

## Why Doubt Can Be Good for You

John 20:24-29

Today, we're starting a brand-new series called "Heroes 2". Did we ever have "Heroes 1"? Yes, we did. Anyone remembers? That was way back in 2013. So, a sequel is long overdue. In the original series, we looked at some of the famous heroes in the Bible like Gideon, and Abraham and Ehud. Some of you go, "E-who?" Well, he was one of the judges in the Book of Judges and he killed Eglon, the really fat king of the Moabites. Anyway, in this new series, we're going to look at another set of heroes. But these heroes are not your usual type of heroes who showed great faith and great strength and all that stuff. But they are heroes in their own right because they showed qualities that we can easily identify with and, therefore, we can learn lessons from their lives. That's why "Heroes 2" is like "Heroes Too". Because you wouldn't think they are heroes, but they are.

Today, the first hero I'd like us to look at is a guy who has been maligned so much. And you don't want to be compared to him. I'm talking about Thomas, one of the twelve apostles Christ who is otherwise known as "Doubting Thomas". I've entitled this message "Why Doubt can be Good for You." Maybe you doubt the truthfulness of that statement. But track with me as we look at an episode in the life of Thomas.

Please open your Bibles to [John 20:24-29](#). Follow along as I read these verses.

Thomas is the apostle who was left behind. While everyone was rejoicing, he was mourning. While everyone was excited, he was depressed. While everyone was full of faith, he was full of doubts. To think that he showed grit, determination, and loyalty early on as a disciple. In John 11, we first see his character that was remarkable.

Lazarus has died in Bethany — a suburb of Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples are in the area of Jericho when they get the word. When Jesus decides to go to Bethany, his disciples remind him that the last time he went near Jerusalem, the leaders tried to stone him to death. It would be suicidal to go back. Jesus decides to go anyway. But the disciples were unconvinced. At that point, Thomas speaks up and says, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

But it is in another passage in John which sheds light on his personality. It is in John 14. It is late Thursday night in the Upper Room. Jesus has just washed the disciples’ feet and given them the great command to love one another. Judas leaves the room to do his dirty deed. The rest of the disciples crowd around their Lord, knowing the end was not far away. To them — those loyal men who had stood with him in his hour of trial — Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place I am going” (John 14:1-4).

Thomas has been listening quietly, intently, carefully. All this talk of coming and going is too much for him. It seems vague and mysterious. In a moment of great honesty, he blurts out, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). Those are the words of a totally honest man. The rest of the disciples were just as perplexed, but only Thomas dared to speak out. We all know people like that—if they don’t understand, they won’t let it pass. They keep asking until it makes sense. That’s Thomas. And that’s the key to his personality. He was an independent thinker, a thoughtful man, not easily stampeded. He wouldn’t make a confession of faith unless he deeply believed it to be true. Let others have a glib, easy faith that comes without reflection and deep thought. Not Thomas. His was a faith won through the agony of personal struggle.

And that is why he wouldn't be easily convinced probably even if angels came and told him that Jesus rose from the dead. So that is Thomas and that is his doubt.

**What is doubt anyway?** The dictionary defines doubt as **a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction.** It is not knowing whether something is true or not. It is not being sure of something. You want to believe and yet you can't because you want proof, sometimes tangible proof. But it is not the opposite of faith. The opposite of faith is unbelief. And there is a big difference between doubt and unbelief. The late R.C. Sproul clearly points out the difference between doubt and unbelief when he writes, **"An all-important difference exists, therefore, between the open-minded uncertainty of doubt and the closed-minded certainty of unbelief".**

Sometimes, we think that to have doubts is not good and that it may even be a sin. Or having doubts is something that only new Christians experience. If you're mature in your faith, and you know your Bible and you've been a Christian long enough, then there should be no questions in your mind about your faith or about God. That is not true, however, because we see in the Bible great people of God who doubted God. An example is Elijah, who ran away from Queen Jezebel after defeating 750 prophets, thinking that God wouldn't be able to rescue him from a woman. And in the New Testament there is John the Baptist who doubted that Jesus, his cousin, was the prophesied Messiah. And we read stories of Christians in the past who doubted and had crisis of faith. So, doubts can come to anyone, whether you're a new Christian or a Christian for a long time.

