

**Title: Doubt decisively defeated - John 20v19-31**

**Purpose:** To see the whole point of John's gospel about coming to saving faith as seen in the climax of Thomas' conversion and confession.

**INTRODUCTION**

Harriet

Q. Who is this?

- Her name is Harriet
- She's lived a whole lifetime in Australia until 2006 when she sadly passed away
- She started out life as a boy with two other male friends Dick and Tom
- Through all of her life she was, by all accounts, a bit on the slow side
- She lived her early years on really quite a tiny island before emigrating to the vast island of Australia
- Probably her most daring event was getting stowed away on a boat for a months-long adventure
- Her greatest claim to fame was to have personally met Charles Darwin
- She died at the age of one hundred || AND seven || ty five

Q. So who am I talking about?

Well Harriet was a tortoise and she was on the Galapagos islands and she was taken along with two others on the HMS Beagle - Darwin originally thought she was a male and called her Harry.

And together they were "Tom, Dick and Harry".

Well, this morning, I want to introduce you to a **"TOM" IN JOHN'S GOSPEL**, and in so many ways he is simply a:

- placeholder **FOR EVERYONE OF US**,
- another name **FOR POTENTIALLY ANYONE OF US** - be it a Harry or a Harriet, a Sally or a Sam.

Travelling on the path of faith

Now for the past 3 months or so we have, as a church, been **charting our course through selected waters** in the gospel of John.

It has been, very intentionally, a **voyage of discovery** as we have had, at least, a **dozen ports of call** along the way.

Today we come to **our final destination, one last port of call and ONE LAST FAITH ENCOUNTER** involving a man called TOM.

Tom/Thomas/Another name

Now, **Tom** was his short name - **Thomas** his fuller name.

In fact, rather like Harry on the HMS Beagle with Darwin, Thomas might not actually have been his right name - Thomas, in the NT, was simply the Aramaic for "twin" (the Greek translation for twin was 'Didymus') and so pretty certainly he had another name that more correctly identified him.

Now Thomas was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus and, as such, he would have been an original eye-witness of most of the faith encounters that we have looked at:

- He would have been around and seen the Samaritan woman and how transformed she and her townsfolk became
- He would have no doubt seen the man who had been 38 years a cripple at the pool of Bethesda
- He would have experienced first hand the man born blind, seeing again
- He would have observed the man Lazarus emerge from his tomb of 4 days, still bound with the burial cloths - in fact he might even have been one of those Jesus instructed to loose him

And so today, as we are dropping anchor on this particular series, the obvious question that is going to be bobbing around is this one:

Q. Where you are on the faith journey? :

Q. Where have you got to?

Now before some of you think to yourself - well, I don't really need to listen in too strongly this morning - because you see I'm already there. I'm already a signed-up believer, don't be quite so quick.

#### The final verse (Verse 31)

The final verse of our section, as I have mentioned at other times, gives us the intention, the purpose for the writing of John's Gospel - let me read it:

Verse 31 " But these are written that you may <b>BELIEVE (or CONTINUE TO BELIEVE)</b> that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."
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And if you look in your version, you will probably see that there is indicated what would be called a "marginal reading" in place of the word BELIEVE - so a possible alternative is "But these are written that you may CONTINUE TO BELIEVE...".

The only difference in the various manuscripts is a single letter S in the word for believe which changes the tense.

And so some would argue that John's intention in writing his gospel is to try and strengthen and establish all the more the faith of those already in the believing community. For others, and this would be the greater majority, that John is seeking to bring people into the faith community and bring them to a place of decisive and clear belief in Jesus Christ.

The way we have preached this series is really with both aims in view.

Appreciating the work of the gospel BOTH:

- brings people to faith
- AND reminds and refreshes people who are already on the inside

#### The MONDAY question

If there is a question we have all been asked probably hundreds of times, it is what I would call THE MONDAY QUESTION:

"Q. How was your weekend?"

Q. I wonder what the disciples of Jesus would have said if someone batted that question to them on the Saturday night (which for them was the start of Sunday) and of course their way of time reckoning is kind of a day ahead of ours, their Saturday being our Sunday?

No doubt they would have been avoiding too much contact with people.

### My own Mum's death

I can still very clearly remember my feelings from 20 years ago entering church on the Sunday morning when my Mum had died a couple of days previous.

