

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL JESUS SAVES

JESUS THE RISEN KING

The Risen King and the Doubter

Today's lesson on Jesus, the Risen King, takes to His encounter with a doubter. Christian apologist, Gary Habermas, distinguishes between three kinds of doubt in his book, *The Thomas Factor*.

1. Factual Doubt – comes from questioning the truthfulness of Christianity due to biblical, historical, scientific, philosophical and logical concerns. This type of doubt can be conquered through reading the Bible and prayer. We will look at such an example in this lesson.
2. Emotional Doubt – emerges from one's own moods and feelings. Emotional doubt can stem from such things as anxiety and depression, peer pressure, one's own sinfulness, hypocrisy in the church, a tragic life event, or need for spiritual growth. Habermas says that emotional doubt can masquerade as factual doubt. I accepted Christ at a very young age and I am confident that my conversion experience was genuine. However, in my youth, every time I heard a pastor explain how to be saved, I would pray repeating the steps 'just in case'. As I grew in my faith, this emotional doubt disappeared. Jesus said in **Matthew 18:2-3 (ESV)** ² *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them* ³ *and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*
3. Volitional Doubt – comes from a decision or act of will to forsake the truth. This is the most serious of doubts because it can stem from stubbornness, arrogance or lack of repentance. The solution is a personal awakening rooted in Christ. **Ephesians 5:13-14 (ESV)** ¹³ *But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,* ¹⁴ *for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

If we are willing to admit it, we all have doubts regarding our faith at times. In fact, doubt is a normal and natural part of faith in God. Even biblical heroes experienced doubt: Abraham, Moses, Sarah, Jeremiah, Elijah, David, John the Baptist, Peter, and in today's lesson – Thomas the one whose name sadly has become synonymous with doubt. Scripture reveals that even during their doubts, all of these biblical examples remained connected to God.

In the case of some lives, doubt has been the catalyst that led them to faith in God. Randy Croft tells of the example of Lee Strobel who was an award winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune. For most of his life he was an atheist. But after his wife became a Christian, he started to see positive changes in her life. So, Lee decided to attend church with her, partly because he was curious and mostly because he wanted to poke holes in her faith.

However, in that worship service he was confronted for the first time with Jesus' claims. And after that service he made a decision. He says in one of his books: "While I didn't believe the Gospel was true, I was convinced that if it was the truth, it had tremendous implications for my life. So I vowed to check out the Christian faith as a journalist would. I'd separate myth from reality and see what remained. I'd examine the evidence and see for myself." He began his search with this prayer: "God, I don't even believe you are there, but if you are, I want to find you. I really do want to know the truth. So if you exist, please show yourself to me." In that moment Lee Strobel moved from an atheist, an agnostic, to a true spiritual seeker who honestly sought after the truth. After two years of intensive research, Lee Strobel became a Christian and now serves on the staff at the very church where he first heard the claims of Christ in the Chicago area.

As we turn our focus to Thomas who was not present for the encounter the disciples had with Jesus on the first day of Christ's resurrection, I want you to keep in mind that even though Thomas did experience doubt, he quickly moved beyond his doubt. I also want to give Thomas some credit. He was not known throughout Jesus' ministry as being a doubter. When Jesus heard of his friend Lazarus's sickness in Bethany, He told the disciples that they would return there, we read in **John 11:8 and 16 (ESV)** ⁸ *The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"* ¹⁶ *So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."* These brave words were not spoken by a chronic doubter.

It is my prayer that if anyone who hears or reads this lesson and is a skeptic when it comes to Jesus that they would diligently and prayerfully search the evidence of God's Word with an open mind for the purpose of discovering the Truth. God's Word promises in **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Mark Buchanan comments, "Indulged too long, doubt becomes nothing more than a parlor game. And for what? Most people can attest—and the Bible confirms—that even spectacular displays of divine power do not always or forever secure faith and faithfulness on the part of those who witness them. Think of all the doubting and questioning the Israelites did time after time even after the Red Sea crossing, bread from heaven and water from a rock provided, and the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day to guide them.

