

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 4-7-13 AM NOTES
"DEALING WITH DOUBT"
JOHN 20:24-31
#77 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

Romans 14:23b (NKJV) "...for whatever *is* not from faith is sin."

"I suppose that no man is a firm believer who has not once been a doubter."

—Charles Spurgeon

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NIV) ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish **arguments** and every **pretension** that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

I. The Problem With Thomas (vv. 24-25)

John 11:16 (NKJV) "Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.'"

John 14:4-5 (NKJV) ⁴ "And where I go you know, and the way you know.' ⁵ Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?'"

John 14:6 (NKJV) "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

"In three different passages Thomas is mentioned in this Gospel, and on each occasion he evidenced a gloomy disposition. He was a man who looked on the darker side of things: he took despondent views of the present and the future. Yet, he was not lacking in courage, nor in loyalty and devotion to the Savior."

—Arthur Pink

Hebrews 10:25 (NASB) "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

"The very sermon that we needlessly miss may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and stablished, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine."

—J. C. Ryle

"Out of fellowship with Christ, through unbelief, he forsook the assembly. And how much he lost! God's blessing, Christ's presence, the Holy Spirit's power, joy of heart, and in addition, a whole week spent in despondency. What a warning for us!"

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II. The Provision of Christ (vv. 26-27)

John 14:21 (HCSB) “The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him.”

III. The Profession of Thomas (v. 28)

Revelation 22:8-9 (HCSB) “⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown them to me. ⁹ But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow slave with you, your brothers the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

IV. The Pronouncement of Christ (v. 29)

Romans 10:17 (NKJV) “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

1 Peter 1:8-9 (NKJV) “⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of *your* souls.”

V. The Purpose of John (vv. 30-31)

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When I was a child in elementary school, I remember that one of the most fearful words a parent could hear in reference to their child was “polio”. I had classmates who were crippled by this disease. The effects of the polio in a child’s life could range from walking with a limp all the way to living in what was called an “iron lung”. An iron lung was a machine that looked like a big tube that the victim of Polio had to basically live inside of in order to breathe and thus survive. There is a spiritual disease that has somewhat the same effect on our spiritual life. It is doubt. Like polio, there are varying degrees of doubt that range from sporadic bouts of doubt that pass when we choose to stand upon the word of God, to doubt that gets such a hold on a person’s life that they cannot spiritually function. In no way do I believe

that doubt is a good thing. **Romans 14:23b (NKJV)** "...for whatever *is* not from faith is sin." Doubt is certainly not from faith. But I would quickly add that God can use doubt that is correctly handled to actually strengthen you. Pain in the physical realm is not good, but pain in our bodies alerts us to the fact that something is wrong. If the pain leads us to deal with the problem that was causing the pain then the pain resulted in something good. Even so doubt alerts us to the fact that there is a problem in our spiritual life. Charles Spurgeon said, "I suppose that no man is a firm believer who has not once been a doubter". [2200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles Spurgeon, Page 60].

As we examine the account of Thomas' bout with doubt, I want us to learn some things about doubt and how to deal with it in a way that strengthens our faith. When doubt is not dealt with, it will rob you of a vibrant prayer life, your perseverance in trials, and your power in service. Doubt tends to make us self focused, and when we become self-focused, there is no passion for making disciples and ministering to members of the body. Our doubts can end up consuming our minds and our time.

