

A man was on trial for murder.

There was strong evidence indicating guilt, but there was no corpse.

In the defence's closing statement, the lawyer, knowing his client probably would be convicted, resorted to a trick.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for you all," the lawyer said as he looked at his watch.

"Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into this courtroom."

He looked toward the courtroom door.

The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly.

A minute passed. Nothing happened.

Finally, the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement; but you all looked on with anticipation.

Therefore, I put to you that you have a reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed and insist that you return a verdict of not guilty."

The jury, clearly confused, retired to deliberate.

A few minutes later, the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of guilty.

"But how?" inquired the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt; I saw all of you stare at the door."

The jury foreman replied, "Oh, we looked, but your client didn't."

In our bible reading today we find that one of Jesus' closest followers... doubted.

In fact, his very name has become a catch phrase for doubt.

When we encounter someone, who refuses to believe something that is true we call them a "doubting.... Thomas."

Thomas will forever be known as the one who doubted.

Most of us are not into looking at the original Greek words that were used for the word doubt the New Testament.

However, it's important to note the word used here in John 20 about Thomas' doubt ("Apistos".)

It literally means ***“no faith”***.

In God’s word there appears to be several “levels” of doubt.

- There’s the kind of doubt where we want to pray for something... but we hesitate because it just seems too bold and outrageous. Whatever it is we want seems to be too outlandish to bother God about... so we hesitate. We’re not sure we want to ask that big a request of God.
- Then there’s the kind of doubt where (like Peter on the water) we suddenly feel overwhelmed by our circumstances and we take my eyes off Jesus. and find ourselves focusing more on the crashing waves around us.

We shouldn’t DOUBT like that... but we do.

It’s normal for us to hesitate occasionally or to become overwhelmed by our circumstances.

But this doubt that Thomas had - is a dangerous form of doubt.

We all have doubt but the *no faith* kind of doubt that Thomas had – can cut us off from God.

The writer of Hebrews warns the Christians he’s writing to:

“Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” Hebrews 3:12

Thomas was a disciple, Jesus selected him.

It was Thomas that said to the rest of the disciples when Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem in the midst of a dangerous situation,

‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” John 11:16

And later, when Jesus told His disciples that “In my Father’s house there are many rooms” ... and I’m going to prepare a place for you...

You know the way to the place where I am going.” John 14:4

Thomas piped right up and said: "Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" John 14:5

And Jesus responded: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

So, in Thomas we have the picture of a committed follower of Christ.

He loves Jesus.

He walks with Jesus.

He's willing to suffer and even die for Jesus.

But then he shows up late to the party after Jesus rose from the grave.

The other disciples try sharing their excitement with him but he's having nothing to do with it.

You can almost sense how he might be feeling:

"***Unless I see*** the nail marks in his hands and ***put my*** finger where the nails were, and ***put my*** hand into his side, I will NOT believe it." John 20: 25

Not, "I have my doubts."

Not, "I'm having trouble accepting it."

Not, "Is this a joke?"

No --- "***I WILL NOT***

believe it"

Of course, the other Disciples may have had their doubts until they saw Jesus, but it isn't recorded that they said, "I WON'T believe!"

I mean, doubt is one thing, but telling God WHAT you'll accept as proof is another thing entirely.

Telling God to come down and settle things on your terms is not generally a good idea.

So, Thomas is being unreasonable here.

But Jesus shows mercy and lets Thomas put his fingers into the holes in his hands and his side?

Some of us have probably tried on occasions to settle things with God on our terms.

It's encouraging as we see Jesus showing mercy to Thomas here, as He'll probably show us mercy as well.

But notice, Jesus did tell Thomas to "stop it."

"STOP doubting and believe." John 20:27

Jesus showed Thomas mercy, but he also challenged him.

But what was it that Thomas was doubting?

He was doubting that Jesus could do what He promised.

For weeks before this... Jesus repeatedly promised He would rise from the dead

Matthew 16:21 tells us "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third **day be RAISED TO LIFE.**"

Then in Matthew 17:22 Jesus tells them

"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he **WILL BE RAISED TO LIFE.**" And the disciples were filled with grief.

So, Jesus had made a promise... over and over and over again.

But Thomas REFUSED to believe that Jesus could do what He had promised.

He had NO FAITH in Jesus' promise.

That's why what Jesus said to Thomas after allowing him to touch His wounds:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29

Jesus was saying: I'm going to cut you some slack here Thomas, but you must realize not everyone is going to get this break.

People will have to make up their mind to believe in me without touching.

Hebrews teaches us: "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things NOT SEEN." Hebrews 11:1

And it also tells us: "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists AND THAT HE REWARDS those who earnestly seek him." Hebrews 11:6

To have faith you must be able to believe what you can NOT see.

not only are we to believe that God exists... but that He actually is at work and keeps His word.

When we say we believe IN God... that's different from saying I believe God exists.

You can't say: "I believe IN God and then say I don't believe that He could do what the Bible says He can or did do.

We can't let what we don't understand or explain dictate what we believe.

We have limited knowledge compared to God

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is where a Jesus heals a boy with an evil spirit.

The boy's father brings him to Jesus and says "if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us"

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me

overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:22-24

THIS man is admitting his weakness.

He wasn't saying he will NOT believe in Jesus... he's just admitting he's having a problem. But despite his struggle with unbelief he's saying:

I am making a conscious decision TO believe. "I believe – help my unbelief!"

Thomas had all kinds of information. He'd walked with Jesus for 3 years and had seen Christ heal 100s of people by just touching them
feed 1000s with just a small amount of food, and raise people from the dead.

And at some point, along the line in our faith...

you and I had to make that choice about following God.

We had to CHOOSE to believe.

We accepted that we couldn't fully understand Him... but we believed IN Him.

A true story to end: its good news.

Devotional writer Selwyn Hughes wrote

"Those who doubt most, and yet strive to overcome their doubts, turn out to be some of Christ's strongest disciples."

Thomas was transformed, saying, "My lord and my God!"

That does not hit us as powerfully as it would hit the original disciples.

Before that day, they called Jesus rabbi, meaning teacher.

They called him Christ, meaning the anointed one.

They called him the son of the living God.

No one, before Thomas, had called Jesus, "God." Jewish leaders would not have hesitated to pass the death sentence on Thomas for blasphemy.

It was an incredible and dangerous thing to say.

The Bible says that the one who had been most honest about his doubts was the first to call Jesus, "God."

Lets pray "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" amen