed. So if seeing is not believing, what is the key to our belief?

We need to turn to Romans to answer that question. Paul writes, 'faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.' (Rom 10:17)

Therefore for each generation since the apostles, hearing is believing. We believe because we heard the message of the gospel from our parents, Sunday School teacher, minister, friends.

We have had the privilege of hearing the gospel and responding to it by believing in Jesus Christ. Yet not all have heard the gospel message.

There are many people with no Bible in their native language. Many who have never heard the name Jesus.

These people need to be reached; missionaries need to be sent to live among them, learn their language and preach the gospel so they can hear and have the opportunity to believe.

But it's not only countries overseas that require missionaries, it's here at home also. We have a missionfield on our own doorstep.

There are people we work with, are educated with us, living beside us who never go to Church, never open a Bible. How are they to hear the message unless, as Paul says, someone preaches to them?

If they don't come to Church or their children to Sunday School then they won't hear the Minister. And if they are not members the Minister won't know to visit them.

But if they are your neighbours, or work colleagues, or classmates then you have an ideal opportunity to speak with them. Now I don't mean you preach at them, but witness to them through your friendship - invite them home for a meal, invite them to come to Church.

In a survey more people said they came to faith through the witness of a friend than in any other way.

If we want to see our Church grow and our country change then we need to realise that the Great Commission Jesus gave his disciples applies to us also.

We too are his witnesses

We too are to preach the gospel

We too are to make disciples

Thomas went from doubt to faith, from unbelief to belief. But he didn't just stop there, he obeyed the Lord's command to go and make disciples of all nations.

In the state of Kerala, South West India over half the Christians have the surname Thomas. Why? Because Thomas travelled to India to preach the gospel and the Church that bears his name, the Mar Thoma Church, exists there to this day.

Are we, who like Thomas confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God, prepared like him to go where God sends us, to proclaim his message? Whether it be to India, or to our next door neighbour?