**What causes us to doubt?** There are many reasons. Let me talk about a few. First, we doubt because of **Lack of Knowledge or Discipleship.** When we don't have the correct information or we are fed lies or not properly disciplined then seeds of doubt grow in our minds. Just like when I became a Christian, I was 18 then. I came to know Jesus through a book given to me by a friend. I became born again.

When I became a Christian I didn't tell my friend because he is a Jehovah's Witness like me. He gave me the book just to dispose of it. How could he disciple me? I didn't know what to do next. What I did was I went to tell another friend in order to share with him the joy of my salvation. But what he told me afterwards affected me. He knew I've been searching for the truth and have been trying one religion after another. He said, "Rolly, what if this turns out to be not the truth as well, where will you go?" The devil planted that seed of doubt in my mind and I walked away from my new-found faith.

**Trials and Severe Suffering** can also make us doubt. When finances are low, when we have serious health conditions, when the pandemic is taking longer than it should, when people hate us or are mean to us or persecuting us, when things don't go the way we expect them to, doubts can creep in and chip away our belief in a loving and caring God. Much more so when there is severe suffering. In Psalm 13:1-2, David says during the time he was being pursued by his enemies, **"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"** The Lord Jesus himself, as a man, when he was crucified, wondered aloud in **Matthew 27:46, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

Last Friday night, Voice of the Martyrs showed "The Imprisoned for Christ" virtual event. It featured two Americans, Dan Baumann and Andrew Brunson, who were arrested by Iranian and Turkey authorities on false charges. Both men underwent cruel treatment and unimaginable torture in the hands of their captors. Both men revealed how they faced a crisis of faith and doubted God's sovereignty and even his existence. One of them even attempted suicide many times in his cell. Extreme situations like this can cause doubts in our minds.

Also, **Neglecting spiritual things and fellowship** can undermine our faith. This is exactly what I believe has happened to Thomas. After Jesus died, I'm sure he had lots of questions. His mind couldn't fathom what had happened. Like the other disciples, he had expected a conquering hero who would rescue them from their Roman oppressors. But Jesus died. What was he going to do about it? He sulked and became a loner and was depressed. That's why he missed Jesus the first time he appeared to them. And he doubted that Jesus really resurrected. That could happen to anyone of us as well when we miss being with other Christians. We realize that at this time we cannot meet physically and enjoy fellowship in person. But there are other opportunities. We have our Sunday service and if you're watching right now, that's good. We have TNF, our Thursday Night Fellowship, and if you come, that's good as well. BTW, if you're not a member of Fil-Am or you're attending our Worship Service but you're from another state or another part of the world, you're welcome to join our TNF. We will send you the book that we're studying. We're studying the fundamentals of our faith and their relevance to our lives and how to apply them. Hopefully this will address some of your doubts. So, we have our Worship Service, our TNF, and then our prayer meeting as well. If you come, that's even better. We need to pray more and more as a family.

Now, we come to the crux of the matter. **Why doubt can be good for you.** Let me share with you two important reasons. First, having doubts can be good for you because

**1. It can lead to a deeper faith.**

You see, when you doubt, you ask questions. "Is it true? Why is it like this? Are there no alternatives? Is it logical? Is it practical, relevant, etc.? How does it affect me?" You ask questions because you care deeply about the important things in life. If you don't care, you don't ask. If you don't care, you just let things be. You just walk away and then perhaps waste your life away.

Many people are like that. They're just drifting along, going with the flow, caring about nothing. But there is more to life than we commonly know. We are put on this earth for a purpose. That's what the Bible says in Psalm 139:16, "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed."

That was the case with Thomas. When he started to follow Jesus, suddenly he found meaning and purpose in life. He was so devoted to him to the point that he wanted to die with him when he was going to Bethany to see Lazarus. And when Jesus died, probably he was more deeply hurt than the others. His mind was filled with questions. He became a loner because his heart had been crushed. Everything he had, he had given to Jesus, and Jesus had died. He still loved, still cared, still wanted to believe, but his heart was broken. He was not a bad man nor was his doubt sinful. Deep inside he wanted to believe. Thomas was definitely not a skeptic or a rationalist. His doubts came from devotion to Christ. It's one thing to doubt the Virgin Birth in a classroom setting. It is something else again to lose someone you love and wonder if there is still a God in heaven.

