

## Thomas the Reluctant Disciple (Jn. 20:24-29)

Many of us might confess to looking back to when we were younger and remembering the times we have been in a conversation ... when we had given our opinion, whether it was asked for or not, and afterwards perhaps we thought to ourselves, "I wish I hadn't said that!"

In the Bible we find some folks who would have been better keeping their silence. For example, in the Old Testament, young Joseph did not endear himself to his brothers, when he shared with them his dreams about how they would one day bow before him (Gen. 37). Since they weren't keen on him anyway, he stoked their dislike of him, until they threw him into a desert pit!

In the New Testament, James and John caused quite a stir when they asked Jesus to sit on the thrones on either side of Him in the Kingdom (Mk. 10:37). When the other disciples heard about it, they began to be much displeased with James and John (v.41).

Someone has wisely said, "If you keep your mouth shut, you will never put your foot in it". ... The passage in Jn. 20:24-29 is a reminder of how an unfortunate conversation can define how people remember us. Unfortunately, Thomas is forever associated with being the *doubter*. ... Perhaps a more mellow description would be 'Thomas, the reluctant disciple'. ... He is mentioned in each of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, but it is John who gives us the fullest insight into his character.

In John chapter ten the Gospel writer recounts how Jesus was contending with the growing wrath of the Jewish leaders, *Jn. 10:31* Then the Jews took up stones *again* to stone him ... <sup>39</sup> they sought *again* to take him: but he escaped out of their hand. He left Jerusalem and went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John [*the Baptist*] at first baptized (v.40). After spending a short time secluded there, He decided to return to Jerusalem.

However, as they were coming out of the Judean wilderness, they received the news Lazarus was very seriously ill (Jn. 11:3,4). Instead of rushing back, Jesus remained in the wilderness with His disciples for two more days ... before setting out to go to Bethany, which was less than two miles outside Jerusalem (v.6,7). His disciples reminded Him, - as if He was liable to forget, - that going anywhere near Jerusalem was extremely dangerous for the Jews were waiting for Him.

Nevertheless, Jesus was determined, and He told His disciples, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep (v.11) ... to which they replied rather dismissively, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well (v.12) ... “he’s okay, the sleep will do him good, and he’ll get better!” ... However, Jesus meant he was dead. ... They were not listening properly for Jesus was telling them He was going to Bethany on His way to Jerusalem ... and He would raise Lazarus from the dead. ... The lesson behind it for them was that just as Lazarus would be raised from the dead, it would be a precursor to His own death and resurrection. ... This was preparation for Calvary.

The disciples missed the point though for they did not understand, and Jesus ‘let it go’ (v.15) for He did not consider it appropriate at that time to pursue the matter. As on other occasions when they failed to understand, He knew there would come a day when they *would*, for example, *Jn. 12:16* These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

Sometimes we feel we *must* get our point across, when it would be wiser to hold our counsel for what we are trying to convey will eventually become evident. ... As young Christians, we can remember when someone tried to explain some of the great Scriptural truths, and it was too deep for us to understand ... but there *did* come a time when it dawned on us what they meant. ... Such was the patience the Lord had with His disciples.

The disciples remained sceptical about returning to Jerusalem. Thomas, though, felt so strongly he spoke out, <sup>16</sup> Let us also go, that we may die with him. ... Jesus is intent on going to Jerusalem, and if He is going to die there, since we are His disciples, - His followers, - we must also go, and die with Him!

Yes, he is known as being **Thomas the doubter** ... but he was also **Thomas the devoted** for he realised what their Master was talking about, - that we may die with *him*. Jesus. ... Thomas was prepared to go up to Jerusalem for he was devoted to the Saviour, *so* devoted he would have died with Jesus!

... Say what you like about him, but *Thomas loved* the Lord! He was dedicated to the Saviour. As far as he was concerned, the Jewish opposition would have to get through him to get to Jesus! That is devotion ... and to be commended.

Thomas was a pessimist at times ... but he was a courageous and loyal and devoted pessimist! ... **Thomas the DOUBTER, Thomas the DEVOTED, and Thomas the DEPENDABLE!** Thomas did not want to live without the Saviour,

and if it meant dying with the Saviour in one of those confrontations with the Jews, then he *would* die with Him! And that is what he said in front of the other disciples, “I’m going with Jesus, with or without the rest of you!” ... And the other disciples considered the matter and decided to follow Thomas’ example.

This love for the Lord shows up again in chapter fourteen when Jesus spoke with His disciples in the upper room, after Judas Iscariot had departed. The disciples were troubled by Jesus’ prophecy saying He was leaving them, <sup>Jn. 14:2</sup> I go to prepare a place for you. ... He is going without us! ... These were worrying times for they had thought and hoped Jesus would establish His Kingdom and their future would be secured on earth with Him ... but when He talked about going, and them being left behind ... what would become of them then?!

