

## THE STRUGGLING SKEPTIC, THE SEEKING SAVIOR, AND A STRIKING STATEMENT

**INTRODUCTION:** Please take your Bibles and turn to John chapter 20. As you turn there, I want you to try to imagine being one of the 12 disciples on the day Jesus rose from the dead. You had spent the last 3-1/2 years with Jesus, seeing Him give **sight** to the blind, **hearing** to the deaf, the **ability to walk** to the lame, **casting out** demons, and even **bringing Lazarus back to life**.

You were in the garden with Him when He was taken captive by a multitude with swords and clubs, **led by** Judas who had been **paid to show** them where Jesus was. Jesus tells you **not to fight** because He could have angels come to rescue Him, but that was not God's plan. Peter, one of the leaders of your group, follows Jesus and the mob to see what happens. Before the rooster crows the next morning, Peter—the fearless one—has three times denied that he **even knows** Jesus.

You helplessly watch as you see—or hear about—the mock trial...and the humiliating treatment of Jesus as soldiers dress Him in a robe, put a crown of thorns onto His head, put a reed in His hand, then bow mockingly before Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mt 27:29). You see His back shredded by the whipping, then follow from a distance as He is led away to Golgotha—the place of the skull—to be nailed to a cross.

You hear the hatred of those standing by—including the chief priests and scribes—mockingly saying to Jesus, "You saved others—save Yourself!" "You trusted in God—let God deliver you—if He will **even have you!**"

For **three** hours Jesus hung there—then the sky turns **dark**—in what is usually the lightest part of the day. Three hours later, you hear a loud cry from Jesus that sends a shiver down your spine—and makes the hair of your skin stand up: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Not long after that Jesus cries again, "It is finished!" then "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And then He **dies**.

A soldier thrusts a spear into Jesus' side just to make sure He is dead. Joseph of Arimathea gets permission from Pilate to take down the body of Jesus and, with the help of Nicodemus, Jesus' body is wrapped in linen clothes, carried to Joseph's own tomb, and laid there. You mark the spot well in your mind—so do some of the women that followed Jesus.

We are not told what the disciples did those 3 days, but we do know what happened early Sunday morning. Notice vs 1-2. In vs 3-8, we see Peter and John running to the sepulchre and finding no body—but the linen clothes that had been wrapped around the body!

V 10 "Then the disciples went away again unto their own home."

In vs 11-18, we see the resurrected Jesus revealing Himself to Mary Magdalene. Now v 18. Imagine trying to process all of this! Jesus was dead...and was wrapped in grave clothes...and was laid in a tomb that soldiers were guarding. But the stone was moved...and the body was gone...and now Mary says she has **seen**—and talked to—the living, resurrected Jesus!

Now verses 19-20. Jump ahead to verses 24-25. With that as a rather long introduction, this morning I want to preach a message entitled: "*The Struggling Skeptic, the Seeking Savior, and a Startling Statement*"

**1. The Struggling Skeptic.** I'm referring to Thomas, of course. Nick-named "Doubting Thomas," I think he gets somewhat of a bum rap. Let's look first at.... A. The character of Thomas

What do we know about him? First, his **name**. *Didymus* does **not** mean "doubter"—it means **twin!** It seems, then, that Thomas was a twin. It is also interesting to realize that "Thomas" also means twin in Hebrew. Who was he a twin **with**? Not told in the Bible so God decided we didn't need to know!

Other than this account, there are only two other places where Thomas' words are recorded. One relates to the sickness and death of Lazarus.

**John 11:13-16** "Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. <sup>16</sup>Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Commentators are divided as to Thomas' attitude behind this statement. Was he being an ***Ey-ore***?

'O bother; last time Jesus went there they wanted to kill Him! I guess we are all going to die with Him!' Others suggest that Thomas was demonstrating his love for Jesus. Clarke suggests that his attitude was a ***good*** one. 'Since we can't stop Him from going—and they probably will succeed in killing Him this time—let's prove our love for Him by going with and suffering with Him.' I'll let you study that out and decide for yourself!

The other time we read about Thomas is connected to **John 14:6** "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The "him" that Jesus is referring to is Thomas who had just asked this question in **John 14:5** "Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

Let's consider next... **B. The request of Thomas**

Notice v 25 "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. 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." Is that a ***reasonable request***—or was Thomas being overly skeptical?