Doubt can attack us in several areas. The most common doubt that people struggle with is doubt about one's salvation. Other common doubts are doubts about the existence of God, the sovereignty of God, the goodness of God, and the power of God to keep His promises. The source of doubt is not the circumstances we are going through; it is the enemy of our souls that uses circumstances that make us more open to the alien thoughts that he implants into our minds. We read in **2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NIV)** "⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish **arguments** and every **pretension** that sets itself up against [opposes] the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." The primary strongholds that are referred to in 2 Corinthians 10:4 are in our mind. It is in the mind where the bouts with doubt take place. These doubts come in the form of arguments and pretensions. The delivery agent may be some human being, but the originator is always the one who took the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden and spoke the lie into Eve's mind found in Genesis 3:1 "Has God indeed said...?" The Greek word translated "arguments" means to put together in one's mind. In this context, it refers to considerations that are hostile to the Word of God. It is translated "speculations" in the NASB. The word translated "pretention" is translated "barrier raised" in one translation (TCNT). The J. B. Phillips paraphrase renders it "every deceptive fantasy and imposing defense". When we entertain these arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God, the result is doubt. That's why we are told in the very next verse, 2 Corinthians 10:5 that we must take these thoughts captive and think in obedience to Christ. Faith is choosing to believe that God is telling the truth and then ordering our behavior to act like He is telling the truth.

Let's examine this account involving the one who has been called "Doubting Thomas" and learn how we can overcome bouts with doubt.

I. The Problem with Thomas (V24-25)

Even though Thomas was one of the original 12 disciples, we don't know a lot about him. John mentions Thomas three times. Here are some things that we know about Thomas. He was not a coward. The first time John mentions Thomas is in John 11:16. Here is the context. Jesus was planning to go to Bethany where Lazarus had died. This trip would result in Lazarus being raised from the dead. The problem is that Lazarus and his sisters lived very close to Jerusalem and the last time Jesus was in Jerusalem the Jews had tried to kill Him. As Jesus heads back into the proximity of Jerusalem, we read in **John 11:16 (NKJV)** "Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.'" That was not being melodramatic; from a human perspective this was a likely outcome. The second time we meet Thomas in John was in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus said in **John 14:4 (NKJV)** "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas quickly speaks up and actually contradicts Jesus in **John 14:5 (NKJV)** "Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?'" Jesus had just told them in the previous verses that He was going to the Father's house to prepare a place for them. Jesus responds with **John 14:6 (NKJV)** "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

Me.” Since Thomas knew Jesus, he knew the way to the Father’s house. When we combine these accounts with out text for today, it seems that Thomas was the “eternal pessimist”. The character in literature that Thomas seems closest to is one from the children’s books, “Winnie the Pooh”. Thomas reminds me of the character Eeyore, the donkey. Eeyore can always find the dark cloud in any silver lining. People like Thomas are often called “melancholy”. Arthur Pink gives this description of Thomas: “In three different passages Thomas is mentioned in this Gospel, and on each occasion he evidenced a gloomy disposition. He was a man who looked on the darker side of things: he took despondent views of the present and the future. Yet, he was not lacking in courage, nor in loyalty and devotion to the Savior.” [Arthur Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, Page 290].

We are told in verse 24 that when Jesus made that resurrection appearance to the disciples on that first Lord’s Day, Thomas wasn’t there. All of the original disciples were there except Thomas and Judas. We know why Judas wasn’t there, but why was Thomas not there? The Bible doesn’t tell us, but it seems clear that the reason was unbelief manifested as doubt. Was Thomas alone somewhere feeling sorry for himself that his worst fears had come true? Things had not turned out like Thomas thought they would and should. Now, he was hurt and probably angry. Hurt and anger and unbelief (doubt) are our biggest temptations when our expectations and hopes have been dashed. It may be that you can relate to Thomas. Things in your family, your marriage, your vocation, your health, your relationships, or even your ministry have not turned out like had hoped. You may be thinking, “Maybe God isn’t so good after all; maybe His love doesn’t reach to me; maybe I’m not even one of His children; maybe all of this is just my being unlucky and God really isn’t sovereign over every circumstance.” This is doubt. This is exactly what 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 was talking about. These thoughts are in reality alien thoughts and are the “arguments” and “pretensions” that set themselves up against the knowledge of God.

