

When Does Unbelief Turn Into Saving Faith?

John 20:24-29

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Although the Gospels and New Testament don't tell us much about Thomas, he is better known and we talk more about him than about other disciples. There is even a saying which, personally, I don't think it should be attributed to him: "doubting Thomas" (NB. In Romanian it is "Toma necredinciosul" – "Thomas the unbeliever")

In the three synoptic Gospels we don't read anything about Thomas. He is only mentioned in the lists with the apostles' names. The lists of the 12 apostles are arranged in 3 groups, and Thomas is in the second group, associated with Matthew (Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16).

The name of Thomas comes from the Aramaic language and means "twin". Hence the desire of many to know who was Thomas' s twin. We don't know his birthplace, occupation, or the circumstance when he was called by Jesus to be His disciple.

John is the only one who gives us more information about Thomas. There are three situations in which John mentions Thomas.

- John 11:16 "Let us also go, that we may die with him..." He was a pessimist, he was always looking at the negative aspect of things.

- John 14:4 "we do not know where You go, and how can we know the way?" Thomas didn't pretend to know what he didn't actually know.

- John 20:24-29 Thomas wasn't present with the other disciples when the resurrected Lord appeared to them. We don't know why he wasn't there, but it is always a loss when you are not present when the brethren are fellowshiping.

Looking carefully at Thomas, at his reaction after hearing the resurrection message, at his inability to believe the glorious truth of Jesus' resurrection, and at the experience through which he came to say from the bottom of his heart that Jesus Christ is his Lord and his God, we can learn a very important lesson about the blessed change that takes place when an unbelieving person comes to saving faith.

When does unbelief change into faith?

1. When you sincerely admit your unbelief

Thomas had the strength to admit his unbelief. It's not easy to be alone against the current, even when you have to admit your unbelief in a Christian context. Thomas' sincerity must be appreciated. In the midst of the disciples and the women who were full of joy and enthusiasm after seeing the Saviour, Thomas was the only one who was sad and different from all the others because of his unbelief.

There is a tendency to be like the others, to talk like the others, to act like the others, even to believe what the majority believes. Peer pressure, to be like the majority, is great, and only a few are capable of going against the grain. How many adolescents have started to smoke, drink alcohol, lose their sexual purity, because they didn't have the strength to be different from the others, and to avoid doing what their friends were doing?

2. When you look for proofs and are open to change your attitude

When the disciples told Thomas that they have seen the Lord, he answered: "Unless I shall see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:25b)

This is proof of Thomas' sincerity. Thomas listened carefully and analysed what his friends told him. He couldn't believe, but he knew exactly what was necessary for him to change his mind.

There are people who declare themselves unbelievers, but they have never read or listened carefully to the resurrection message, the Gospel message. There are others who declare themselves sceptical regarding the Gospel truth, but if you ask them what they need in order to believe, they couldn't answer. These kinds of people actually don't want to believe.

The renowned English analyst and journalist Frank Morrison, around the year 1920, wanted to write a book to destroy the Christian testimony. Many years he studied the testimonies and facts regarding the person of Jesus Christ, especially about the resurrection event. After about 10 years of careful study, he became a Christian, fully convinced that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. The book he wrote "Who Moved the Stone?" is one of the best books written to show that the only explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

3. When the Lord Jesus comes and talks to you

After 8 days, Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples, and this time Thomas was with them. The Lord looks at Thomas and tells him: “Reach your finger here and behold My hands; and reach your hand here and thrust *it* into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” (John 20:27) If Jesus Christ hadn’t shown Himself to Thomas, he would have remained in the darkness of his doubts.

The Lord Jesus comes to us today and talks to us through:

- the Holy Scripture
- nature
- conscience
- circumstances

All the other religions’ founders are dead. Christianity is the only religion whose founder is alive for ever.

A muslim became Christian. When he was asked by a friend why he renounced Mohamed and became Christian, he said: Imagine you are on a road and reach the crossroads. You don’t know which way to turn. There are two people there, a dead one and a living one. Who would you ask for directions? – Obviously the living one, because the dead one can’t answer.- That’s exactly what I did: I asked Jesus Christ, because he is alive. We all know Mohamed is dead.

Elihu, in the book of Job, says: “For God speaks once, yea, twice, but not one takes notice.” (Job 33:14) My dear friend, are you listening when God speaks to you?

4. When you recognise the Lord Jesus and submit to Him

When the Lord Jesus comes near you and talks to you through the Word of Scripture, through circumstances, through blessings or trials, when God speaks so that you can understand, you have the responsibility to respond with faith and full submission.

Thomas recognised Jesus as his Lord, his God, his Saviour.

The Lord’s resurrection is an undeniable reality. It is the foundation stone of Christianity. The apostle Paul says that, without the resurrection, our faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15). The biggest miracle that occurred with Jesus’ resurrection is the changed lives. The disciples were changed, the women who came to the grave were changed, and from then until now, the living Jesus continues to change lives. When Jesus changes a life, He changes the tears of sadness into tears of joy, brings hope, brings victory over sin, brings love towards others, brings everything good and beautiful, and takes away the filth. The challenge for you, dear

reader, is: can you truly say “He is risen”? Has He changed your heart in such a way that this change is obvious ?