

Thomas – “Stop doubting and believe”

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See service sheet online at [www.knbc.org](http://www.knbc.org)

Welcome and Opening Scripture (Ps 145:1-3)

Hymn: MP 656 The Lord is King, lift up your voice

Bible Reading: Psalm 145

Prayer of adoration and praise.

Notices AT-3 update, KNBC Picnic

Communion Is 9:12-14

Main reading: John 20:19-31 (p.1089)

Hymn: MP 632 thank you for the cross

Sermon Thomas – “Stop doubting and believe.”

Hymn MP 258 I am trusting thee Lord Jesus

Close -----

Listen to today’s sermon by clicking on the link at [www.knbc.org](http://www.knbc.org).

The audio file is [21\\_07\\_04.mp3](#).

*Welcome and pray*

- Have you ever missed out on something important? Missed a connection when traveling? Missing the train in Poona, Kerela, safety in numbers etc. It took quite a while to get back on track.
- Have you ever missed an event, you are too late, or didn’t see it important at the time but then others tell you later that that was the key event when so and so came.

Thomas is a man who nearly missed out, when the others gathered he was absent. *Pastors* In the end he didn’t miss out, for him there’s a happy ending. We can learn from everyone in the Bible. Today let us learn from Thomas.

*Firstly who is he?*

Thomas was one of the Apostles. He is called Didymus, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name for a twin. According to the church historian Eusebius his real name was Judas. As with the other Apostles he was probably a Galilean. One record has him born at Antioch but we don’t know, nor do we know the circumstances of his calling.

Thomas is found in the list of the Apostles (Mt 10:3; Mr 3:18; Lu 6:15). Here he is coupled with Matthew who was the son of Alphaeus. These two are always followed by James, who was also the son of Alphaeus, causing some to suppose that these three, Matthew, Thomas, and James, were brothers. ?? He is in another list, those gathered for prayer in Jerusalem awaiting the gift of the Spirit.

*What kind of person was he?*

He is known as ‘doubting Thomas’, is that fair? Jesus says to him – “**Stop doubting and believe.**” So yes, but why? All we know of him is recorded by John in his gospel. There are three incidents which throw strong light on his character. Thomas makes a comment in John 11, he asks a question in John 14, while later in Ch 20 he is the focus of attention. So let us look at these three passages.

*In John 11* (v8,15-16) (do turn to it)

When Jesus, for Lazarus’ sake, proposed to go into Judaea again the disciples remonstrated, 8 **"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"**

But Jesus has something important to show them 14 **So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, and why?? so that you may believe.**

Jesus wants them to believe, as he wants us to believe, to have faith in him so he says v16 **let us go to him.**" and learn the lesson. He had said earlier in v7 to these reluctant disciples “7 **Let us go...**

At this it is Thomas who then turns to the disciples and says with a sigh, and with some sarcasm: **let us also go** x2- what to believe? No but to die.

Is Thomas demonstrating his devotion to Jesus? Is he ready to follow him to death? Is this a sign that he is willing to brave it all? He doesn’t seem to have listened to Jesus’ plain statement that he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. It seems like slowness of mind to believe. He can see no hope of

escape. His natural despondency anticipates death as the certain outcome. Do pick up his fear? "**Let us also go - that we may die with Him.**" Joh 11:16.

Thomas is fearful. How fear can stop faith. Fear has strange effects on people.....

- One person said last week he often felt that he retaliated out of fear,
- Another said she often found herself wanting to fight or flight.
- ✚ Fear stops the ears, stops the reason, stops the trust or faith.

There is an irony in Thomas' statement "**Let us also go; that we may die with him**" for to follow Christ I must die, I must die to self.

- ✚ Here's Thomas - fearful and weak in faith.

The next time we hear him is in John 14 please turn to it and lets see what we can learn here.....

### *John 14 (do turn to it)*

Here Jesus is with his disciples in the upper room, he is preparing them for his imminent departure.

At the beginning of this chapter v2 we hear **2 In my Father's house are many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you.** Did you hear that? No? so Jesus immediately repeats it **3 I go and prepare a place for you..**

So that is where he is going - and why he is going.

How can <sup>5</sup> Thomas then say to him, "**Lord, we don't know where you are going** - Thomas why ask when you have just been told?

Why ask when you already know? Jesus had just said "**4 You know the way to the place where I am going.**"

Thomas, what kind of person asks a question when you have just been given the answer?

What is more Peter had just asked that in John 13:36, '**Lord, where are you going?** Prompting Jesus' clear answer.

Come on disciples, what is the matter here? What's going on?

