

Twelve Men: Thomas



As we continue our journey investigating the Twelve Disciples, we come to Thomas. What are you thinking right now about Thomas? If I were a betting man, I'd say you was thinking of his nickname "Doubting Thomas." I mean that is what comes to mind for me. Scripture is clear on that subject, but at the same time, it is clear on other aspects of Thomas that reveal something special about him and allows us to look at him in a different way. Let's start by laying the foundation and context as we always do. We do that by looking at Scripture.

As with the other disciples we've looked at, Thomas is mentioned in the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts:

*Matthew 10:2-3, Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; **Thomas** and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.*

*Mark 3:16-19, And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.*

Luke 6:13-16, And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and

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*Bartholomew; and Matthew and **Thomas**; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

*Acts 1:13, When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and **Thomas**, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*

We know much more about Thomas compared to the previous disciples we've studied, because in addition to what we see of him in the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts, he is mentioned eight times in John's gospel. Let's take a closer look at those scriptures to better understand who Thomas was.

We begin in John chapter 11, which is significant because it speaks of Jesus' friend Lazarus who died and who Jesus raised back to life. As chapter 11 opens, Jesus is made aware that Lazarus is sick, but he doesn't go to Lazarus because of safety concerns, at least that is what Jesus' disciples believe. In the grand scheme of things, Jesus did not go because of what had to take place with Him raising Lazarus from the dead. Nevertheless, the disciples are determined to not let Jesus go to Bethany to see Lazarus or his family to keep Him safe from the officials in Jerusalem which was a stone's throw away.

John 11:8-15, The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him."

Verse 16 brings into play Thomas, *Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."*

When I read that statement from Thomas, I do not see "Doubting Thomas." In fact, I see someone who was courageous and determined. Thomas pretty much was saying to his fellow disciples that they should all go with Jesus to Bethany and when Jesus is stoned, they will also be stoned with Him. He was ready to die with Jesus. That shows us how close he was to Christ. That shows us what sort of relationship he had with his Master.

John MacArthur in his work *Twelve Ordinary Men* says, "Now that is pessimistic, and that's typical for Thomas. But it is a heroic pessimism. He could see nothing but disaster ahead. He was convinced Jesus was heading straight for a stoning. But if that is what the Lord was determined to do, Thomas was grimly determined to go and die with Him.

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You have to admire his courage. Thomas obviously had a deep devotion to Christ that could not be dampened even by his own pessimism.”¹

For me, I see someone who loved Jesus deeply and was fully devoted to Him and His ministry. He may have been pessimistic, but as MacArthur stated it was a heroic pessimism. It’s also obvious that the other disciples looked up to him, because they all went to Bethany. They followed his leading and example.

As we continue in the gospel of John, we come to chapter 14 where Jesus is trying to give His disciples some comfort and lasting peace when He shares the following:

John 14:1-4, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.”

We read Thomas’s response as he speaks up in verse 5, *Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”*

Kenneth Gangel in the Holman NT Commentary writes, “This is one of those places at which we would like to have audio aids for the Bible. What was Thomas’s tone of voice when he said this? Is he still the skeptic? The pessimist? The negative thinker? It would appear so, but we admire his openness and vulnerability²”

I agree with Kenneth, Thomas still seems to be a bit skeptic about what Jesus is teaching. He is trying to fully understand everything. His mindset was still thinking about the things he could see, touch and feel. He didn’t want Jesus to leave and if He was going to leave, he wanted to know how to get there too.

MacArthur says, “Here is a man with deep love. He is a man whose relationship with Christ was so strong that he never wanted to be severed from Him. His heart was broken as he heard Jesus speak of leaving them. He was shattered. The thought of losing Christ paralyzed him. He had become so attached to Jesus in those years that he would have been glad to die with Christ, but he could not think of living without Him. You have to admire his devotion to Christ.”³

We pick up the narrative in John chapter 20 where Jesus has been crucified, buried and resurrected from the dead. Jesus appears to His disciples in the upper room for the first time, but not all of them are present. Thomas is not accounted for. He had chosen not to gather with the other disciples. Why? Where was Thomas? I believe Thomas was truly shattered and heart broken over Jesus’ death. It had been three days, and nothing had happened. Can you

¹ MacArthur, John, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), 160.

² Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 265.

³ MacArthur, John, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), 162.

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imagine what was going through Thomas's mind? The thoughts, questions and emotions? Again, it is clear from other passages that Thomas had a deep love and devotion for Jesus. He was close to Jesus. Now Jesus is gone.

John 20:24-25, But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

This is where most Christians are familiar with Thomas and thus have nicknamed him "Doubting Thomas." But let me take a moment to remind you that the other disciples doubted as well.

Mark 16:9-13, Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

John 20:19-21, So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Did you catch all that? Mary Magdalene shares the news of Jesus' resurrection to those who had been with Him, which is safe to assume included some of the disciples, and they refused to believe it. Jesus even appeared to two of the disciples as they were traveling and after they gave a report, those same people did not believe. Then when he appears to the disciples in the upper room, they didn't believe until they saw His hands and His side.

MacArthur says, "What set Thomas apart from the other ten was not that his doubt was greater, but that his sorrow was greater."⁴

John 20:26-29, After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Let's just imagine for a second what truly was going through Thomas's mind. He has been told of Jesus' resurrection and has refused to believe it until he saw and touched the scars. He is now gathered back with the disciples, and Jesus appears a second time. No one even had to tell Jesus about Thomas, He simply tells him to reach and touch

⁴ MacArthur, John, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), 163.

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and believe. Then Thomas says, “My Lord and my God!” Wow! I get goosebumps just imagining that setting and emotions for Jesus, Thomas and the other disciples as they witnessed what was taking place. All of Thomas’ questions, doubts, sorrow, grief were suddenly all wiped away.

MacArthur says, “The Lord was amazingly gentle with him. Thomas had erred because he was more or less wired to be a pessimist. But it was the error of a profound love. It was provoked by grief, brokenheartedness, uncertainty, and the pain of loneliness. No one could feel the way Thomas felt unless he loved Jesus the way Thomas loved Him. So Jesus was tender with him. He understands our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).⁵

What do you think about Thomas now? He had his failures just as the other disciples had, and just as you and I do today. Despite those failures he had a deep devotion for Jesus. He had a deep love for Jesus. We were able to see Jesus’ lowly and tender heart toward Thomas despite his doubts.

Have you ever questioned Jesus? Have you ever doubted Jesus? Think of the times your heart has been broken due to circumstances in your life, maybe you questioned Jesus’ presence or ability to answer your prayers during those times. What is remarkable about Thomas and the other disciples we have studied so far is the fact they are all relatable to us today. I can relate to each disciple we have studied so far, and if you were to be honest, you have too. That’s a good thing, and not a bad thing. Jesus choose the twelve to follow Him. He still chooses us today to follow Him. How are we doing in our devotion to Christ compared to the disciple Thomas?

I’ll close this post with a portion of the lyrics from the song entitled “Thomas” by the Primitive Quartet:

THOMAS SAT DOWN AT THE TABLE AND BURRIED HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS. SUDDENLY GRIEF OVERTOOK HIM FOR HE HAD JUST LOST HIS BEST FRIEND. THEY NOT ONLY CRUCIFIED JESUS, THEY CURSED HIM AND PUT HIM TO SHAME. SHAKEN BY WHAT HE HAD WITNESSED THAT DAY THOMAS WOULD NOT BE THE SAME....
THREE DAYS LATER THOMAS THOUGHT HE SAW A GHOST FACE TO FACE IN THAT OLD UPPER ROOM.
I AM YOUR KING, THOMAS I LIVE WHAT MUST I DO, BEFORE YOU'RE CONVINCED LOOK AT MY HANDS, COME TOUCH MY SIDE. WHAT MORE WILL YOU NEED BEFORE YOU BELIEVE I AM ALIVE.

⁵ MacArthur, John, Twelve Ordinary Men (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), 164.