I was raw and deeply hurting inside. In fact, to make it all the worse it was "festival time", everybody was happy because it was Christmas.

I can distinctly remember saying to myself as I walked across the car park, steeling myself for what lay ahead, I cannot see how this service can possibly minister to me.

### Suddenly changed

Well, in an incredibly gracious way the hymns and the message ministered very directly to me and to my situation even though the pastor knew nothing of what I had just been through.

In fact, if I remember rightly, I think when the minister met me in the foyer after the service, he broached the subject of me taking up the role of hosting and leading a housegroup! (Pretty poor timing really! But he didn't know what I was about to tell him.).

That service confirmed for me a huge question that was in my heart and it concerned whether or not my mother had truly come through to faith in the final days of her life or not.

And the passage for that morning service centered around the text Luke 2 verse 29:

- <sup>29</sup> “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you now dismiss your servant in peace.  
<sup>30</sup> **For my eyes have seen your salvation,...**

And I knew at that moment that my Mum had crossed over by simple faith into the arms of Jesus.

### Same for the disciples

And the situation for the disciples was rather similar:

- for a couple of days - they MOPED
- for a couple of days - they simply COPED
- BUT as the saying goes "it's FRIDAY - BUT 'Sunday's a-coming!!!"

And in a moment all their questions and fears, their cares and tears were wiped away and dissolved into an INFECTIOUS JOY:

- Jesus comes to them in the upper room - appears through a locked door and says "Peace be with you"
- he shows them his hands and side so that they might have no doubt that this is the same Jesus who was crucified a couple of days earlier on

- he even deliberately eats roasted fish with them to demonstrate the fact that he is not a ghost, not some phantom or trick of the mind - that he does have a glorious new body

For the 10 disciples of Jesus, we read that they were: "overjoyed when they saw the Lord."

### People coming to Jesus

Looking at the various people in this climaxing chapter of John 20 we have:

- **Mary Magdalene** coming first to a joyous faith **with just a single sound** - the sound of her name spoken by Jesus
- **the apostle John** comes through to belief **by a single sight** - the look and the lie of those discarded grave clothes.

Perhaps it was the way that the head piece was folded up separate from the other piece.

Maybe it was that the main piece was shaped like a cocoon out of which Jesus had emerged.

Perhaps it was the sudden realization that the stone had been removed to let them in and \*not\* to enable Jesus to be taken out.

- **the two disciples from the Road to Emmaus** came to an excited faith **with nothing more than a single memory** - when they saw the risen Jesus break the bread and give thanks it brought back a familiar memory and their eyes of faith were suddenly triggered.

**BUT NOW** we come to Thomas, the last of the disciples, the last of the apostles who will be helped to break through to faith.

There's a couple of questions that come to mind regarding Thomas:

- Q. Where was Thomas?
- AND Q. How would Thomas have likely felt about the sudden joy of the others?

### Q. Where was Thomas?

So then - Q. Where was Thomas?

- Perhaps he was having a time-out from, how shall we say, "church people".

He just wanted to be alone with his thoughts, alone with his grief, perhaps he was one of life's "copers"

### Losing my Mum

You know, when I lost my Mum, I had spent a week away from church with just my biological family, but I longed to be with my spiritual family - \*not\* because my own family was of no importance, but because the bonds I have with my spiritual family go deeper.

The Scripture speaks about our need to be regularly in fellowship - Hebrews 10 tells us to:

"not neglect the meeting together as some are in the habit of doing."

Q. Have you believed that the Bible has nothing to say about the necessity of going to church?

The NT reality is that of being \*both\* STATED and EVERYWHERE ASSUMED & IMPLIED for any that consider themselves believers.

E.g. The early church:

"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" ...

"every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts"

#### A bit of a Catch-22 with evening services/midweek meetings

I strikes me that there's a bit of a **CATCH-22 thing going on** with evening services and this could equally apply to midweek meetings that seem to be viewed as partly or fully optional.

My suspicion is that there would be very few people who don't come out to evening services BECAUSE of clearly thought-through theological /biblical or historical reasons.

**For the majority** it comes down, in many respects, if we are going to be really honest and up front, to appetite and desire and a disconnect with the bible pattern.