Here is what I know. If Thomas had assembled himself together with the other believers the previous Sunday, there would have been no bout with doubt. Thomas wasn’t the only disciple that struggled with doubt. None of the others believed or even seemed to remember Jesus’ prophesy that He would rise from the dead on the third day. On that first Lord’s Day they weren’t in that upper room filled with joy and anticipation for the risen Lord to appear. They were depressed and fearful that they would be next. The difference is that they gathered together and Thomas did not. Their doubts disappeared because they saw Jesus! Thomas spent the next week in doubting and gloom while the other 10 spent the week rejoicing that He is alive!!! In verse 25, Thomas voices his doubts and it seems like a little of his anger oozes out when he says to the other disciples who have come after him in **John 20:25 (NKJV)** "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Allow me to make some application to us concerning Thomas’ problem. This is why the Lord has commanded believers in **Hebrews 10:25 (NASB)** “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” This is one of the clearest commands that the Lord has given His people, and yet one of the most often disobeyed. Since the pattern of the early church was to meet together on the Lord’s Day, we can safely assume that this “assembling together” refers to Sunday services. The last statistics that I saw showed that in our denomination, less than 40% of church members show up on any given Sunday at church. I will give an “informed guess” that a sizable percentage of those who do show up make the decision of whether or not to come on a week to week basis. Let me strongly suggest that you purpose in your heart (looking to the Holy Spirit to enable you to obey) that you will assemble together with other believers on every Sunday unless it is reasonably impossible. In years to come you will look back on that Spirit empowered decision as one of the most important decisions you ever made. Most church members remind me of the young man who called his girlfriend and said, “I love you more than anything in this world. I would climb the highest mountain for you; I would fight wild beasts for you; I would swim the widest river for you, and I’ll be over to see you tomorrow night if it doesn’t rain.” That’s a lot like our talk of how much the Lord means to us and yet the forecast of flurries or rain serve to give us an excuse to sleep in and disobey

the command of Hebrews 10:25. Someone coined a little phrase that is so true it hurts. When it comes to Sundays, “For every drop of rain that falls, somewhere a Baptist stalls”.

Here is another application from this passage. The other ten went after Thomas. I wish our church did a better job with this! When someone misses a few weeks in their Sunday School class and in worship, we ought not have to have some program to get people to contact them. There ought to be a loving concern like these first disciples had. They went after Thomas and said in **John 20:25 (NKJV)** "We have seen the Lord." When people get their feelings hurt or struggle with doubt or grow cold because of unconfessed sin, they should be inundated with phone calls, email, and texts and even visits by fellow believers expressing concern and really in their concern expressing love. If the love of Christ constrains us (2 Corinthians 5:14), we will go to the one who is struggling and bring them back! As a side note, if you are not in a Sunday School class and just sit in a pew and go home without encouraging and being encouraged, it not likely that anyone is going to come after you, because they won't know you are gone.

Dr. J. C. Ryle gives a great summary of what we miss when we, like Thomas allow doubts or hurt or anything else we can control keep us from assembling ourselves together: “The very sermon that we needlessly miss may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and stablished, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine.” [J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume IV*, Page 405]. Arthur Pink expounds further what we miss when we are not faithful to assemble ourselves together. Speaking of Thomas, Pink says, “Out of fellowship with Christ, through unbelief, he forsook the assembly. And how much he lost! God's blessing, Christ's presence, the Holy Spirit's power, joy of heart, , and in addition, a whole week spent in despondency. What a warning for us!” [Arthur Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, Page 294].