Jesus had said plainly enough he was going '**His Father's house,**' John 14:2, (That is ascending to where He had been before, John 6:62)

It is time for some direct language as if he is saying 'watch my lips' - **6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. - No-one comes to the Father except**

**through me.** In these famous word we have his clear and emphatic answer. Nothing else is getting through.

We see this because there's then the gentle rebuke "**if you really knew me**" i.e if you knew me - you would understand.

Thomas isn't listening x2. What is causing him not to listen? What causes us not to listen?

Thomas is affected by his feelings, they are leading him, he is a slave to them. The fear of death and now the thought of Jesus leaving is just too much. For Thomas rational thinking has gone, listening has gone.

There are many like that. They're not really listening to what you say. For them it is about how they feel in a situation. It is very difficult to help a person like that because they are only listening to certain bits, the more you say the less they listen.

- ✚ It is a bit like 'the closer you get the slower I go!'

The more I fear - the more doubt - the less I listen

So in church people hear the life saving words of Jesus. Jesus gives the answer but I don't hear it. I walk in confused and walk out confused.

- ✚ Start lost and remain lost, start in the dark and remain in the dark.

Jesus often said **he who has ears let them hear.** There is a **Way** – it is Jesus nothing else, no-one else, not religion, not doing good, not my effort but Jesus. So to with the **Truth.** As it is too with the **Life** – they are all in Jesus.

- ✚ **CROSS Gospel. Jesus the way to heaven - Jesus the way to avoid Hell Have him and you have everything - don't have him and you have nothing.**

When the fire is lit all that you think you have will be burnt up. Everything. Thomas still doesn't understand. His fear has stopped his faith.

Thomas didn't know the way – in Cheltenham not knowing either - but Bjorn was with me – and he knew. So with Abraham, so with every follower of Christ. Fear produces doubt and together they hinder faith

Remember this as we come to the fuller passage about Thomas.

### *John 20 (do turn to it)*

On the first day of the week on that resurrection Sunday Jesus appears to his disciples. They are described as the Twelve although there are only 10, Judas is not there - he has gone off and hanged himself.

Thomas is not there, why? It's fear. He doesn't want to be next in line for the chop. The Twelve had gathered 19 **with the doors locked for fear of the Jews**. The threat is very real.

- Refer to the persecuted Christians in North Nigeria. Would you keep away next Sunday if there was a fair chance you would be shot?

Fearful Thomas is absent so the disciples tell him **"we have seen the Lord"** Earlier Mary had first declared to the disciples v18: **"I have seen the Lord"**.

When Jesus stood among them they were witnesses to his bodily resurrection. After the immediate shock they were filled with Joy. Why? Jesus had answered the obvious question making it clear - yes it is him! 20 **After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** The disciples saw his hands and side.

So when the disciples say: **"we have seen the Lord"** they did not just say those five words, no they would have told Thomas they **had seen the Lord - and seen** his hands and his side.

- ✚ In other words Thomas **"believe it. !! and share our joy."**

But he said to them, **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands - and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, - I will not x2 believe it."** He could, but he **will not**. Why not Thomas?

This unreasonable demand for sense evidence is alien to faith. For Thomas one sense, seeing, is not enough. Not even feeling will satisfy him unless he feels the spear mark as well as the nail marks with both hand and fingers. **"I will not"**. He could believe, others had believed, but for him it is: **"I will not believe"**.

Why wouldn't he believe? What are the reasons not to believe?

The renowned atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell was once asked what he would say if he found himself standing before God on the Judgement day and God asked him, "Why didn't you believe in Me?" Russell replied, "I would say, 'Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!'"

God is in the Dock, wanting more evidence is to put you as Judge - and to put God in the dock.

Thomas had decided that he himself would be the one to set the criteria for belief. "I will use all my senses to test truth - to my own satisfaction". This unreasonable demand was the real source of his difficulty, the result? He refused listen and thus he refused to believe.

This unbelief masks itself in the call for more evidence, just a little bit more, how much more? How much more do you need?

- ✚ Have you put God in the Dock? And shout "more evidence"?

Unbelief was the unconscious cause of his deafness, he doesn't hear what he wishes not to hear. Jesus says that there will be those who don't hear – Their hearts are hard and so Satan steals away, **snatches away** the seed of God's truth before it enters the heart.

Please understand there is nothing wrong with the person's ears, but as the word of God tries to enter the heart it finds it too hard to penetrate and like the hard path the seed just bounces off. **Hardness of heart affects the hearing**

- ✚ Who of you this morning hears - but only hears certain things?

- Like a poor phone call - words drop out, you miss the message.

The other reason is fear. Are you like Thomas? lead by your feelings and therefore your fears? Thomas is fearful and has kept away. He wants to preserve his life. Those that try to keep their life safe will one day lose it.

