

Thomas

Introduction:

1. Thomas is not one of the better-known apostles like Peter, James and John.
2. Most often he is remembered negatively with an epithet associated with his name: "doubting" Thomas.
3. He is only mentioned by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their lists of apostles. His name, like a middle child, is tucked away in the middle of the list.
4. But the Gospel of John gives some particular attention to him, mentioning him in four separate episodes in the life of Jesus.
5. Who is this man Thomas? Is he like me? Do I need to be like him or unlike him? Why has John elected to mention him in these four episodes in the life of Jesus?

Discussion:

- I. The first episode is in association with the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-16).
 - A. The story begins with the report that Lazarus was sick.
 1. Lazarus, Mary and Martha were close friends of Jesus and the apostles.
 2. They lived in Bethany, a village less than 2 miles from Jerusalem.
 3. According to Jn. 10:40 they received the report while in the region where John had at first been baptizing (cf. Jn. 1:28).
 4. Bethany was also the home of Simon, the leper (Mk. 14:3-10). Some suggest that Bethany was a place associated with the care of the poor and the sick.
 - B. Since Jesus was not that far from Bethany and his friend Lazarus is sick you might expect him to go immediately to Bethany and heal him, but he does not. He waits two days.
 1. He said, "This sickness is not to end in death."
 2. How the disciples understood this is not clear. Perhaps they thought, "He will get over this. No need to go to him."
 3. It is clear that they preferred not to go to Bethany in light of the threat of being stoned (11:8).
 - a. Jesus had just been in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication.
 - b. He claimed to be one with the Father, making the claim of deity.
 - c. And so they took up stones to stone Him.
 - d. That is why they are out in the remote region where John had been baptizing.
 4. Jesus said, "Let us go to Judea."
 - a. Understandably the apostles are hesitant.
 - b. They know the tension arising. It is like going back to the scene of the riot that you have just escaped.
 - c. Lazarus was dead. Jesus would go back to raise him.
 - C. This is when Thomas made his startling statement to the other disciples. "**Let us go, so that we may die with Him.**"
 1. What remarkable loyalty!!! Thomas was willing to risk his life. He knew that the other disciples were like him in willingness. There is no doubt in this statement,

- only commitment to give his life for his Master.
2. Do you have that kind of loyalty to the Lord? Do you have that kind of confidence in the loyalty of your brothers and sisters?
3. Thomas (and the other disciples) are ready to follow the Lord to death. There must have been some fear, but also great courage and devotion to the Lord. If He would go back, then they would go back too, and Thomas would lead the way.
- D. "But," you might object, "Jesus had power over death." Yes, he did. He even raised Lazarus from the dead.
1. But Thomas had no promise that Jesus would raise him from the dead, had he lost his life in a riot.
 2. His statement was a matter of courage and deep devotion to Jesus. Maybe we would be better to remember Thomas as "courageous Thomas" or perhaps "loyal Thomas."
- II. In the second episode Thomas openly confesses his ignorance (Jn. 14:1-6).
- A. Jesus has just predicted his death and betrayal (Jn. 13).
1. Peter has boldly stated, "I will lay down my life for You."
 2. Jesus replied, "A rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times."
 3. Still, Jesus works to console his disciples (14:1-4).
- B. Thomas speaks, "**Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"**
1. Jesus' statement is not clear to Thomas.
 2. He doesn't pretend to understand. He doesn't hide his lack of understanding with silence. Thomas is not a pretender. What you see is what you get.
 3. He openly confesses his ignorance.
 4. Thomas is a man who honestly confronts himself. Too many of us are unwilling to see ourselves as we really are. Too many of us are unwilling to confess our ignorance. Thomas saw himself as ignorant.
 5. But he also sees his fellow disciples as ignorant. "**We do not know where You are going.**" He saw his ignorance and theirs. There was no bold proclamation like Peter, just confession of ignorance.
 6. From this episode, instead of describing Thomas as doubting, we would describe him as "humble Thomas."
- III. The third episode is where we get the epithet "doubting" (Jn. 20:19-29).
- A. This episode begins with a description of how the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples when Thomas was absent.
1. No reason is given for his absence.
 2. Is he discouraged, disappointed, disheartened that the one he had believed in has been crucified? Has he isolated himself in his grief like some of us do?
- B. The other disciples reported to him, "We have seen the Lord!"
1. For Thomas, it was incredible. He could not believe it on their word alone.
 2. He demanded the evidence!

- 3. “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.”
- 4. I see people all the time that believe about whatever they are told. They are wishful thinkers, seeing God’s activity in events that are without clear evidence of God’s action. That is not Thomas. He is willing to believe, but his belief must be founded on real evidence. He is not just a wishful thinker creating things in his own mind and assigning them to God.
- 5. More of us need to be like Thomas and say, “Show me the evidence.”
- C. Eight days later Jesus appealed to him, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”
- D. Thomas confessed, “**My Lord and my God!**”
- E. Maybe it would be more fitting instead of calling Thomas “doubting” if we called him a real believer!
 - 1. John says that he wrote his book, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31).
 - 2. In his book he records 7 miracles performed by Jesus, not counting the resurrection.
 - 3. It is interesting that Thomas’ statement, “My Lord and my God,” is placed at the close of John’s book, immediately preceding his statement that he has recorded these signs “that you may believe.” Thomas’ statement of belief is that capstone of John’s gospel.
 - 4. It is ironic that we would call him “doubting Thomas.” I think John would call him “believing Thomas.”

IV. Thomas is seen on two other occasions following the resurrection in Scripture. In both he is numbered among the faithful followers.

- A. He is among the apostles fishing on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus manifested himself and provided them with a great catch of fish (Jn. 21).
 - 1. Thomas was there with the Lord and at breakfast with Him.
 - 2. The other apostles too.
- B. In Acts 1:12-14 Thomas was with the 120 as they anticipated their work of taking the good news of the resurrection to the world.
- C. The biblical record gives no further information about Thomas. Tradition says that he took the gospel into India or Parthia.

Conclusion:

- 1. Do you have the courage that Thomas had to die for the Lord?
- 2. Do you have the humility that he had that confessed his ignorance?
- 3. Do you have the belief that he had that confessed Jesus as “My Lord and my God?”