Q. Where does the **CATCH-22** come in?

Well the difficulty is that of exactly how we would get more appetite, more desire, IF we take on board less food, if we attend the watering hole only from time to time?

You may say - "well it's easy for you, you don't have any small children" - Well of course, I am not disconnected from the realities of family and everyday life. However, I did once have small children and that was rarely any obstacle. Q. How come? Simple - one week, I would attend, the next my wife would attend. We used the same approach with a midweek meeting. And where there were multiple housegroups, then my wife would have belonged to one group on one night and I would have belonged to another on another night.

The NT pictures everywhere Christians having OVERLAPPING LIVES where you can:

- love one another, encourage one another daily as long as it is called Today
- where you can pray for one another, confess your sins to one another, bear one another's burdens
- where you can be devoted to one another in brotherly love, where you can live in harmony with one another, where you can serve one another

It is virtually impossible to do these things if our lives only intersect over coffee for 30 minutes after a service.

SECONDLY: Q. How would Thomas have likely felt about the sudden joy of the others?

- Like many of us, he might have felt annoyed at their sudden joy.

He might have felt a bit aggrieved that he had somehow missed out.

Perhaps you have had a rather similar experience where some friend of yours has suddenly "found religion" and they are all excited and they are changing at the rate of knots and you can't really find it within yourself to be very happy for them.

WELL Thomas' reply (and maybe this is you too) is: "I don't believe it!" AND "I won't believe it!"

**FOR HIM**, it is **not going to be enough** that he will **just hear a sound**  
it is **not going to be enough** that he will **see a sight** OR **have some memory jogged**

**FOR HIM** he will **have to have things more "NAILED DOWN"** and for that he has **3 clearly definitive criteria** that will have to be satisfied (Verse 24) "Unless ...

- #1 - I **see the nail marks** in his hands
- #2 - **put my finger** where the nails were
- #3 - **put my hand** into his side, I will not believe

Q. Why these 3?

Well put simply - they are all to do with Jesus' death.

Thomas is a pretty down-to-earth, realist type of person - for him:

- dead men don't walk
- crucified men don't talk

**And so this one who has made an appearance will have to pass STRINGENT BIOMETRIC TESTS.**

A profile of Thomas

I don't know if you ever had a nickname growing up. Most of them we tend to get given to us at school.

Well Thomas' name has gone down in history as "**DOUBTING THOMAS**".

in the other 3 gospels we don't learn anything about this disciple except for the fact that he is one of the twelve chosen to accompany Jesus for three years.

Fortunately however, John affords us a few more details about him, he crops up 4 times in total:

John 11 - Going back to Judea

**The first time** is in John 11.

Perhaps you remember the incident with Lazarus getting sick and then dying.

Jesus says to his disciples that they should return to Judea to go to him, however the disciples are alarmed and say to him: (John 11 Verse 8) "...a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

When Jesus explains more, and it becomes decided that Jesus is fully intending to go - this is where we get Thomas' first recorded words:

(John 11 Verse 16) **"Then Thomas** (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, **'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'**"

What I would suggest this tells us about Thomas is that he is certainly **not lacking in loyalty and devotion** - at least on the surface he appears to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus shoulder-to-shoulder.

John 14 Verse 5 - Being clear about things

**The second time** we get the words of Thomas are three chapters further on there in [John 14](#). This is where Jesus is with his disciples at the Last Supper and he has just begun that Final Discourse.

Jesus has just begun explaining that they should have peace because he is going away to prepare a place for them. Jesus says: ([John 14 verse 4](#)) "You know the way to the place where I am going."

Now I can imagine that all of the disciples bar none were quietly saying to themselves: "No we don't!" but it is **only Thomas that has the guts to be upfront about things**:

[John 14 verse 5](#) we read "**Thomas** said to him, '**Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?**'"

Whatever else we might like to say about Thomas, there is **a wonderful note of honesty and straightforwardness** about him. Thomas is simply not happy to say that he understood when he did not understand.

Thomas is not happy to still his doubts by simply pretending they did not exist.

Thomas was **one who had to be sure** - he is very much a "**What you see is what you get type of guy**" - and that is really precious.

It was [Tennyson](#), the 19 Century poet who wrote:

"There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds."