We are all naturally fearful. For Thomas it was fear of death. This fear affected his reason, as it will affect mine. It skews how I look at things.

It causes me to step back in fear when there is good reason to trust.

Like walking on that high suspension bridge which is built so strongly I need have no worry at all in crossing it. I won't because I feel fear. My mind says 'go' but my trembling body says 'don't', and so I don't.

I so convince myself – so that 'don't' becomes 'can't' that becomes 'won't'.

Thomas could have believed the message given first by the ladies - and then the apostles - but because of fear his don't became can't became **will not**.

Statue of Thomas "the Doubting Apostle" by the Danish sculpture Thorwaldsen. It is this feature of his character which has been captured in this statue. Here he stands, the thoughtful, meditative sceptic, with the rule in his hand for the due measuring of evidence and argument.

*Jesus' grace, Jesus is gracious*

Thomas has a week to think about all this. Jesus did not come back to life to live as he had done, but to appear on certain chosen occasions.

On the next Lord's day, the following Sunday again with the doors locked shut, and the fear of death still very real Jesus came and stood in their midst. He comes and stands among them so they can see. Then he looks at Thomas

and recounts Thomas' words of last week. Thomas can see that Jesus knows all about him.

Jesus graciously invites Thomas to reach out and touch him <sup>27</sup> **Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."**

**As Jesus has reached to Thomas – Thomas is invited to reach out to Him**  
**"Stop doubting and believe."**

Though Jesus might have give up on him yet a bruised reed he will not break or a smouldering wick snuff out. He condescends to Thomas' culpable weakness. **Nor does he today give up on those he is calling**

**"Stop doubting and believe."** So Jesus says to you **"Stop doubting and believe."** **Stop**, it's a command

You have read the written account, you have heard the testimony of those who were there, now believe. **Use your faculties to rule over your doubts** Will you do that? It's the doubter who like the waves of the sea is tossed here and there with every wind of change and every turn of emotion. Will you ensure your mind & will are stronger & not weaker than your feelings?

**Stop doubting and believe."** That is the right response - and the required response - to all that Jesus had – and does now - clearly shown himself to be.

✚ **Fear brings doubt, x2 and doubt unbelief**

✚ **Jesus came to remove fear, to remove doubt and to bring faith**

### *The confession*

Thomas said to Him, **"My Lord and my God!"**

Thomas addresses these words to Jesus. Here is the highest confession of faith in Jesus' divinity thus far made by anyone!

This is personal - Thomas says: **"my Lord and, my God."** Do you say that?

✚ **Having seen the overwhelming proofs before him of Jesus' humanity**  
**Thomas believes in His Divinity.** For it is..

**The resurrection of the Son of man – that proves He is the Son of God.** Ro 1:4

### *How about you?*

To want to see and to touch is the opposite of faith – *Faith comes through believing what you hear.* x2

Thomas has seen and believed. Why hadn't he believed the message the testimony of the women **"I have seen the Lord"**

Why didn't he believe the message of the Apostles **"we have seen the Lord"**. It is the testimony, the message that is the means God uses to save people.

As Jesus said v29 **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed** So John summaries the whole reason for Jesus coming and living as he did that you and I will find Him – and thus find eternal live.

And this is found through the message you are hearing – the message you are hearing now, this morning. 31a **But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

Yes - **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** Ro 10:17

**Augustine said: Thomas was permitted to doubt, that we might not doubt.**

**Take note: God's word, not demonstration, is the true ground of faith.** x2

The effect of his awareness of who Jesus is – is immediate. And profound. The removal of his doubt became deeper and stronger than that of any of the other Apostles.

✚ **"My Lord and my God," the greatest and fullest in all Christianity.**

### *The result*

Thomas is slow to be convinced - but once he is – He is ready to act upon his convictions.

Thomas is one of those gathering for prayer in Jerusalem as the Spirit comes empower them to be witnesses to the nations.

The rest of his life is shrouded with traditions and legends. Eusebius that 4<sup>th</sup> Century Christian historian mentioned that he preached in Parthia or Persia, and was finally buried at Edessa modern day Ukraine. Chrysostom also mentions his grave at Edessa.

Several of the fathers inform us that he preached in the Indies; and others say that he preached in Cush, or Ethiopia, near the Caspian sea.

There are nominal Christians in the East Indies, who bear the name of St. Thomas, because they report that this apostle preached the gospel there.

His martyrdom (whether in Persia or India) is said to have been caused by a lance; and is commemorated by the Latin, the Greek and the Indian Church.

Whatever is the truth of these his clear conviction of who Christ goes on to be greatly used of God.

**May there be no fear and doubt rather love and confidence in your life. May that be you true of you - may you too be greatly used of God. END**