

*The Disciples, Thomas: Doubting or Inquisitive?*( John 14:5; 20:25 and selected Scriptures)

**Theme:** Thomas asked questions and was skeptical at first, but this led to the greatest affirmation of faith in the Gospels (John 20:28). Sometimes our doubt can lead to stronger faith. **Theme of learning, studying, inquiring**

William Tyndale pioneered the translation of the Scripture in English in the sixteenth century. He did this against opposition. For his efforts he was rewarded with exile, poverty, and persecution. Finally in 1536, he was strangled and burned at the stake.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main things that motivated Tyndale to translate Scripture into the common language was a survey of English clergy that revealed that most of them did not even know who the twelve apostles were. Only a few of them could name more than four or five of the apostles.<sup>2</sup> Let me say that many times disciples and apostles are used interchangeably. A disciple is an understudy, a learner, one who follows someone else in a field. An apostle is one who is sent. Jesus' disciples were called as disciples, they were then called to ministry (Luke 5), then later apostleship, and martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

I believe what was Tyndale's concern is still true today. We have educated clergy, we have the Scriptures in multiple translations and many Bible study resources in libraries and online. However, we don't know a lot about the disciples. Even after between 7-8 years of college and graduate school focused on Biblical studies, I struggled to know much about many of the disciples. Therefore, I am doing more study and teaching this to you.

Know this: Jesus handpicked the disciples: Jesus knew the disciples even before he selected them (especially John 1:47; also John 6:70; 13:21-27). The disciples were common men just as we are today. As we study their lives, we find this to be true. Most of them were from Galilee, an agricultural region at the intersection of trade routes. And Galilee remained their home base for most of Jesus' ministry--- not (as some might think) Jerusalem in Judea, which was the political and religious capital of Israel. Galileans were deemed low-class, rural, uneducated people.<sup>4</sup>

So, let's talk about Thomas. I hope you will find that Thomas was inquisitive, courageous and faithful so we must also be.

## I. Who was Thomas?

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John. *Twelve Ordinary Men, How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing. 2002. Page 9.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John. *Twelve Ordinary Men, How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing. 2002. Page 9

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, John. *Twelve Ordinary Men, How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing. 2002. Page 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, John. *Twelve Ordinary Men, How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing. 2002. Introduction and page 10.

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- i. One writes this about Thomas: “It probably is fair, however, to say that Thomas was a somewhat negative person. He was a worrywart. He was a brooder. He tended to be anxious and angst-ridden. He was like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. He anticipated the worst all the time. Pessimism, rather than doubt, seems to have been his besetting sin.”<sup>5</sup>
- ii. Matthew, Mark and Luke do not have any information about Thomas beyond his name in the lists of the twelve disciples. To find information about Thomas we must look at John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel gives us some redeeming qualities of Thomas.
- iii. In John 11:16 Thomas is called Didymus which means the twin.
- iv. The first reference to Thomas’ personality is in John 11:16: In this passage Thomas speaks up about dying with Jesus. This reference shows Thomas being courageous. In this passage a close friend of Jesus named Lazarus was dying and eventually dies. Jesus stalls from going there and then he went to Lazarus and brought him back to life. This is one of Jesus’ great miracles. In John 11:7 Jesus says to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” He said this knowing that this was in order to bring Lazarus back to life. But in verse 8 the other disciples say: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again”? This is where Thomas speaks up in verse 16: Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”
  1. Notice that this shows Thomas’ extreme devotion to Christ, he was ready to die with Christ.
  2. Thomas was also an example of strength to the rest of the apostles. The rest of the apostles followed Jesus to Judea even though they were initially afraid.
  3. Notice also that Thomas obviously had a deep devotion to Christ that could not be dampened by his own pessimism which we see later.
- b. Thomas’ profound love for the Lord shows up again in John 14:5. Prior to this passage, in John chapter thirteen, Jesus had told the disciples that He will soon be leaving them. Jesus was referring to the crucifixion. Then in John 14:5: Thomas says: “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” It is as if Thomas is stating:

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“You are leaving, we don’t even know how to follow you.” Thomas was ready to follow his teacher.

- c. In John 20:24-25, we see Thomas’ pessimism: Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” 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 believe.”
  - i. But, Mark 16:10-11 shows the other disciples didn’t believe in the resurrection either.
  - ii. It is certainly not good that Thomas lacked faith, but I see this showing that Thomas was inquisitive and a learner. Later on in verse 28, Thomas makes one of the greatest faith statements of all: “My Lord and my God.” Thomas was a learner and we will come back to this in a second.
- d. Lastly, about who Thomas was: There is a considerable amount of ancient testimony that suggests that Thomas carried the gospel as far as India. There is to this day a small hill near the airport in Chennai (Madras), India, where Thomas is said to have been buried. There are churches in south India whose roots are traceable to the beginning of the church age, and tradition says that they were founded under the ministry of Thomas. The strongest tradition says that he was martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear--- a fitting form of martyrdom for one whose faith came of age when he saw the spear mark in his Master’s side and for one who longed to be reunited with his Lord.<sup>6</sup>

## II.

Applications to our life today?

1. We must be a learner as Thomas was. In John 14:5 we saw that Thomas wanted to know where Jesus was going. He was not afraid to speak up about this. Then later on he was a little skeptical. There are times when we need to be skeptical as well. We must be studying and learning. We must have a hunger for the Scriptures. A professor from Asbury writes the following:

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<sup>6</sup>MacArthur, John. *Twelve Ordinary Men, How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing. 2002. Introduction and page 10. Page 164.

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People who are not well grounded in God’s Word will fall for most anything that is winsome or interesting or piques their curiosity. Or again, as my grandparents used to say ‘people who don’t stand for the right things, will fall for most anything’.

In a world of Biblically illiterate people, if you commit yourself to life long study of God’s Word, you will very quickly stand out from most of your peers especially as our culture becomes increasingly more post-modern and post-Christian in character. But here is the good news about that— you will have a chance to be salt and light in a world of increasing darkness, no matter what profession you take up.

2. As learners, we must always be working diligently to present ourselves to God as approved... (2 Timothy 2:15)
3. As Thomas was we must be courageous also encouraging others and ourselves to go to persecution for Christ (John 11:16)
4. As Thomas did we must also affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ (John 20:28)

**Conclusion:**

**The Bereans:**

There you have it, now you know something about Thomas. We see Thomas a learner desiring to know where to follow Jesus (John 14:5), desiring to confirm that Jesus was resurrected (John 20:24-28). I have talked about the Bereans before and now will again:

There is a wonderful illustration in the book of Acts that might drive this point home. In Acts chapter 17 Paul is on a missionary journey. He is going to various cities in order to preach the Gospel. Then Paul comes to Berea. In Berea Paul goes to the Jews and preaches the gospel in a synagogue. To these Bereans, Paul might have sounded as if he was preaching *false doctrine*. Here they are Jewish and Paul is telling them that their Messiah has come and He is Jesus. You know what the Bereans did? They searched the Scriptures to see if this was of God. That is what we are to do. Study the Scriptures; search the Scriptures in order to know what is of God and what is not of God. Then you will be prepared when a missionary of another religion knocks on your door.

**pray**