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**From Doubt to Faith**

**John 20.24-29**

**Series: Signs of Life**

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I. **A Life of Doubt**

- A. Remarkable how those consumed with life in the academic world can easily devolve into nonsense
  - 1. They say the definition of a scientist is one who studies more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing
  - 2. And the definition of a philosopher is one who studies less and less about more and more until they know nothing about everything
- B. I thought of that when I considered the life of René Descartes
  - 1. A brilliant philosopher and mathematician
    - a. Was extraordinarily influential in establishing the Age of Reason
    - b. The period in western philosophy in which human reason, unaided by divine revelation, was thought to be able to generate true and certain knowledge
- C. Descartes' philosophy, if it was anything, was ironic
  - 1. His desire was to discover convincing and certain knowledge and remove any vestige of doubt
    - a. He wanted to arrive at a fundamental set of principles of knowledge that can be known to be true without any doubt whatsoever
  - 2. But his method at arriving at certain knowledge was to doubt everything
    - a. His method was known as hyperbolic/metaphysical doubt, or metaphysical skepticism
    - b. So he began his philosophical program by rejecting anything and everything that can be doubted
  - 3. He wanted to find the one foundational principle that could not be doubted
    - a. And then, he argued, one could build a cathedral of knowledge on that one undoubted foundation
- D. Descartes' foundational principle is well known in philosophy
  - 1. ***Cogito ergo sum* (Latin)**
    - a. **"I think, therefore, I am"**
  - 2. He reasoned that if he were, in fact, thinking, there must be a thinker who exists
    - a. "I think, therefore, I exist"
  - 3. That's an extraordinarily important insight from this great philosopher
    - a. Especially for those of you who are not sure that you exist
    - b. If you think that you may not actually exist, you can take great

- comfort in the fact that you think that you may not exist
- c. Because in the mere thinking, it proves that you do indeed exist
  - d. Don't you feel better already?
4. So when you go home – or to the Crystal, or wherever you go to eat lunch – you can have great conversation with your friends and encourage one another with the fact that you exist
    - a. Which you now know you do
    - b. Because you think
- E. In fact, some have recognized – even Descartes himself – that the kind of thinking that assures with absolute certainty – is doubt
1. That the phrase ought to have read *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum*: “I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I exist”
- F. It's hard to life like that, isn't it?
1. Hard to live a life in which we doubt everything
  2. Think of how many things we have to rely on, assume to be true
    - a. Otherwise we would never do anything
    - b. We would be paralyzed
  3. Even to come here this morning
  4. Assume that the car would start – not really understanding much about how cars actually work in their engines and transmissions
    - a. There are those who do understand those things – I'm not one of them
    - b. I had to assume, without much doubt anyway, that the car would bring me here
    - c. Doesn't always happen; but it have been no use in doubting that it would
  5. Assume that once I arrived here, that this church building would exist
    - a. Which itself was no small feat after experiencing a hurricane
    - b. Lots of things were destroyed; not this
    - c. I had to assume that it was still functioning
  6. Assume that my colleagues and staff had done their extraordinary work of preparation for what would take place in our service
    - a. Logistics, materials, music – you have no idea how many different things have to come together in order to have a worship service
    - b. And then how many other things have to come together to broadcast that service
    - c. Most of those things I'm not directly involved in – don't even understand how a lot of them even work, like the technology
    - d. But I still have to assume, without doubting, that they will be in place
  7. Assume that my own mental faculties, which appeared to be working reasonably well last night, will continue to function adequately today
    - a. And I don't even understand the way my mind works when I prepare sermons
    - b. But I have to prepare, without doubting, each and every week

8. To live a life of doubt is really paralyzing
  - a. It's no fun
  - b. It's impossible
- G. Not even René Descartes could actually live the life he advocated
  1. A life of doubting everything
- H. Descartes, however, was right about something
  1. It is natural for human beings to doubt
  2. And there is in fact a time and occasion when doubt is a virtue
  3. If you believe everything, you're gullible
    - a. And you can be easily manipulated and led astray if you believe everything
  4. Bible says, "... test everything; hold fast to what is good." (1 Thessalonians 5.21)
    - a. "Check it out; doubt the truthfulness of things – and find out what passes the test – and don't doubt those things that you find to be true."
  5. All of which makes the case of Thomas one that we can all relate to

## II. **Doubting Thomas**

- A. The Apostle Thomas has come to be known as "Doubting Thomas"
  1. The incident which has designated that name is well known
    - a. And we consider it this morning
- B. Text – **John 20:24–29** (ESV) —
  1. 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.
  2. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."
  3. 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.
  4. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
  5. 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."
  6. 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
  7. 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
- C. One explanation for Thomas' behavior during these days is that Thomas was from Missouri
  1. Missouri is the "Show Me" state
    - a. Missourians need to have proof
    - b. They need to see things to believe them
  2. So maybe Thomas was from Missouri
    - a. But I doubt it