I've shared with you a few times in the past the life story of Nabeel Qureshi, a former Muslim who became a Christian and then proceeded to become a debater and a brilliant apologist. Until the Lord took him home a few years back because of cancer. As he debated with a Christian friend for years, he began to doubt his Muslim faith. But one thing that prevented him from becoming a Christian was the doctrine of the Trinity. He really doubted that it was true. Then, in his Chemistry class in college, everything clicked as he listened and pondered on what his teacher was teaching about atoms and structures of nitrate and stuff. He says in his autobiography, "My eyes rested on the three separate structures of nitrate on the wall, my mind assembling the pieces. One molecule of nitrate is all three resonance structures all the time and never just one of them."

The three are separate but all the same, and they are one. They are three in one. That's when it clicked: if there are things in this world that can be three in one, even incomprehensibly so, then why cannot God?

Do you understand that? I don't. God gave him an answer that was most meaningful to him. That he can relate to easily. God met him where he was.

That is how Jesus met Thomas. Jesus answered his question and addressed his doubt to the point. Afterwards, he had developed such deep faith that according to tradition and reliable sources, he became a missionary and travelled as far as the Malabar Coast which is in Kerala State in India. There, he established several churches. He was martyred in AD 72 when he was speared to death.

Doubt can lead to a deeper faith and also

## 2. You come to know who Jesus really is.

After all these years, Thomas has gotten a bad reputation. We call him "Doubting Thomas". We tend to look down on him. But not Jesus. Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus speaks to him as to one whose faith is weak, not to one who has an evil heart. He says, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). It's worth noting that Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He knew the raging sea within his heart. And he came just so Thomas could be sure. Jesus didn't put him down. He said, "Go ahead. See for yourself. Stop doubting and believe." This means that above the front door of every church in the world, we should erect a two-word sign: DOUBTERS WELCOME. That should be the church's message.

As far as I can tell, Thomas never actually touched Jesus. It seems that simply seeing him face to face completely convinced him. The strongest doubters often become the strongest believers.

When he saw Jesus, he rose to the highest level of faith in the gospel of John as he cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Years ago, I was 30 and I was with an international group of missionary-trainees in West Germany on our way to Russia for our missions trip. I have an uncle who lives in Frankfurt because his father was German and so I contacted him and we had dinner the night before we left. My uncle is an ardent follower of Eckankar, a New Age religion. Over dinner, he talked to me about their beliefs which was largely Hinduism in cover, you know, reincarnation, karma, yoga, and all that stuff. Of course, I tried my best to reason out and defend my faith.

After dinner, we stepped out and he continued to sway me to his views. He was like a Jehovah's Witness who never let up on me. Until I realized that I was getting confused. You see, at that point in my life, I was just coming back to the Lord after 10 years of being away from him as I mentioned in my previous testimony. So, while he talked, doubts about my faith and Jesus started to creep in my mind again and I was like getting dizzy. I was in danger zone and so I prayed, "Lord, please help me. Protect my mind. And please help me to introduce you to him."

Suddenly, I felt like my uncle's words weren't penetrating my mind anymore. He was talking but his words seem to be garbled. His words were bouncing off my head as if there was something covering my head. And I realized that God just put the helmet of salvation on my head! Then, suddenly, an idea came to my mind. I asked him, "Uncle George, do you believe in the Bible?" His answer was "yes". New Agers believe that the Bible is a sacred writing just like the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita and such. Then, I asked him again, "Do you believe in Jesus?" He said, "Yes." New Agers believe that Jesus is an enlightened master and a great prophet like Moses and Muhammad and such. But, of course, they don't believe that Jesus is God.

Then, I took out my Bible and opened to John 20:24-29. I read through it and when I came to the part where Thomas said, “My Lord and my God”, I asked him, “If you believe in the Bible and Thomas declared here that Jesus is God, shouldn’t you believe then that Jesus is truly the Lord and God of this universe?”

My uncle, a brilliant and articulate speaker, suddenly was tongue-tied. He began to stutter and clutter his words. I saw his face became red with embarrassment. Then, he quickly said goodbye saying he was late for the train.

I stood there alone and felt God’s presence. I was amazed at how powerful he was. And I came to know who Jesus really was, my Lord and my God!

