

THOMAS WHOSE MISTAKE Will ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED  
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But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymas, was not with them when Jesus came, 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 (John 20:24-25).

It is unfortunate that mistakes are remembered much longer than achievements. A man may devote a lifetime to meritorious service, but one mistake can ruin his reputation. He will be remembered not for his wonderful deeds, but for the blot on his record. Probably Thomas is the most outstanding example of that regrettable fact. The designation 'Doubting Thomas' has become an integral part of language: even people who never read the Bible use it. Any one who exhibits lack of faith, confidence, and trust or fears the future, is said to be "A Doubting Thomas." Even atheists refer to the Scriptures when they use the words regarding Thomas. It is to be regretted that the finer qualities of a man's character may be obscured by an isolated flaw. This is unfortunate, for the disciple of Jesus was a fine man whose actions were above reproach. Many of the qualities he exhibited would increase the effectiveness of any Christian.

Thomas the Courageous ... How Stimulating

Thomas was also called Didymus, which means a twin. Many have speculated concerning this, but the most likely interpretation is that he had a twin brother or sister. Perhaps he was the only one to survive. Others have suggested that the Lord gave the name to His disciple to indicate the man could be elated one moment, and dejected the next. He was a mixture of faith and fear. It is wise to remember that the Savior knew this even before He invited the man to become a disciple, but in spite of the imperfections Jesus wanted Thomas to become His follower. Jesus never sought perfect people. He called folk who were filled with flaws, and that should encourage every body.

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Then after that saith he to his disciples. Let us go into Judaea again. His disciples say unto him. Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again? ... Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples. Let us also go, that we may die with him (John 11: 7-8, 16).

Evidently Thomas had reached a conclusion. Life without the Lord would be empty and meaningless. It would be better to die with Him than to live without Him. If, as had been suggested, the Jew's stoned Jesus, death would be brutally painful, yet to Thomas, even that was preferable to living without the Master. The New Testament describes people who deserted Christ because to follow Him would mean sacrifice and loss. The rich young ruler refused to become a disciple because the cost appeared to be too great. Thomas saw only the emptiness of a life deprived of fellowship with Jesus. Maybe the man was pessimistic and morbid, but although he sincerely believed martyrdom was approaching, he found consolation in the fact that he would be with Christ in death as he had been in life. Thomas should be a shining example to every Christian, but unfortunately there are many people who are not so dedicated. They applaud miracles but dislike hardship.

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Thomas the Candid ... How Surprising

And if I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest: and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:3-6).

Preconceived ideas are often a menace. It is difficult to persuade any one who has already formulated an opinion. The disciples followed Jesus because they believed Him to be the Messiah. When they saw His miracles, they smiled and imagined what would happen when He became king. They, expected Him to expel the Romans and establish within Palestine the eternal kingdom of God. Yet as time passed, they became confused and bewildered. The Lord disliked violence of any kind, so how could He

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overcome invaders? Romans would never withdraw willingly. When Jesus urged listeners to love their enemies and do good to obnoxious people, those disturbed men hardly, knew what to think. They looked for a kingdom which would surpass in excellence the empire of Solomon, yet Jesus seemed to be vague and mysterious when He spoke of building mansions for His followers. Where and when would He do this? Where would He obtain the necessary materials to complete the project? How long would it take to finish the job? Then to make matters worse. Jesus predicted His approaching death. How could He complete anything if He were dead? Their Master's actions were difficult to understand.

Jesus could expel demons, heal the sick, and calm stormy seas. On the other hand. He could be so tired that even the noises of a raging storm could not disturb His slumber. It was not a cause for amazement when the disciples failed to comprehend the things he said and did. All of them were troubled, but only Thomas expressed concern. Finally, he could not remain silent and seemed to say, "Lord, You speak of many mansions to be built somewhere, yet here You have no place to lay your head. You are going somewhere, and we are expected to know where. Lord, the time has come to be explicit. Tell us plainly what you are planning to do, for we all seem to be going around in circles. Explain what is on your mind, and we shall have a better chance to cooperate. `We know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5).

Any one of the twelve could have spoken similar words, but no one did, Thomas alone expressed his problem, and for that he should be congratulated. A man who knows everything has lived too long, and he who never asks questions has an undeveloped brain.