I believe it was a... **i. Reasonable request.** Why?

Because Thomas was one of the 12—and he wanted to see ***what the other 10 had seen!*** How do we know what they saw? Notice again vs 19-20.

--They saw His hands...and they saw His side!

--Did they put their finger into the nail prints—and their hand into the hole where the spear was thrust through? Can't say for sure, but it is certainly possible—and it appears Jesus may have ***encouraged*** them to do so. **Lk 24:39** "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: ***handle*** me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

--Whether the other disciples touched Jesus or not is unknown, but we certainly know that that is what ***Thomas*** wanted to do. Notice the emphasis of Thomas wanting to make it ***personal***: "Except ***I shall see***... and put ***my finger*** into the print of the nails...and thrust ***my hand***...I will not believe."

Thomas' request was ***reasonable*** because he was wanting to see what the other disciples had seen. Not only was it reasonable, it was also a... **ii. Reliable request**

Should he have believed what the other disciples told him? Possibly, but let's not forget that Jesus had been put to death and it is not out of the question that His followers would become a target, too! So Thomas wanted proof—the same proof that the others had—before he would believe.

What would be more convincing...

--An ***empty tomb*** like Peter and John saw—or ***seeing*** the living, resurrected Jesus?

--***Two angels*** at the tomb of Jesus with a message from Him—or ***hearing*** the words from the living Jesus Himself?

Even a man working miracles that maybe looked like Jesus...and walked like Jesus...and talked like Jesus was not enough for Thomas—he wanted to see the ***proof of death*** in a body that was now alive!

First, the ***struggling skeptic***. Second, let's consider.... **2. The seeking Savior**

In v 26 we see that the disciples are all together—and this time Thomas *is* with them. Jesus appears in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you.” The statement, I believe, is to all of them.

In v 27, though, we see.... A. Jesus’ seeking of Thomas

“Then saith He to **Thomas...**” Jesus specifically sought out Thomas and spoke to him. What did He say? Before we look at that, I want us to consider for a moment what Jesus *didn’t* say.

--He *didn’t* say: ‘**Where were you last week** when I appeared to the other disciples? Only Judas was missing—and you!’

--He also *didn’t* say: ‘**Why do you need proof?** I was with you for 3-1/2 years—why not just believe what the others told you?’

Did Jesus sometimes *scold* people for not believing? Yes, He did!

When Jesus was walking on the road to Emmaus with two men the day of His resurrection, He said in **Lk 24:25** “...O fools, and **slow of heart to believe** all that the prophets have spoken:”

Jesus didn’t do that to Thomas, though, did He? Instead, He was **compassionate and kind**.

### B. Jesus’ knowledge of Thomas

We considered what Jesus didn’t say to Thomas; now let’s look at what He *did* say.

V 27 “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side...”

Think about that: Jesus knew what Thomas had **said to the other disciples** when they told him 8 days earlier that they had seen Jesus! Jesus wasn’t visibly standing there when they told him—but Jesus knew what Thomas’ response was!

Not only did Jesus know what Thomas **had told** the others, Jesus also knew how Thomas **felt**. I believe Jesus knew Thomas was **discouraged and hurting** and that is why Thomas wasn’t with the others the week before. I believe Jesus knew that Thomas **now felt even worse** that he had not been with the others and had missed out! And that is why, I believe, Jesus came to Thomas in an **encouraging** manner instead of a **scolding** one!

Isn’t God good—and wise? He not only knows what **we say**...and what **we do**...and what **we look at**...and what **we think**—He knows what we **feel**. And He **seeks us out** and knows just the right way to come to us every time and in every situation. Sometimes we need a **rebuke**—a waking up and a shaking up—and sometimes we need **soothing words of encouragement** like God gave to Elijah when he was discouraged—and like Jesus spoke here to Thomas.

Let’s consider next.... C. Jesus’s desire for Thomas

Jesus knew what Thomas had said a week earlier; Jesus also knew how Thomas was feeling. He knew Thomas’ doubts and struggles—but He also knew Thomas would **be there** with the others this time. So Jesus visited the 11 when they were again together and specifically **sought out Thomas** with this message:

Verse 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.**”

Let’s not overlook the fact that Jesus **did not** come to Thomas for the sole purpose of making him **feel good**. He was providing the proof that Thomas requested for 1 main reason: “be not faithless, but believing.”