II. The Provision of Christ (V26-27)

Since they counted the previous Sunday as day one, it was the next Sunday. The disciples were not about to miss assembling together, and this time Thomas was there. His attitude probably stunk; he was likely saying things like “I don't know why I'm here; He's not going to show up” (that would fit Thomas' pattern anyway). But Thomas was there. Suddenly (without the doors even being opened) Jesus was there! He gives them the same greeting that He did the week before, “Peace to you!” I want you to see the grace and mercy and compassion of Christ. It is implied that this appearance was just for Thomas. What mercy! Jesus meets Thomas at the point of Thomas' need. There was no harshness – “You sorry doubter; how dare you to not believe My word”. There seems to be a tenderness in Jesus' voice in verse 27. It is as though He is saying to Thomas, “Thomas, if this is what it takes to chase the doubts away, then look at the nail prints and see where the spear pierced My side.” The Lord meets with honest doubters like Thomas. There is no evidence in Scripture or in history that Thomas ever doubted the risen Lord again. There is a tradition that Thomas was martyred by having a spear thrust through his body when took the Gospel to the India. Don't give up on another believer who struggles with doubt. There are many in God's family that struggle with doubt. They don't need our condemnation or harsh rebukes. They need our compassion, our encouragement and if they are honest and surrendered to the risen Lord, He will in His time show Himself real to them as He did to Thomas. Encourage the doubter to keep on in obedience. Jesus promised in **John 14:21 (HCSB)** “The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him.” We tend to get that backward. We want to say, “Manifest Yourself to me and I will love You and obey You.” Jesus says, “No, you keep loving me and evidencing your love through your obedience in spite of the doubts and in my timing, I will manifest myself to you”. In some extreme cases such as the poet William Cowper, that manifestation may only come after physical death.

III. The Profession of Thomas (V28)

Though Thomas was slow to believe the resurrection of Christ, he was not slow to understand the implications of the resurrection. The resurrection was the affirmation that Jesus Christ was God in flesh. When Thomas called Him “my Lord”, he put Jesus on the throne of his heart; when Thomas confessed Jesus as “my God”, he put Him on the throne of the universe. When Thomas gave what is one of the greatest confessions in Scripture, Jesus accepted his confession by not correcting him. In the New Testament, there are several occasions where men or angels are called God and they quickly and fearfully correct the speaker and let the speaker that they are not God. In the book of Revelation, we see John experiencing this very thing. **Revelation 22:8-9 (HCSB)** “⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown them to me. ⁹ But he said to me, ‘Don’t do that! I am a fellow slave with you, your brothers the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’” The fact that Jesus accepted Thomas’ worship is evidence that Jesus was claiming to be God.

What a transformation in Thomas! When he had a true encounter with Jesus, he turned from a doubter to a worshipper immediately. If he had not assembled with the other believers that Sunday, he would have missed this meeting with the Lord. If you struggle with doubts, maybe next Sunday will be the day that the Lord speaks to your doubt. Will you be here?

IV. The Pronouncement of Christ (V29)

Jesus is not devaluing or questioning the genuineness of Thomas’ faith which was based on sight; He is simply saying that there is a higher kind of faith here on earth. The higher faith is faith based on the written Word of God. The ground of faith today is proclaimed in **Romans 10:17 (NKJV)** “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Those who insist on signs and wonders to believe are seeking a lesser form of faith that is based on sight. Peter voices this same blessing in **1 Peter 1:8-9 (NKJV)** “⁸ whom [Jesus] having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of *your* souls.” There is greater blessing to those who believe based on the trustworthy written Word of God witnessed by the Spirit of God. Our faith stands on the absolute trustworthiness of the Word of God. He Bible is a supernatural, Spirit-inspired, surviving, sufficient, sustaining, book about the Savior. It is the ground of our faith, and blessed by God are those who choose to believe this Word even though they have not seen with physical eyes the Savior it proclaims. “The Word of God is more sure than anything we see, feel, hear, or think” (Adrian Rogers).

V. The Purpose of John (V30-31)

Someone said that there are 36 miracles recorded in the Gospels. John tells us that there were many others. However, what is written is sufficient for the John’s and the Holy Spirit’s purpose. That purpose is not an academic purpose; it is an evangelistic purpose. The Spirit inspired John to write this book that people may read it and savingly believe on the Savior who is proclaimed. Has this book accomplished its purpose in you? Have you believed, trusted, turned from every other hope to the Jesus proclaimed in this book? If you have, it will be evidenced by new, spiritual, abundant life that is the possession of all who have savingly believed even though they have not physically seen Him. (3396)

- Like Thomas, though you may struggle with doubt, you can be a great believer through believing all that is proclaimed in this book. It is not a blind faith. Here is overwhelming evidence that this book is true (especially in the fulfillment of prophesy)
- Purposed heart to be faithful and not miss what God is doing among His people
- Join