Thomas the Critical ... How Stubborn

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came (John 20:24).

Where was he? Why had Thomas, temporarily at least, left his brethren? As far as the disciples were concerned, they were in enemy territory where merciless foes had crucified their Master, Apart from the large upper room in Jerusalem, they had no place in which to hide and no friend to offer shelter. Yet Thomas

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had gone somewhere! Possibly he could no longer appreciate

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morbid companions. Filled with joyful anticipation they had watched their Lord riding majestically into the city of David and had heard the welcoming cheers from crowds which lined the streets. Then treachery overwhelmed them, and their world fell apart. Language could not express the misery that filled their souls, and when Simon Peter suggested a return to fishing, the others knew there was little else to be done. Even in his better moments Thomas was prone to be somber and depressed. but on that particular day he probably wished he had died with his Master. Opening the door. Thomas went out to be somewhere. anywhere. But where could he go'? Maybe he wandered around the streets or sat on a bench. but the end result was never in doubt. He returned whence he had come. When he entered the room, he stopped and stared. The gloom that had troubled his colleagues had disappeared: the disciples were happy and smiling. Some might even have been whistling a merry tune. Were they crazy? Had grief affected their sanity?

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 (John 20:25).

"I will not believe." Thomas was a little belligerent. His eyes revealed indignation. The brethren had taken leave of their senses! He would have to see the nail prints in the Lord's hands before he could believe their absurd statements. His fingertips would have to explore the wounds before faith would be possible, and even more evidence would be needed. He would require to thrust a hand into the wound made by the soldier's spear. The idea was stupid. He would never believe! Doubt gave place to anger. Nothing would persuade him that Jesus was alive. He sat alone with his thoughts. The disciples knew it was useless arguing with a stubborn man and unwise to pour oil on a fire! Naaman said he would never wash in the river Jordan, but he did! (2 Kings 5:14). Jonah said he would not preach in Nineveh, but he did! (Jonah 3:4). Simon Peter said he would never deny his Lord, but he did! (Luke 22:55-62). Thomas said: "I will not believe," but he did! (John 20:28).

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Thomas the Convinced... How Sublime

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus. the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said. Peace be unto you. 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. And Thomas answered and said unto him. My Lord and my God (John 20:26-28).

Thomas was tired. It had been a long week! The continuing ecstasy of his companions increased his agitation. His world was empty. Yet, he remained among his friends who constantly affirmed Jesus had risen from the dead. As he listened to their testimony and recognized their sincerity, perhaps his resistance began to weaken. But how could the Master be alive, when everyone knew He had died? Then without warning a strange silence filled the room. No one spoke. No one moved. They all heard. "Hello. Thomas." The doubter was amazed and ashamed when he looked at the outstretched hand of the Lord. Tears filled his eyes and joy his soul when he exclaimed. "My Lord and my God." His doubts disappeared. His fingers never touched

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the nail prints, and his hand never moved to reach the wound in the side of the Savior. He would never repeat his mistake. It is nice to know that Christ is able to meet the challenge of any unbeliever.

Many legends and stories have survived the passing of time, but it would be helpful if the world could be sure of their accuracy. Tradition says that Thomas became a missionary in Parthia, Persia, and India, and there is a place near Madras which is called "Saint Thomas Mount." The discovery of The Gospel of Thomas which was found in a jar of papyri at Naj Hamadi, between Cairo and Luxor in 1943, caused international interest. "It took some fourteen years for the knowledge of the discovery to reach the West. Some inkling of The Gospel of Thomas had emerged in 1903 from a papyrus discovered by Grenfell and Hunt. The Naj Hamnadi document is a collection of 114 sayings of Christ. Some of the quotations differ slightly from those found in the New Testament, and probably represent the views of people who escaped from Jerusalem prior to its fall in 70 A.D. These folk sought refuge in the isolation of a foreign country. Thomas

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may indeed have been the author of their original documents. Thomas would have appreciated the words:

Doubt sees the obstacles.  
Faith sees the way:  
Doubt sees the darkest night.  
Faith sees the day.  
Doubt dreads to take a step.  
Faith soars on high:  
Doubt questions "Who believes?"  
Faith answers "I."

The Pictorial Bib/c Dictio,tarv (Nashville: The South Western Company. 1976). 850.

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