

“FACING THE GIANT OF DOUBT”

by Rom A. Pegram (5/26/19)

The *Greek words for doubt* carry with them the idea of ‘uncertainty’—being unsettled, lacking a firm conviction. I’m going to tell you right up front today that the GIANT of DOUBT is not the opposite of faith, but rather *the opportunity of faith*; doubts are the growing pains of an eager, seeking spirit! To doubt, then, is to be human, like the doubters of the Bible...

- David
- Job
- Solomon (David’s son)
- Jeremiah (the prophet)

Some of the greatest in the Bible ... and they, too, had their special times of dealing with the GIANT of DOUBT. I want to add one more from our scriptures; his name was John the Baptist. Do you remember what Jesus said about him? In Matthew 11:11a (NIV) Jesus states, “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist...” It wasn’t long before Jesus’ pronouncement ... that John, in a dark prison cell, asked (Matt. 11:3, NIV): “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Folks, if this could happen to ‘the greatest [person] born of women,’ then *none of us are exempt*. So, **doubt itself is not sinful, but simply a rite of passage we must all go through on our way to a deeper faith**—a deeper knowledge and love of God. God understands ... and I believe is much happier with those who *ask the questions*, and who *challenge the assumptions*, than those who simply accept second-hand and ‘as-is’ the faith of their ancestors!

TODAY, we need to reinstate that word *doubt* as a friend, not an enemy. But, alongside that, we need to examine another word: *unbelief*. John Drummond (1851-1897) said it this way: “Christ never failed to distinguish between doubt and unbelief...

- Doubt is *can’t believe*; unbelief is *won’t believe*.
- Doubt is *honesty*; unbelief is *obstinacy*.
- Doubt is *looking for light*; unbelief is *content with darkness*.”

We too need to distinguish between these two powerful words—doubt & unbelief...

Folks, John 20 brings us to one of history’s most notorious doubters; his name was Thomas—Thomas Didymus, to be exact. Some say that Didymus means “the Doubter.” However, a closer examination of the word really translates “the Twin.” *Didymus*—the word—travels down through the years and ends up in our language as ‘ditto’—*double*. Now, we don’t know much about Thomas’ twin, but ironically it may also be referring to Thomas as being ‘of two minds’—one definition of *doubt*. In other words, Thomas Didymus—after all—could mean “Thomas the Doubter,” or affectionately “Doubting Thomas” ...

So, why did Jesus choose someone like Thomas? You and I might have looked at him, checked out his attitude, and crossed him off the list ... but Jesus chose Thomas to be one of his closest friends. Perhaps he needed a ‘tough-minded’ disciple in his group (like all churches do)! I can’t help but think of the Upper Room conversation the night before Jesus was betrayed (John 14:4-5) where Jesus said, “You know the way

that leads to the place where I am going.” And Thomas then said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?” Here’s the Thomas of scripture—practical, skeptical, taking nothing for granted—but *not* unbelieving!

Folks, as we begin today, know this: We can have faith and see miracles, just like Thomas did, and still have questions... So, *let’s enter the room right now and learn some timeless secrets of doubt and belief—here, we see doubt as a friend* (John 20:24-29, NLT)...

One of the disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. ²⁵ They told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” ²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” ²⁸ “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed. ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

Let’s begin here...

DOUBT DEVELOPS IN ISOLATION. John 20:24 gives us the key to this passage: *Thomas has missed the fireworks!* Verse 24 shares this: One of the disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came.

Folks, Jesus appeared in the midst of his friends, showed them his wounds, and pointed to the future! Great joy and celebration had broken out in that room—you can just imagine! Jesus, alive? Can it be true? YES ... for he was right there in the flesh ... but, Thomas wasn’t. And that’s the point...

Ten men gathered together in the custom of their day, when someone had died ... just like we do. When someone dies, we gather together at someone’s house, where food is brought in, and reminiscing begins—even gentle laughter, as we remember the good times. Solitude isn’t recommended for anyone. We need each other at times like this...

Thomas, independent thinker that he was, decided to go off on his own ... and he missed not only the encouragement and support, but he missed the miracle, too!