And Jesus continued, <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ... Their minds could not cope with it all, and it did not really help when Jesus added, <sup>4</sup> And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. But that was the problem, their minds were so clouded with all they were hearing from Jesus, they were not processing it! ... What was He talking about? They could not understand so Thomas spoke up and said what the others were thinking, but were too afraid to ask, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ... **Thomas the DOUBTER, Thomas the DEVOTED, and Thomas the DEPENDABLE** ... **Thomas who wanted to know the DETAILS.** ... It is like this, Lord, we do not know where You are going so how do You expect us to know how to get there?! ... But behind the words of Thomas we see how his dearest desire was to be never to be parted from His Master! He is overwhelmed as he contemplates living the rest of his life without Jesus. The thought of not being with his Lord was more than he could bear. ... How was he to find out the details? ... He had only one source, as the hymn says, “Ask the Saviour to help you, comfort, strengthen, and keep you” ... and that is what Thomas did, and the Saviour assured him and the others, <sup>6</sup> I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. <sup>7</sup> If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Shortly afterwards, the fears of Thomas *did* come to pass, and Jesus *was* taken from them and put to death on the cross ... Jesus died, and he didn’t. Jesus was gone, and he was left. ... Thomas along with the other disciples abandoned Jesus when the Jewish leaders arrived to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. Thomas was gone as quick as the rest of them! ... He was not at the cross, and neither was he at the tomb. He was not even with the disciples who were hiding for fear of

the Jews when Jesus came to them (Jn. 20:24) ... Dear knows where he was!  
 ... But, in his favour, he *did* return, even if he was late. ... I wonder if he was questioning what the point was anymore! Jesus is gone, what more can we do?!

Nevertheless, the other disciples witnessed to him, We have seen the Lord (v.25)  
 ... Thomas should have been ecstatic, delirious, euphoric, so excited ... but he 'put a dampener' on it straightaway, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe (v.25). ... I'll have to see it to believe it ... and for a whole week he was under a dark cloud of despair for he would not accept Jesus was alive.

After the eight days he met with the disciples again, , then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you (v.26). ... Thomas, who usually had something to say, was speechless ... and Jesus spoke directly to him, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing (v.27). Without further hesitation, the doubting pessimistic but loving Thomas declared with joyful praise, My Lord and my God (v.28). ... **Thomas the DOUBTER, Thomas the DEVOTED, Thomas the DEPENDABLE ... Thomas who wanted to know the DETAILS ... Thomas the DECISIVE ...** What a journey he was on!

Some people are slow to believe for they erect unnecessary obstacles. True, it is better to be slow to believe than not to believe at all ... but when the evidence is presented that Jesus Christ is the answer to whatever you are facing, what a waste of time and energy to doubt and unbelieve! How many times have we hesitated to trust God when He has been so gracious to open up a way before us, but we have been frightened to progress. ... We fall short of receiving what the chorus says, "He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through". ... "Lord, it is not the way we would do it", rather than trusting in His promise, *Jer. 29:11* I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. ... "I know the plans I have for you ... to give you a future and a hope" ... in the assurance, all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

It was Jesus Who had graciously proved Himself to Thomas and the disciples on countless occasions for they had witnessed blinded eyes being opened, the lame walking, the lepers healed, the dumb speaking, the dead raised to life ... There was no excuse for unbelief. ... There was no reason not to believe the promises of God spoken by the Son of God.

Thomas was an often-incorrigible pessimist, but God even has them among His number. We are not all the same for He takes and uses different types of faithful servants, with complicated personalities and characteristics. ... And He moulds and shapes the pure raw material beautifully weaving it, and elegantly fitting it for His marvellous glory, and that is what He did with Thomas.

Notice too how Jesus did not go looking for Thomas during those eight days (v.26), but instead Jesus allowed him to wait out the week. Sometimes God does that, - He lets us wait so we would appreciate what we miss when it is returned to us. ... It is part of learning to trust Him, to lean on Him, and to love Him more. For a whole week Thomas lived as if Jesus was dead. ... It is like being a Christian today and not believing God is in control. ... What a *long* week it must have been for Thomas!

It is not God's intention for a Christian to wallow in despair because we are to live in the knowledge Jesus is alive and working. ... God does the impossible, and He knows the answers to our prayers before we pray them. ... He is 'bigger than all my problems, bigger than all my fears, He is bigger than any mountain I can or cannot see'.

It is precious how Thomas was reunited with his brethren. ... It is even more beautiful he returned to his Saviour. ... When Thomas was not looking for Jesus, Jesus came to where He was. He never lets us go. Our doubts cannot affect our eternal standing with God, as Jesus explained, "Look Thomas, touch the nail prints in My hands, and touch where the spear was thrust into My side. Thomas, I died for you, and you belong to Me ... <sup>29</sup> Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed ...

Our doubts and fears are entangled within our complex nature ... how could such a great God love me? Why would He think of me? Why would He care for me? Yet, His Word assures us, - beyond all our doubts and fears, and in our reluctance to believe, - *Phil 1:6* he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. ... He will keep you by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, as He speaks to and teaches you through His Word ... That is how we shall overcome, with Him, through Him, and in Him ...

A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,  
 A wonderful Saviour to me ...  
 I'll shout with the millions on high.