

This morning, I am finishing up my sermon series “Meeting Jesus,” looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus in the book of John. Today, I will be looking at the interaction Jesus has with Thomas, one of his disciples, in chapter 20, after his resurrection.

John 20 - Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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 it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In John 20, after Jesus has been crucified, he rises from the dead. Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene and some women at the tomb, who run and tell the disciples about the risen Jesus. In v. 19, Jesus comes and shows himself to the disciples, but one disciple, Thomas, is not there, and when they tell him that Jesus is alive again, he does not believe them. He says, "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 it." In other words, unless I experience Him myself, I will not believe. We see here in Thomas someone who is not willing to live on secondhand faith, to believe because others in his life believe. His faith must be his own, his experience of Jesus must belong to him. And Jesus graciously comes to him and shows himself, and says "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

I want to use this interaction between Thomas and Jesus as an opportunity to talk about doubt and faith. Three things in particular:

1) Bring your doubts and questions to God

You might think of doubt as being on a continuum. On one end, doubt is not allowed. Questions are not allowed. Some individuals believe that God is offended by doubts and questions. Others belong to churches or families where doubt is not allowed, where blind faith and obedience is expected. Some certainly have that perception of the church.

On the other end of the continuum is those who live as though doubt is a virtue in and of itself. They don't know, and are comfortable in their agnosticism. Maybe there is a God, maybe not. Maybe Christianity is true, maybe Islam is true, or maybe none of them is true. "I'll find out when I die." Some people may claim to be seeking, but in reality, they prefer not to believe, not to find out that there is a God to whom they are accountable.

Jesus is not on either extreme. On the one hand, he does not tell Thomas that he is sinning by his doubts. He meets him in his doubts, but he does not leave him there. He does not let Thomas stay in a place of mystery. He leads Thomas to faith. He reveals Himself to Him.

I want to encourage you to be honest about your doubts and questions. Some are intellectual – why does God let people suffer? How do I make sense of the miraculous stories of the OT like Noah and the Ark? Some are theological – why is there a Hell? How can God be sovereign and still allow for free will? And some are borne out of your own experience. Why did God let my loved one die? Why doesn't God answer my prayer? Doubts and questions are welcome. But the goal is not to stay in doubt, but to bring those doubts to God.

*Matthew 7:7-8 - "Ask **and it will** be given to **you**; **seek and you will** find; knock **and the door will** be opened to **you**.⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

2) Don't be afraid to wrestle with God

In the OT, there is a man named Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. He is a scoundrel, cheating and stealing his way through life. And even though God promised his parents while he was still in the womb that he would be the child of promise, the one through whom would eventually come the Messiah, he had a hard time believing that, and was continually trying to grab the blessings of life for himself instead of trusting in God.

Genesis 32:24-31 - So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but **Israel**, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." ²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." ³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

Jacob becomes Israel, and he will have 12 sons who will become the 12 tribes of Israel. Do you know what the name Israel means? One who wrestles with God, or one who struggles with God. The name given to the people of God is a name about struggling, wrestling with God. It is borne out of the story of a man wrestling with God.

The Bible is full of doubts, questions, and arguments with God.

Psalm 13:1-2 - How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

How encouraging that is to us in our doubts. This life of faith is not easy. It involves a great deal of wrestling and struggling with God to understand who He is and what He is doing, and why He is doing it. It is not smooth sailing. The journey of faith involves wrestling, struggling, contending, hanging on to God until He blesses you. I don't know if I'm where I'm supposed to be. I don't know why everything is such a struggle. I am doing my best to hang on to God and struggle with Him.

Be honest with your doubts and questions. But don't just stay in your doubts, but seek God for answers, trusting that whoever seeks will find.

3) Put your faith in the crucified and risen Christ

Not just God in general, but Jesus, the one who loves you so much that he died for you and rose again.

Back to v. 27:

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas doubts that Jesus has risen. Jesus in return shows him his scars. The hands that were pierced. The side that had a spear thrust into it. And he tells him to stop doubting and believe. Thomas would have stayed in a place of doubt unless Jesus revealed himself to him. And we are in the same place. Apart from God revealing Himself to us, we will continue to be in a place of not knowing.

On the cross, you have what appeared to be God at his most evil and his most unloving. What could be worse than the innocent, sinless Son of God being unjustly executed while His all-powerful Father in heaven turns his back, even as His Son cries out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Think of how you would respond if your child cried out to you for help as he was being abused, and contrast that to how God responded. Seriously, what kind of father would turn his back on his suffering son like that? God has never appeared more evil and unloving as he did at the cross, allowing his innocent son to be unjustly abused and executed.

But now, with the benefit of hindsight, we look back and we know that the reality was that God was never working more for good than He was at the cross. At the cross, God gave His Son to be sacrificed, and His Son willingly went to His execution, because the only way for a sinful and rebellious humanity to be restored to a right relationship with God and to have eternal life was for a sinless sacrifice to take on the sins of the world. On that cross God was taking on himself the punishment for all the things we had ever done wrong.

John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Be honest with your doubts, but do not stay there: seek God for answers until you see Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ, yourself.

I'm sure most of you know how Thomas has come to be known – doubting Thomas. Although he is known as doubting Thomas, I want to commend him, and I want to commend those of you who are skeptical and don't just take the words of others. He could hear the testimonies, and you could hear the testimonies of others and their experiences of God throughout this series. But Thomas was not content

with secondhand faith. He wasn't content just to believe because of the experiences of others. He wanted to experience Jesus for himself. And once he experienced Jesus for Himself *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"* He is the first to recognize Jesus as God.

As great as it is to hear the testimonies of other people about their experiences with God, eventually it comes back to you. Do you know God? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you know in your heart that He is good, that He loves you, that He is powerful enough to overcome anything in your life? Do you know His forgiveness, His peace, the freedom that is found in knowing Jesus? Do you believe this for yourself? Or are you just living on secondhand faith, believing in the testimonies of other people but not having a testimony of your own?

This chapter ends with John's purpose statement in writing this gospel:
But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I pray that you would come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior today, and that you might find life in His name.

Jesus, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God. I believe that in you is found eternal life, life to the full. I believe that apart from faith in you, I will die in my sins, separated from God for all eternity. But I believe that you love me so much that you died on the cross in my place, taking the penalty for my sin, and that you rose from the grave, conquering death. I turn from my sinful, self-centered way of life and I believe in you as my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Stop doubting and believe.