- D. But some people are more prone to doubt than others
  - 1. Just as some people tend to see the glass half full and others the glass half empty
  - 2. Some people are more prone to a more melancholy disposition, and are more apt to doubt what most people take for granted
  - 3. That's really the case with Thomas
- E. Thomas was, in fact, a loyal disciple of Jesus – with Jesus pretty much from the beginning
  - 1. He followed Jesus during the exciting times, when the crowds were with Him and growing
    - a. And he followed Jesus when there were conflicts with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law
    - b. And he followed Jesus when the crowds began to dissipate and lose interest
  - 2. He was not lacking in courage, devotion, or loyalty to Jesus
  - 3. But Thomas did tend to the pessimistic disciple
- F. The first time we meet Thomas in the Gospel of John was in **John 11** – the chapter when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead
  - 1. When this chapter opened the disciples were in a remote part of the wilderness beyond the Jordan River
    - a. To be anywhere near Jerusalem at this point in Jesus' ministry was considered dangerous
    - b. The last time Jesus was in Jerusalem, the authorities tried to capture Him – but He escaped from them (**John 10.39**)
  - 2. When they were there word came that Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick
    - a. Jesus delayed for two days
    - b. Then told the disciples that He would go to Bethany – a little town near Jerusalem – to be with the family
    - c. **John 11:8** (ESV) — 8 The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”
    - d. Jesus would not be dissuaded; would not change His mind
    - e. They would, in fact, go
    - f. He told them that Lazarus was no longer sick, but that he had died
    - g. But they would go to Bethany anyway
  - 3. **John 11:16** (ESV) —
    - a. 16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”
    - b. “Ok, this can't be good. He's going to go; probably get arrested. We'll probably get arrested too. They probably kill us. Let's go anyway...”
- G. The next time we run into Thomas is in John 14
  - 1. Jesus has spoken of heaven
  - 2. **John 14:1–4** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in

- me.
- b. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
- c. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
- d. 4 And you know the way to where I am going."
- 3. Wonderful promises – really encouraging to the disciples
- 4. **John 14:5** (ESV) —
  - a. 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"
  - b. "You know the way..."
  - c. "No we don't!"
- 5. Arthur Pink: He reminds us very much of John Bunyan's [characters] ' [Mr.] Fearing,' ' [Mr.] Despondency,' and 'Much Afraid,' in his Pilgrim's Progress – types of a large class of Christians who are [his] successors.
- H. Then, of course, following the resurrection the first time Jesus met with the disciples Thomas was not with them
  - 1. Now we don't know why; the text is silent regarding the reason
  - 2. But often with one who tends toward a melancholy disposition, especially after witnessing the disastrous set of events that led to the crucifixion, that one would withdraw, would rather be alone, would distance himself from people
- I. So Thomas, not without some reason, is called "Doubting Thomas"

### III. **Unbelieving Thomas**

- A. But it's really worse than that in this case
  - 1. Thomas' posture regarding the resurrection of Jesus is worse than merely doubting
    - a. As if, when told by his fellow disciples that Jesus is alive, allows that it might be true
    - b. But, if was a betting man, he wouldn't mortgage his house on it
    - c. After all, resurrections were extremely rare
    - d. The vast majority of people who die, stay pretty much dead
    - e. Not just mostly dead; pretty much, all dead
    - f. He did see Lazarus raised from the dead
    - g. He did hear about the OT examples – one from the ministry of Elijah, two from Elisha
    - h. Three from Jesus' ministry, including Lazarus
  - 2. But if you do the math – millions and millions die without ever being raised from the dead
    - a. So it would be natural to doubt the story that Jesus was raised from the dead
  - 3. Doubting Thomas might have said, "Yes, I know it's possible. But it almost never happens. So rare. I doubt it!"
- B. But that's not what he says

1. He doesn't say, "That sounds encouraging, but you'll have to convince me in order for me to believe"
2. He says, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (John 20.25)
  - a. "I will never believe"
3. Not, "I will believe if I see the marks in His hands"
  - a. But, "Unless I see the marks... I will never believe"
4. That's Thomas' default position
- C. That's the posture, not of a doubter, but of an unbeliever
- D. Are you doubting the person and work of Jesus Christ?
  1. Or is your position that of an unbeliever?
- E. Are you like the father of the demon-possessed child (Mark 9) who said, "I believe; help my unbelief"
  1. Or is your default position, "No! This notion of a resurrected Jesus is something that I can't swallow!"
- F. There's a difference, isn't there
  1. One is a doubter
  2. The other is really an unbeliever