Do you know that Jesus has the same message for **us** today? It is **not just** about Thomas; Jesus also does not want you or I to be **faithless**—He wants **us** to be believing! How do we know that?

We see that in **3. The Startling Statement about believing**

Vs 29 “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, **because thou hast seen me**, thou hast believed: **blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.**” Where is Jesus now? He is in heaven, right—and has been for well over 2000 years ago. The opportunity to see the physical proof of Jesus in His resurrected body is **past**—

unless we are alive when He returns. Thomas **believed** because he saw—so did many other people who were alive at that time. Were there some **at that time** that believed **without** seeing the risen Jesus?

I believe there were. But Jesus is not talking about them, He is talking about those who were alive **after** them!

He is talking about those that would have the faith to believe on Him even though they haven't physically **seen Him**—meaning **us**! And those that believe without seeing are **more blessed**—more favored and to be envied—than Thomas was! So what did Jesus mean when He said "**believing**" and "**believed**?"

First, let's consider.... A. The content of believing. **What** are we supposed to believe? Can we believe **anything** we want? No; we can't believe **whatever** we want and are given some specifics here in this passage.

--First, we need to believe what Thomas did—that **Jesus died and rose again**. Thomas believed it was Jesus when he saw the nail prints—and the hole in Jesus' side. By faith, we need to believe that Jesus died on the cross—and conquered death by coming back to life!

--Second, we see in Thomas' response that he believed **Jesus was God**. We see that in v 28 "And Thomas answered and said unto Him, **My Lord and my God.**" Jesus did not **rebuke** Thomas for calling Him God. By accepting that title, Jesus was agreeing with Thomas that that is who He was.

B. The consequence of believing. What is the benefit; what difference does it make?

Notice the end of the v 31 "...and that believing ye might have **life** through His name." Believing that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.... that came to earth....and lived a perfect life....and died for our sins...and rose again... is how we might have **life**—meaning **eternal life** in heaven with Him after we die.

It means being spared from the punishment of our sins that we deserve because Jesus paid it in our behalf. It means being born again...and becoming a child of God's forever!

C. The choice of believing. Please know that "believing" is more than an agreement that what God says is true. It is **more than mental assent**. It involves choosing to **transfer the trust** you had on yourself to trusting now on Jesus—and Jesus only. It is not in what **you do**—plus what Jesus did! It is a trust on what **Jesus accomplished** when He said, "It is Finished!"

I believe this choice is laid out well in the song I sung earlier for you and I would like you to turn there (299)

"Free salvation now He offers."

--Salvation—forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Heaven—is offered to us by Jesus.

--It is free to us—but it cost Jesus His life.

"Take His gift; Oh, hear His plea."

--It is a gift—from Jesus to us—that He longs to **give** and He pleads with you to take it.

"On the bloody cross behold Him;"

--Look at the cross...look at the slain Lamb of God who died as **your** substitute. See with the eyes of faith the print of the nails in His hands—and the hole in His side.

"Join His shout of victory."

--What was Jesus' shout of victory? "It is finished!"

--What was finished? His life? His suffering?

No; what was finished was the way for sinful man to be forgiven and to enter into the presence of the thrice-Holy God! Join His shout—shout with Him; make it personal—that your way to avoid Hell is complete!

Have you done that? Has there been a time in your life that you **turned** from trusting you to trusting **only in Jesus**? "Free salvation, **now** He offers." Jesus makes that offer **now**.

Have you taken Him up on that offer? If not, why not today? What an Easter it would be for you to remember—the day I bowed my head and heart like Thomas did and said, "My Lord and my God."

So what does God want us to do in light of what we have heard from His Word today?

1. First and foremost, “Take His gift”—trust Him as your Savior. “It is finished” means just that—the price to be forgiven has been **paid**, but you must receive it as a gift for you. Have you done that?
2. Second—for those that are children of God—is God your **Lord**? Is He your **master**? Are you loving Him and obeying Him and serving Him?