

THOMAS

Invariably, the first thought we have concerning Thomas the disciple is his nickname, 'Doubting Thomas'. It is what he is best known for. He is the epitome of those who are always looking for the negatives in life ... those who see 'the cup as being half-empty' rather being 'half-full'.

Really, though, it's not altogether fair with regards to Thomas! Yes, there was an aptitude in his personality to be rather negative ... and negative people do tend to approach most things with a strong degree of pessimism. They are known for being cynical, for worrying, for complaining and for being able to find problems where no one else would consider looking. That is just the way they are! They anticipate the worst ... and they can be happy being miserable!

Well, to a degree *that was Thomas* ... but at the same time it can be unfair and not altogether accurate. Thomas is a Hebrew name which comes from the Aramaic word for 'twin' ... and Didymus is the same name in the Greek language. So, it would seem he either had a twin sister or a twin brother that is not mentioned in Scripture.

He is mentioned in all four of the Gospels but it is John who gives us a better insight into his character. Matthew (10:3), Mark (3:18), and Luke (6:15; Acts 1:13) only mention him in their list of disciples but it is John who gives us more information.

For example, John speaks about him in chapter eleven. There Mary and Martha have been bereaved, with the loss of their brother Lazarus, - this was a family very dear and very close to the Saviour. They lived in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. ... In the previous chapter Jesus had an altercation with the Jews because they took exception to what He was saying, **Jn. 10:23** And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. **24** Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. **25** Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. **26** But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: **28** And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. **29** My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. **30** I and my Father are one. **31** Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

And they continued to react so strongly, ³⁹ Therefore they sought again to take him [*Jesus*]: but he escaped out of their hand, ⁴⁰ And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. ... It is a distance that would take over an hour to travel by car ... and that is the distance Jesus and His disciples walked to elude the attempts by the Jews to kill Him for it was not yet His time to die.

Then, after spending a short while by the River Jordan He returned to Bethany, and to this bereaved home. ... When Jesus had first started on his way to Bethany Lazarus was still alive ... only just ... but by the time the Saviour arrived at the home, Lazarus had died.

Now the conversation between Him and the disciples, - before they went back to Bethany, - highlights very interesting words spoken by Thomas ... **Jn. 11:1** Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) ³ Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. ⁴ When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. ⁷ Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. ⁸ His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? ... All the disciples warned Jesus not to even consider going back to Jerusalem for Jesus, if You go back they will kill You! They will be more prepared this time ... and they will kill You! ... ⁹ Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. ... In other words, when you work in the light you know what you are doing because you can see what you are doing and where you are going ... However, if you work in the dark, it's dangerous and unwise ... so work in the light, and that is what Jesus was telling them He was doing because He could clearly see, - in the 'light', - what would take place. ... ¹¹ These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. ¹² Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. ¹³ Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. ... The disciples were confused ... ¹⁴ Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe ... He was going to show them how He is in control, so He repeated ...; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Well, the disciples obviously did not want to go. At that point Thomas felt so strongly about the situation that he spoke out, ¹⁶ *Let us also go, that we may die with him.* ... Now, all the other disciples were for avoiding potential trouble but Thomas, - characteristically pessimistic, - said the opposite for he could not see it ending up any other way than Jesus dying, and them dying too. Typical! ... Yes, pessimistic ... but if Jesus was going to die, he wanted to die with Him.

If he had been an optimist he would have tried to see some kind of positive outcome that just might ... *might* happen! But no, they were all going to get killed along with Jesus! And yet, it *was* pessimistic Thomas who spoke up and demonstrated courage because he was willing to die with Jesus! ... Say what you like about him, but *he loved* the Lord! He was devoted to the Saviour. As far as he was concerned, they would have to get through him to get to Jesus! That is true devotion! In fact, that is outright courageous! ... And that is commendable for a servant of the Lord!

Thomas might have been a pessimist ... but he was a courageous and loyal and devoted pessimist! And a dependable one, at that! Thomas did not want to live without the Saviour, and if it meant dying with the Saviour in one of these 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, no matter what!" ... And they followed too.