#### IV. Willing Thomas

- A. At the same time, even from the posture of unbelief, Thomas is a willing unbeliever
  1. Because even after the disciples run into Thomas and tell him that Jesus is raised from the dead
    - a. And Thomas says "No, I can't believe that!"
  2. They don't give up on him
- B. They tell Thomas, "No Thomas, please come with us."
  1. "We met together last Sunday. We're going to meet again this Sunday. Please join us."
  2. And Thomas does
    - a. He joins them
  3. He's willing to stay connected with his brothers
- C. Most unbelievers don't do that
  1. Most unbelievers try to stay away from the believers
    - a. They don't want anything to do with the church
  2. But not Thomas
    - a. He's invited to join the brothers
    - b. And so he goes; he's with them on that second Sunday
- D. It's my observation that a lot of unbelievers really do want to believe in Jesus
  1. Some have told me, "Oh I wish I could believe like you do."
  2. But they can't bring themselves to believe
- E. If you're operating from the posture of unbelief, but you'd really like to believe
  1. Then come, join the disciples
    - a. Hear their testimonies

- b. Listen to the scriptures
- c. Sing the songs they sing
- d. Hear the preaching about Jesus
- 2. Even if you're an unbeliever, you can do that
  - a. There's nothing that prevents an unbeliever from getting out of bed on Sunday morning and going to church
  - b. There's nothing that prevents an unbeliever from joining a believing friend at a Bible study
  - c. There's nothing that prevents an unbeliever from attending Alpha
  - d. Or going with neighbors to a concert at the church
  - e. You might actually enjoy it!
- 3. Thomas did it
  - a. He really did not believe Jesus was raised from the dead
  - b. But he went with the disciples anyway
  - c. And so can you
- 4. Doubting Thomas, who was really unbelieving Thomas, was willing Thomas
  - a. Are you willing to come?
  - b. So see what all this is about?
  - c. To consider whether this Jesus really is alive?
- 5. Do you want to believe?
  - a. Faith comes by hearing; hearing by the word of Christ
  - b. So come – hear the word of Christ
  - c. See what God will do
- 6. Are you willing?

V. **A Condescending Invitation**

A. **John 20:26–27** (ESV) —

- 1. 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.
- 2. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”
- 3. 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

B. Jesus comes, and He meets doubting Thomas, unbelieving Thomas

- 1. And He meets him on Thomas' own turf
- 2. Thomas is not convinced by the testimonies of his friends, the disciples
  - a. Who have told Thomas, Jesus is alive! We've seen the Lord!
  - b. That wasn't enough for Thomas
  - c. The Word wasn't enough for Thomas
- 3. Thomas took the position of an empiricist
  - a. He had to have evidence – physical evidence
  - b. He needed to see Jesus in the flesh – and had to verify that it was in fact THE Jesus, by the artifacts of the crucifixion
- 4. So Jesus says, “Ok, if that's what you need, look; look at my hands; look

- at my side; touch my side; touch the marks.”
    - a. “And then stop your unbelief. Believe!”
  - C. Jesus condescends to give Thomas what Thomas thinks he needs
    - 1. Jesus didn’t have to do that
      - a. But He did do that
      - b. He did it for Thomas
    - 2. A wonderfully condescending invitation
  - D. Any invitation from Jesus is a condescending invitation
    - 1. Jesus’ coming in the flesh – the incarnation – was the greatest act of condescension imaginable
    - 2. And so here, with Thomas, He stoops to Thomas’ level
      - a. “You want empirical evidence? Here’s empirical evidence.”
  - E. And in doing so, Jesus condescends to us
    - 1. We all tend to be empiricists
      - a. We all have our demands to see before we believe
      - b. The Word of God ought to be sufficient
      - c. But God condescends to give us the evidence
  - F. That’s why I love that John has included the Thomas incident
    - 1. It helps us know that while faith is not dependent on physical evidence, it is not detached from real space-time history
      - a. That what is claimed by Christianity is verifiable
      - b. That the gospel corresponds with the data
      - c. Jesus Christ was a real flesh-and-blood human being
      - d. He did in fact die on a Roman cross
      - e. The marks of His death were just as real as you are
    - 2. And so, through Thomas, our faith is affirmed

## VI. Transformed Thomas

- A. And so Thomas receives this condescending invitation
  - 1. But amazingly, it does not appear that Thomas actually does what he says he needs to do in order to believe
- B. **John 20:27–28** (ESV) —
  - 1. 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”
  - 2. 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”
- C. Nowhere does it say that Thomas actually touched Jesus
  - 1. That he put his hand in Jesus’ side
  - 2. That he put his finger in Jesus’ hand
- D. No! Thomas believes!
  - 1. Without actually having the sensory experience that he thought he needed
- E. Thomas has now changed
  - 1. He’s gone from being an unbeliever to a believer
    - a. He’s transformed
    - b. He’s born-again
    - c. He’s a new creature in Christ