Before Jesus made His way to the cross, He already knew that His own resurrection would not be enough to cause some to believe. **Luke 16:31 (ESV)** ³¹ *He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*"

The trouble with all doubt is a doubting heart can never be really satisfied. No evidence will be finally enough. Doubt demands proof, but then doubts the proof it's given. Some people like to question Jesus for the sake of argument - not because they are seeking the Truth. 'Doubting Thomas' was not

questioning his friends because he wanted to debate. He had a heart that was willing to believe. Warren Wiersbe suggests that Thomas was at first trying to take a ‘scientific approach’ to life. Science is not the road to Jesus – faith is. **Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)** ¹ *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* There is more to this world than just the things we can see and feel. We need to understand that God is God and we are not. We are finite. Our understanding is limited. Look through the eyes of your heart and know that Jesus is alive and because He lives we can too!

Let’s look in on Thomas as he places a condition on belief.

Read John 20:24-25 (ESV) ²⁴ *Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”*

We don’t know why Thomas was absent the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples on Resurrection Day. Perhaps the absence of Thomas in the beginning was part of God’s grand design to deal with “doubters” in the centuries to come.

However, commentators Wiersbe and Ironside both suggest that Thomas is a good warning to all of us not to miss meeting with God’s people on the Lord’s Day (**Heb. 10:22-25**). Because Thomas was not there, he missed seeing Jesus Christ, hearing His words of peace, and receiving His commission and gift of spiritual life. He had to endure a week of fear and unbelief when he could have been experiencing joy and peace! Remember Thomas when you are tempted to stay home from church. You never know what special blessing you might miss!

Thomas wanted to see the physical evidence for himself. Who would blame him for that? He wanted to experience what the others had experienced. We can doubt without remaining doubtful. Doubt encourages us to sharpen our mind and come to an understanding. Doubt can be used to ask questions and get answers. But doubt was never meant to be a permanent way of life.

Jesus’ command to believe.

Read John 20:26-27 (ESV) ²⁶ *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”*

Thomas gets blessed when he shows up the next week. Thomas’ words help us to understand the difference between *doubt* and *unbelief*. Doubt says, “I cannot believe! There are too many problems!” Unbelief says, I *will not* believe unless you give me the evidence I ask for! Wiersbe comments, “It is

not easy to understand the psychology of doubt and unbelief. Perhaps it is linked to personality traits; some people are more trustful than others. Perhaps Thomas was so depressed that he was ready to quit, so he "threw out a challenge" and never really expected Jesus to accept it. At any rate, Thomas was faced with his own words, and he had to make a decision." Let's read Thomas' confession of faith.

Read John 20:28-29 (ESV) ²⁸ *Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Jesus shows his wounds to Thomas, tells Thomas to see, to touch. He sees, but he does not touch. He knows when enough is enough. He was ready to put his doubt and unbelief aside. And here is the real sign that Thomas truly did believe because his belief turned to worship: *'My Lord and my God!'*

Jesus said, *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* That's me! That's you! Jesus is talking about us when we believe in Him! I have not seen the resurrected Lord like Thomas did but I know that I will. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷ *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.* This is what I believe! What we choose to believe is a matter of life and death!

According to Pew Research, roughly 72% of Americans believe in heaven and 58% believe in hell. 89% of Muslims believe in heaven with 76% believing in hell. Among other non-Christians, however, beliefs that there are places of eternal reward and punishment after death are not as widely held. Roughly half or fewer of Hindus, Buddhists and Jews believe in heaven while roughly one-third believe in hell. There are many different opinions out there concerning the afterlife. What matters is what God's Word says. Let's read what Jesus said.

Read Matthew 7:13-15 (ESV) ¹³ *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.* ¹⁴ *For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.* ¹⁵ *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves*

The narrow gate is through Jesus. **John 14:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* You don't have to believe what Jesus said, but you must believe it in order to go to heaven. Do you know that you know – that you know that you are going to heaven? If not, don't you think it is about time to decide? Remember: your choice will be the difference between eternal life and eternal death. Me? I choose Jesus! How about you?