This love for the Lord shows up again in John chapter fourteen when Jesus spoke with His disciples in the upper room ... - after Judas Iscariot had left. The disciples were troubled by Jesus' prophecy saying He was going to leave them, ^{14:2} *I go to prepare a place for you.* ... He is going without us! He is leaving us here! ... These were very worrying times for they had thought, - they had hoped, - He would set up a Kingdom and their future would be with Him ... but when He talked about going ... what would become of them?!

Well, Jesus sought to dispel their anxieties, ³ *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.* ... But then he added to their confusion ... ⁴ *And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.* However, they *didn't* know! What was He talking about? They could not understand what He was saying so Thomas said what the others were thinking, but were to afraid to speak up, ⁵ *Thomas saith unto him,*

Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ... 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?! Basically, he was saying “we’re doomed and we are all going to be ‘running round and round in circles’!”

But behind the words of Thomas we see how his very practical desire was yearning to be always with Jesus! He is broken and shattered to consider living the rest of his life without Him. The thought of not being with Jesus was more than he was able to bear. ... It is like the hymn, “I must have the Saviour with me, For I dare not go alone.” You see, Thomas did not want to be anywhere the Lord was not going to be ... and that, surely, is true devotion. That is real commitment the most of us would envy!

He could not countenance life without Jesus, and so Jesus assured him and the others, ⁶ I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. ⁷ If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him ... and, therefore, I shall always be with you.

Well, the fears of Thomas *did* come to pass, and Jesus *was* put to death on the cross ... and Jesus died, and he didn’t. Sadly, he had deserted Jesus, - along with all the other disciples, - in the Garden of Gethsemane ... and there is no mention of him at the cross. However, John brings him in again in chapter twenty.

Mary Magdalene and some of the women had arrived the tomb on the Sunday morning, only to find it empty for Jesus was not there. Mary lingered in the garden and was rewarded by meeting the risen Lord. The disciples, on the other hand, were squirming away locked in the upper room, **Jn. 20:19** Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. ²⁰ And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

But the disciples were down to ten men for not only was Judas Iscariot absent, Thomas was not there either, ²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ... Why wasn’t he with the other disciples? Well, you could imagine him saying, “What’s the point anymore? Jesus is gone and that is it all over.” Pessimism most likely kept him away. Jesus had died, and the whole ‘bottom had fallen out’ of Thomas’ world ... and he simply didn’t want to be with anyone. He was wallowing in a broken heart.

²⁵ The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. ... No, you can't have for He's dead! You are making it up! It cannot possibly be true. ... None of the other disciples had been previously convinced about the resurrection either, but yet all ten of them had stayed together. With Thomas, though, it was different. Instead, he chose to be on his own, and he seemed to take it the worst! His sorrow was so great ... and that indicates how much He loved and depended upon Jesus. Yes, he remained a pessimist, **But he said unto them, 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.**

One week after the death of Christ and after the resurrection, Thomas had met up with the disciples again, and that was when he *did* discover Jesus *had* truly risen from the dead! ... ²⁶ **And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. ... And then Jesus spoke to Thomas directly and gently for the Lord knew the tenderness of his heart,²⁷ Then saith he to Thomas, 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. Then, without any further hesitation, the doubting pessimistic but loving Thomas declared with joy unspeakable, ²⁸ My Lord and my God.**

Nobody could feel the way Thomas felt unless they loved the Lord. Yes, he was pessimistic and laden with despair but that was because the Lord was everything to Him and life would be empty without Jesus.

So that is what the Bible tells us about Thomas. He *was* a great stalwart of the Gospel because he loved the Saviour at its centre. Tradition and history records he served the Lord in as far away a place as India. He is reputed to have been executed by having a spear thrust through him.

Thomas is the example of how God takes and uses all types of faithful servants, with sometimes various complicated personalities and characteristics from the bubbly and the excitable, right through to the opposite. ... And He moulds and shapes the pure raw material beautifully weaving it into a precious new creation, elegantly fit for His marvellous glory ... and that is what He did with Thomas. Amen.