2. How did that happen?
- F. Well, Thomas did see Jesus
  1. And he did see Jesus' hands – with the nail prints
  2. And he did see Jesus' side – with wound from the spear still present
  3. But he saw more than the artifacts of the crucifixion
  4. What did Thomas see?
- G. Thomas saw in those marks the love of Jesus
  1. **Romans 5:8** (ESV) —
    - a. 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
  2. You can have all the intellectual arguments you want
    - a. You can wrestle with all the philosophical questions
    - b. And you can have the answers to all of them
    - c. You can have every doubt erased from your mind
    - d. And still not believe in Jesus
- H. What transforms Thomas is not an intellectual argument
  1. Or even the observation of empirical evidence
  2. What transforms Thomas is a demonstration of the love of Jesus
    - a. It is the love of Jesus that melts his stony heart
  3. And it is the love of Jesus that will transform your stony heart
- I. Oh, dear friend – even dear unbelieving friend
  1. Consider the love of Jesus
    - a. Who lived a life you have never lived
    - b. Who suffered the worst of tortuous afflictions
    - c. Who died the most painful of the forms of execution on the cross
    - d. Whose Father turned His back on Jesus as Jesus took the punishment for your sins and mine
  2. Oh, consider the love of Jesus!
    - a. Does not the love of Jesus pierce your heart?
    - b. Does not the love of Jesus pierce your heart even as the soldier's spear pierced the side of Jesus?
  3. Will you not be transformed by this love?
- J. Thomas' transformation is complete
  1. That's evident in his glorious confession
    - a. He calls Jesus both Lord and God
  2. Jesus is sovereign; He is master; He is Lord
    - a. Just what the disciples knew Him to be the three years they spent with Him
  3. But Jesus is God!
    - a. Thomas understood that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God
    - b. More than understand – He believed it!
    - c. Jesus is God!
  4. This one verse destroys those aberrant sects of Christianity who deny the deity of Jesus Christ
    - a. Jesus Christ is God!

- K. And more than that, Thomas doesn't just say, "Lord and God"
  - 1. He says, "My Lord , and My God!"
  - 2. He owns his relationship with Jesus, in whom he now believes
- L. It's one thing to have the right theology
  - 1. To say – and even believe – that Jesus is both Lord and God
  - 2. It's another to trust in Him personally
  - 3. To say "My Lord and my God!"
- M. Is He your Lord and your God?

VII. **Blessings of Belief**

- A. Then finally in this text Jesus, though He has condescended to Thomas in offering the physical evidence Thomas thinks he craves
  - 1. He gently raises the stakes on the true nature of faith
- B. **John 20:29** (ESV) —
  - 1. 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
- C. True faith is rooted in trusting in the Word of God
  - 1. Certainly, the evidence is clear, overwhelming in fact
    - a. Jesus is rooted in history
    - b. His story – life, death and resurrection – is confirmed by the testimony of more than 500 witnesses
    - c. Thomas himself has been transformed in his encounter with Jesus
  - 2. But the vast majority of believers through the centuries have believed on the basis of the Word of God
    - a. The testimony of the scriptures
    - b. The word of the apostles in the NT
    - c. And even the words of Thomas
  - 3. And they are truly blessed
- D. What are the blessings of belief?
  - 1. **Become children of God**
    - a. **John 1:12** (ESV) — 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...
  - 2. **Have eternal life**
    - a. **John 3:16** (ESV) — 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
  - 3. **Delivered from judgment**
    - a. **John 5:24** (ESV) — 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
  - 4. **Receive spiritual satisfaction**
    - a. **John 6:35** (ESV) — 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

5. **Experience resurrection**
  - a. **John 11:25–26** (ESV) — 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die...”
6. **Be a blessing to others**
  - a. **John 7:38–39** (ESV) — 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
7. **See the glory of God**
  - a. **John 11:40** (ESV) — 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”
8. **Walk in holiness**
  - a. **John 12:46** (ESV) — 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.
9. **Live a fruitful life**
  - a. **John 14:12** (ESV) — 12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.
10. **Profit from the prayers of Jesus**
  - a. **John 17:20** (ESV) — 20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”

## VIII. Conclusion

- A. Thomas the doubter
  1. Even Thomas the unbeliever
    - a. Has now become Saint Thomas – Thomas the believer
    - b. Saint Thomas just as all believers are known in the NT as saints
  2. He has become such because, even through his doubts and unbelief, Jesus has condescended to him
    - a. And as he experienced the love of Jesus
    - b. Has come to declare Jesus both His Lord and His God
- B. Is Jesus Christ also your Lord and your God?