One commentator puts it like this: (William Barclay):

"There is more ultimate faith in the man who insists on being sure than in the man who glibly repeats things which he has never thought out, and which he may not really believe. It is doubt like that (i.e. 'that insists on being sure') which in the end arrives at certainty."

#### John 21 Verse 2 - In the fishing party

Apart from the passage that we are looking at the end of [John 20](#), **the only other place** where we get to know about Thomas is the simple fact, in [John 21](#), that Thomas is amongst the group of people that go fishing with Simon Peter just prior to the breakfast on the beach.

We spoke about this smaller group of disciples that are fishing the other week and what appears to be the case from those named in the list, is that **they were potentially the more serious ones**.

So just perhaps this is **additional confirmation of the loyal and devoted aspect to Thomas**.

#### John 20 Verse 24-31 - Dealing with doubt

I want now to wind forward to where Thomas will have his own life transforming opportunity.

[Verse 26](#) says: "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"

It is interesting to see how Jesus is, I believe, re-enforcing now **THE SUNDAY PATTERN that was to replace the Sabbath pattern** that had been in existence for over a millennia.

Jesus appear first to the disciples all together on that first Lord's Day evening - now he comes again and Thomas is present.

Q. Why was he present? Well because the other disciples reached out to him. They took the trouble to do whatever it took to get Thomas to be where he needed to be.

And this time Jesus comes again - I don't know whether it was a morning, or again whether it was an evening - what I do know is that one of the most life changing meetings I ever attended was an evening service when the preacher was merely one of the elder's of the church and not even the pastor.

Q. Have you ever asked yourself: Is there any good reason why God should choose to turn up at the morning service MORE THAN at the evening service? We all know that the "BEST" service is the morning one. Q. Do you seriously think that God is interested in that way of thinking?

#### Jesus meets Thomas exactly where he is

Notice how loving and caring Jesus is that he is willing to meet Thomas exactly at his point of need.

Jesus knows that Thomas is not trying to be difficult.

Thomas is \*not\* saying "I've made up my mind - don't confuse me with the facts!!"

So Jesus turns immediately to Thomas and he says (Verse 27):

"Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

#### Thomas' confession

Sometimes we think that what we need is a whole long list of evidence if we are going to confidently believe and Jesus is certainly \*not\* anti-evidence. Jesus offers to Thomas to satisfy his requirements.

But Thomas, I suspect, does not actually need to go ahead and touch Jesus.

He is persuaded on the spot. Jesus can change and convince you on the spot through the powerful working and conviction of His Holy Spirit deep within.

On the day I proposed to my wife, the very night before I had with all seriousness said to her that I was \*not\* ready to take that step. She was going back to Bible college that next day and so I wouldn't see her for a while. BUT when I woke up in the morning everything had mysteriously changed.

It was as if God had taken off the seat belt of uncertainty that I had been wearing and I was gloriously free to propose to her. The rest is history.

And the rest was history for Thomas - he gives us the greatest and highest confession of faith that is to be found anywhere in the gospels:

Verse 28 "Thomas said to him '**My Lord and my God**'"

Q. Are you willing to do that?



## CONCLUSION

You've heard the evidence – you've had John give you the 7 miraculous signs – they all point towards the same conclusion – that Jesus is who he said he was.

You've had John to give you the 7 majestic sayings e.g. I AM the way the truth and the life; I AM the good shepherd; I AM the resurrection and the life.

Q. What more do you want?

No case is hopeless

Maybe you feel your case is hopeless.

No case is hopeless.

The fact is your case is \*not\* hopeless:

- God took Abraham, the pagan -> and made him into a pillar of faith and the father of his people
- He took Moses, the stammerer -> and made him into the greatest vehicle for the communication of the word of God until the Apostle Paul
- He made the shepherd boy David -> into a king
- He took Peter "the weak" -> and transformed him into Peter "the rock"
- John, one of the two "Sons of Thunder" -> became the aged "Apostle of Love"
- Paul, the archetypal "persecuter of Christians" -> became the undisputed champion of church planting and an unashamed martyr into the bargain

The fact is He can do that for you too.

But you do need to allow him to do it.

Believe on Christ. Rather than being faithless, may you be one who, like Thomas, was found "faith-full."

Notice how it ends with a blessing from Jesus: Verse 29b "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

If you want to take that first step – while we sing the final hymn come to the front in the last verse and I will pray with you.

AMEN