

***The Third Day* by Tom Berlin**
Chapter 3: *Thomas*
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The disciple Thomas is widely known as doubting Thomas from a story found in John chapter 20. After Jesus rises from the dead, he was not present when Jesus appears to the rest of the disciples. Perhaps Thomas needed some time alone to process the events of the past few days, or the past few years. Maybe someone just needed to go get food and he volunteered. Whatever the case, once he returns, the disciples are ecstatic and joyful and talking over each other, sharing that Jesus is alive and was right there in the room with him. What is Thomas' reply?"

“I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

Doubting Thomas. But is that really a fair nickname? Once discussing this story with other pastors, we decided Thomas is more accurately called the man from Missouri. The state of Missouri’s motto is the show-me state. Thomas knows Jesus died but he needs proof Jesus rose from the dead. Show me, said Thomas, or I cannot believe. Is that really too much to ask? I don’t think so. People do not rise from the dead in the normal course of our day, nor in Thomas’ day. What he asks for is a fair thing.

We all have doubts at various times in this journey of following Jesus. One lesson we need to take from Thomas is this: **doubt should not be ignored**. Thomas was very clear with his doubt; he did not hide anything. He was incredibly direct with what he was feeling and needing in that moment. It allows the other disciples to journey and to care for Thomas.

We know this is true in other parts of our lives; we need to address problems head-on. When we have a cavity, a pain, in our mouth, we need to get it fixed. If we do not, it leads to larger cavities, crowns and a root canal. It is so much better if we deal with it early. Otherwise, the pain can become destructive.

Ignored doubt can become destructive; ignoring our doubt can lead to despair and possibly the destruction of our faith. Tom Berlin notes the difference between doubt and despair: **“while doubt draws us further into conversation with greater curiosity and discovery, despair shuts us down as we lose hope not only in what we have missed, but in what others have experienced to be true** (44, Kindle).”

Berlin further states, Thomas, rather than releasing his grip on faith and turning to despair, he holds his doubt and remains with his friends in the community of faith (44, Kindle). We need to reframe doubt as something bad and to be avoided into an item to be named and a journey we go on together with others following Jesus.

Thomas’ journey with this particular doubt, about Jesus rising from the dead, lasted only 8 days. But he did go on a journey. Our journeys with doubt could be significantly longer than 8 days.

This journey with doubt lasts a lifetime. Because the questions we ask will change. For Thomas, the question of whether or not Jesus rose from the dead was answered. But you can bet he had other questions and doubts later in his life. He followed Jesus for many years and decades after this moment. Tradition has it that the disciple Thomas, the man from Missouri, took the Gospel of Jesus, that he died and rose again, all the way to India in the 1st century. That's an incredible journey!

As we journey with Jesus through our own lives, the question we have in front of us won't always be there. As we grow and age, as we move from child to teenager to adult, whether or not we choose to get married, to have children, where to work, our doubts will change. They could change from "are you really a good and loving God?" to "how do I help my children, how do I help others, see that you really are a good and loving God? Am I equipped to do that?"

The destination in this journey with doubt is growing closer to Jesus. Dealing with our doubt directly, not ignoring it, and walking with Jesus through it all leads to a deep faith, a mature faith, one that sustains us through difficult moments and one that can show others the way to a mature faith. Doubt can absolutely lead us into a deeper faith.

Thomas, the man from Missouri, was not going to believe until he actually touched Jesus, the place where he was physically wounded on his body. Thomas was quite serious about finding proof that this actually happened. Jesus appears and invites Thomas to do exactly what Thomas wanted to do. How does he respond when it actually occurs?

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me" (John 20:28-29 NLT). The text doesn't say he actually touched him. You would think after Thomas making such a declaration, we would read Thomas did just that. Instead, Thomas sees Jesus and that's it. That's all he needed. He just needed a word from Jesus, Jesus' presence and Thomas was good to go.

Thomas's declaration, "my Lord and my God," is the very first time someone in the book of John refers to Jesus as God. Thomas's declaration is the culmination of all 20 chapters that have come before. Not bad for someone named doubting Thomas.

Does Jesus' response to Thomas seem like a rebuke, chastising him for not believing? I don't think so. I think it is meant for you. I think it is meant for me. It is meant for everyone in the last 2,000 years who have believed and not had the experience Thomas had or the disciples, to see Jesus in the flesh. We are blessed ourselves, even though we haven't seen Jesus in the flesh. We are the ones blessed Jesus is talking about! So very cool.

Jesus promises to be with us in all that we endure, including on this journey of doubts and asking questions. Our faith grows stronger, our connection to Jesus, grows stronger the more we exercise our faith. It is just like muscles being exercised.

Just like muscles grow by being worked, broken down, grow back bigger, do more work and the cycle repeats, our faith is the same way. The more we are in community, in prayer, serving,

worshipping, reading Scripture, exercising our faith muscles, the more they get stronger and the more our faith deepens and grows.

Friends, as we deal with doubt, don't ignore doubt. It is a journey to go on. Doubt leads us to a deeper faith. Please hear me: just because you might have some doubts in your mind, you are not a bad Christian, a Christian lacking faith. You are a good Christian, one who is seeking, in the vein of Thomas the disciple, the man from Missouri, and so many through the last 2,000 years, asking questions about absolutely everything.

Just as ignored doubt can become destructive, explored doubt becomes productive. Dealing with the question in front of you gives us a deeper understanding of who we are and who God has made us to be. It gives us a deeper understanding of faith, one that can be comfortable with mystery, because some questions we asked cannot be answered on this side of the new heaven and earth.

May you be honest about your doubts, journey with the community of faith through them, and find your explored doubts growing your faith and trust in Jesus, just like Thomas the man from Missouri did. May it be so. Amen.