For the time remaining, I just want to share with you how to move from doubt to faith. You see, doubt is a double-edged sword. It can be dangerous. It can also be a spur to enormous spiritual growth. It’s what you do with your doubt that matters. It’s like a pen. You can either write with it. Or you can poke someone’s eye with it. If you’re a fan of X-Men, you know from which movie I borrowed that analogy.

So, here are six simple suggestions about **how to move from doubt to faith.**

**A. Admit your doubts and ask for help.**

In a way, that’s what Thomas did. He plainly stated why he could not and would not believe until he saw the evidence for himself. God is not fragile. He can handle your doubts, your fears, your worries, and all your unanswered questions. He’s a big God. He runs the universe without any help. Your doubts won’t upset him. Tell him your doubts, cry out and ask for his help. And don’t fight the battle alone. Go to a Christian friend, a pastor, an elder, a deacon, anyone with a strong faith and godly insight. Ask them to walk with you as you face your doubts honestly.

**B. Recognize that faith is a choice, not a feeling.**

It took me a long time to figure this out. For many years I tended to associate faith with how I felt at any given moment.

It's easy to feel like you've got a lot of faith when all is well, you've got money in the bank, your wife loves you, the doctor says you don't have cancer, your children are doing well, your career is moving ahead, you're happy at your church and all is right with the world. But what will you have when you run out of money, your marriage falls apart, you end up with cancer, your children have problems, you lose your job, your friends at church won't talk to you, and life in general stinks. If all you've got is a "God of the good times," then your faith is shallow indeed.

### **C. Act on Your Faith, Not Your Doubts.**

That's what Noah did when he built the ark. That's what Abraham did when he left Ur of the Chaldees. That's what Abraham did when he offered Isaac. That's what Moses did when he marched through the Red Sea on dry ground. That's what David did when he faced Goliath. That's what Joshua did when he marched around Jericho. That's what Daniel did when he was thrown into the lion's den. That's what Nehemiah did when he built the wall.

Don't you think that all these great heroes of the faith had their doubts? Of course, they did. They didn't know in advance how everything was going to come out. But they took a deep breath, decided to trust God, and they acted on their faith and not on their doubts. Do the same thing and your faith will continually grow stronger.

### **D. Doubt Your Doubts, Not Your Faith.**

This simply means that you should not cast away your faith simply because you are in the deep valley of darkness. All of us walk into that valley from time to time. Some of us spend a great deal of time there. But when you find yourself in that valley where all is uncertain and you are sorely tempted to give in to your doubts, fears and worries, remember these two words: keep walking. Just keep walking. Nothing is gained by camping out in the valley of darkness.

The only way out is to keep on walking. Every step forward is a way to “doubt your doubts.” Soon enough the light will shine again.

#### E. Understand That There are Some Things You Will Never Understand This Side of Heaven.

All of us have questions that we simply can't answer. Often those questions revolve around the whys of life. Why did this happen? Why did it happen to me? Or to my children? Or to my wife? Or to my husband? Why did it happen now and not ten years from now? To all those questions of the heart, the answers will not come until we get to heaven. It is faith-building to say, “I understand that I won't understand right now.”

#### F. Keep Going Back to What You Know to Be True.

This, for me, is perhaps the most important point. After considering the sufferings of this life, and the perils and tribulations of following Christ, Paul concludes Romans 8 triumphantly by declaring, “For I am persuaded.” And he declares that nothing in all the universe can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In 2 Timothy 1:12 he says, “I know whom I have believed.” Some things you think. Some things you hope. Some things you know.

Recently I ran across a statement that resonated with my own heart: “One who has never doubted has only half believed.” By that standard, I'm not ashamed to say that I have fully believed because I have often doubted. But my doubts have only made my faith stronger in the end. Deep doubt is often the prelude to an even deeper faith. I love the way Frederick Buechner expresses it: “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving” (from the book *Wishful Thinking*). It is a wonderful truth that the greatest doubters often become the strongest believers.

And the honest doubts — once resolved — often become the bedrock of an unshakeable faith. It has been said that no truth is so strongly believed as that which you once doubted.

Here is my final word to you. God never turns an honest doubter away. Never. Come to him with your doubts, your skepticism, your unbelief, your hard questions, your sincere uncertainties. He welcomes your hardest questions.