

Matt Henry
John 20:24-31
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“My Lord and My God!”

Grace and peace...

We live in a day and age when the Lord’s name is not regarded as holy. You know this is the case when you can break the 2nd Commandment by texting shorthand—OMG. People don’t even think about taking the Lord’s name in vain even though it makes me cringe a little. It always has. I can remember how my 4th grade teacher would take the Lord’s name in vain in front of us students. I told her privately that it bothered me; that it wasn’t OK. And you know what? She was respectful enough to stop saying it.

There is a proper way to call upon God’s name, and Thomas models it for us by beholding the resurrected Lord and saying, “My Lord and my God!” It’s a dramatic and personal confession of faith, especially when you understand the kind of person Thomas was.

The synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke only mention Thomas in the lists of the twelve disciples. From the synoptics, there are no quotes from Thomas, no details, no character shading whatsoever. But thanks to John, we see a huge personality coming through, but it’s more whiny than winsome.

So what was Thomas like? I think pessimist is a fair word for him. I think Thomas gravitated toward the negative. It was really hard for him to see how things could work out. He's a fatalist. He's zeroes in on what's not working, or what's not known. *Know anybody like that?*

In this sermon series, we have already seen how Jesus can use anyone. The disciples didn't need education. They didn't need money or social connections. They didn't need to have the right pedigree. But for goodness' sake, you'd think Jesus would *at least require his disciples to have a positive outlook on life*. But he didn't even do that which just goes to show us: He can use anyone! So bring on the whiner, the cynic, the confused, the narcissist, even the martyr. These are difficult, high-maintenance personalities. But Jesus chooses to use them and transform them too.

Thomas is commonly referred to as Doubting Thomas, but that's a misnomer—not because it's not fair to Thomas, but because it's not fair to the text. Thomas never doubted in John 20. He unbelieved in John 20. When you put a prefix of "a" before the word, it negates it. It becomes the opposite. Like the word "typical", there is "atypical". Like "theist" (someone who believes in God) just add an "a" and it becomes "atheist" (someone who doesn't believe in God). The word for faith in Greek is *pistis*, but when it comes to Thomas, he has

apistis. It's not a doubt. It's a hard unbelief. He is Unbelieving Thomas. He is not able to make that leap of faith. To him, the only way to satisfy his pessimism and skepticism is with empiricism. Unless he touches, unless he sees. He needs empirical proof. Science would say "Amen" to that! While there are many areas in which science and reason confirm the faith, as they are meant to go together, there does come a point, where we have to make that leap. We believe that Jesus is alive today, even though we have not seen Jesus. And we have to be OK with that! That's the essence of *pistis* faith. Jesus calls us blessed for believing even without seeing. One day faith will give way to sight!

So what did Unbelieving Thomas see and say?

The first line attributed to Thomas is a doozy and requires some back story in John 11. It's about Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Lazarus was ill in Bethany which is a stone's throw from Jerusalem. The Jews wanted to kill Jesus. So the Twelve are not really in favor of going back anywhere near Jerusalem. "Don't go to Judea, Jesus. They'll stone you—and maybe us too!" Jesus does exactly the opposite of what they expect. He waits for Lazarus to die. And then once he's dead, then he announces it's the time to head straight into trouble. What kind of strategy is that? "Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let

us go to him” (John 11:16). And that’s when Thomas pipes up to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (The him may refer to Lazarus, not Jesus.) And a lot of commentators say this is courageous faith. “O Thomas! So brave! This is devotion to the cause and being willing to die for Jesus.” But friends, I just don’t read it that way. What Thomas the pessimist is saying sarcastically is, “Yeah, this is going to work out. We’re all gonna end up dead.” But Jesus had already said this illness wouldn’t lead to death—not ultimately anyways. Not for Lazarus and not for Thomas.

We can’t be sure how Thomas died, but this is interesting. From the book *Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur: *“There is considerable amount of ancient testimony that suggests Thomas carried the gospel as far as India. There is a small hill near the airport of Chennai (Madras), India, where Thomas is said to have been buried. There are churches in south India whose roots are traceable to the beginning of the church age, and tradition says they were founded under the ministry of Thomas. The strongest traditions say he was martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear—a fitting form of martyrdom for one whose faith came of age when he saw the spear mark in the his Master’s side” (p. 164).* That’s who became. We see how far he was willing to go.

But as for Operation Lazarus, Thomas is frustrated with the plan. It makes no sense. And he's not afraid to voice his displeasure. Negative people rarely keep quiet. But he still went. And for that, we give Thomas props. The point for us as modern disciples of Jesus is this: When it comes to doing what Jesus tells us to do, you don't have to like it. You don't even have to understand it. But you do have to do it.

So this is an example of following Jesus physically. Go here. Let us go to Lazarus. Let us go from Point A to Point B. Not very exciting, but sometimes this is what Jesus tells us to do. And in following, we learn about where we are in relation to people around us. Following clues is in. it gives us perspective.

Author Peter Heller lives in Denver, Colorado. He commented about GPS, "I think it's a terrible invention. Nobody knows how to read a map anymore. You chase down a blue line but you have no idea where you are in the world. Like a rat in a maze. How do I ever know where I am in relation to Pikes Peak, or the South Platte? Or God?" (*Celine*)

Thomas makes is quoted again in John 14. This is a more of a spiritual kind of following. Here Jesus is talking about the Father's house with many rooms. "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. You know the way to where I am going." Thomas

said, "Lord, we don't know where you're going, how can we know the way?"

(14:5). "How's that gonna work Lord? We haven't got a clue. If we don't know of the destination, how can we follow those kind of directions?" Men tend to give cardinal directions and distances. Women tend to give landmarks and objects of relation. But what do you do with this kind of direction? Jesus famously declares, "I am the way, and the truth and the life."

I used to think the disciples were indistinguishable and collectively clueless, but now I am starting to see their personalities stand out from each other. After spending some time considering Thomas, I think he is like this counterpoint to everything brilliant about Jesus. Here we are experiencing this breakthrough, earth shattering moments of Lazarus being raise in John 11, the Father's house being promised in John 14, and the resurrection of Jesus in John 20. And every time, without fail, Thomas says something cynical and negative and we ask, "Who invited Eeyore?" And the answer is, Jesus did! He wanted to bring Thomas to a point of faith and realization when he says, "Touch here and see the wounds in the hand and my side. Stop disbelieving, but believe." The cold, pessimistic unbelief of Thomas subsides and he says, "My Lord and my God!"

We want those who question the deity and divinity of Christ to meet Thomas. What we can marvel at is how patient our Lord is in meeting Thomas'

demands. He didn't have to, but He did. And the Lord imparts to us a blessing for everyone else who did not have the privilege as Thomas did, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:30-31).

See, we live in a day and age when we long for people to take the Lord's name, not in vain, but in faith. What should bother us more than the masses of people who are taking the Lord's name in vain, is that there are not near enough people calling on the Lord like Thomas did as their Lord and God and staking their whole life on it. *But if Thomas got there, anyone can get there.* Skeptics and empiricists take note: when God intervenes, we believe that anyone can believe.

In Jesus' name, Amen.