Here’s the point: *Doubt flourishes in the dark!* Darkness feeds doubt (it did for Thomas); daylight has a way of dispelling the worst of it! So, remember that **DOUBT DEVELOPS IN ISOLATION**. And here’s the lesson: Stay connected to people ... and you’re more likely to stay connected to your faith! Also...

DOUBT DEMANDS EVIDENCE. True doubt never turns away from the facts, wherever they may lead; *it stubbornly pursues the truth*. Thomas required a ‘handling of the evidence,’ didn’t he? In Verse 25 we see this: They told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” And Thomas recites the Skeptic’s Creed: “I’ll believe it when I see it!” As a matter of fact, “I’ll believe it when I *feel* it!” Thomas simply insisted on ‘validation! At least he was honest; he called it as he saw it. And, Jesus met Thomas at the point of his questions ... and he’ll do the same for YOU...

DOUBT DRAWS US BACK TO CHRIST! Enter the scene ... 8 DAYS LATER...

For more than a week, the issue of Jesus’ resurrection has separated Thomas and his friends. Have they witnessed the greatest event in history? Or, have they been cruelly deceived? It’s significant that Thomas, despite his reservations, has stuck with the other disciples during that week. And here again is the difference between ‘doubt’ and ‘unbelief.’ Doubt says, “I’ll stay and investigate.” Unbelief stalks away and says, “You guys go on believing whatever you want. I’m out of here!” Listen to this:

Verse 26 (*The MSG*) of John 20 says, “Eight days later, his disciples were again in the room. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said, ‘Peace to you.’” Christianity ultimately comes down to something more than just theological questions; in the end, it’s all about a Person, not a proposition. Thomas was now in the presence of Jesus; that made all the difference in the world to his ‘doubts’ ... so think about this also:

DOUBT DEEPENS OUR FAITH. Consider this if you would: In the years to come, which disciple had the most definitive (recognized as being the most authoritative and of the highest standard) testimony of all? Who else plunged his hand into the side where the spear had been thrust? Who else ran a trembling finger along the wrists ... where the nails had been driven through? ONLY THOMAS, THE DOUBTER, THAT’S WHO...

Verse 27 explains: Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” When it comes to the strength of the disciple’s faith, my money is on Thomas; he knew, for both his eyes and his hands offered consistent evidence—he’d been there ... done that...

Perhaps I’m closer to Thomas than I ever wanted to admit before, for this is the very reason I go to Israel ... and take others with me. I want to see for myself ... that it might deepen my faith ... and the faith of others!

Assurance, folks, is the reward of the insistent seeker—the doubter. Doubt deepens our faith ... and finally...

DOUBT DEFINES OUR FAITH. When you get a question mark all straightened out, what do you have? An exclamation point, of course! Honest questions lead to powerful declarations (v. 28)...

“My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

Have your doubts brought you to that point in your spiritual journey? Have your question marks been straightened out? Folks, learn to confront your doubts head-on, as Thomas did, but handle them carefully, in these ways...

- *Admit your doubts personally...*
 - You must begin with honesty; admit to yourself what's *not* well with your soul...
- *Articulate your doubts clearly...*
 - Put your finger on precisely what it is that's causing your uncertainty, then...
- *Acknowledge your doubts prayerfully...*
 - Christian writer Mark Littleton gives us this formula:
 - Turn your doubts to questions...
 - Turn your questions to prayers...
 - Turn your prayers to God...
 - I believe that this is at least a part of what was going on in the Garden of Gethsemane...
- *Analyze the evidence diligently...*
 - Read “Who Moved the Stone?” sometime—the story of an attorney who set out to disprove Jesus’ resurrection ... only to end up (after the evidence) right back at the Bible story...
- *Accept the limitations humbly...*
 - Accept your own limitations of understanding...
 - Accept the Bible’s limitations; occasionally, the Bible chooses silence...
 - Adjust to the complexity of the universe (how big God is)...

Work diligently, with questions, to reach the point that Thomas did, in your walk with God! “My Lord and my God!” Is that where you are with Jesus today?