

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

# **Thomas**

### **Lesson 1: Thomas – Let's Die With Him**

#### **Reading**

John 11:1-6.

#### **We need to be prepared to 'die' for Jesus**

Have you noticed that without John's Gospel we would not know much about Thomas from Scripture? Why John should single him out for some little cameos I find very interesting. Yes, he is named in the lists of Jesus' 12 disciples recorded in the other Gospels and Acts, but none of the other writers add the insights of John. Over the next four weeks, I will highlight John's record with a view to us learning a little more about Thomas and what he would say to us today.

I think Thomas gets an unfair 'press'! We all know the phrase "Doubting Thomas" to describe someone who doesn't believe a report or the evidence as presented. Well, as we shall discover, there is a whole lot more to Thomas than an exclamation of uncertainty.

Here in our reading for today, we find Jesus hearing of Lazarus' death. Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home was in Bethany, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the place of greatest opposition to Jesus and the time was fast approaching for His Crucifixion. Jesus' decision to return to Judea was challenged by the disciples since they saw it as walking straight into conflict and potential death. Realising Jesus' determination, Thomas rallies the other disciples and says, *"Let's go with Him, even though we may have to die as well."*

So we see the rest getting 'on board' and following Jesus to Bethany. Please notice that Thomas did not say as Peter did later, *"Even if all (the others) fall away... I never will."* Thomas didn't exalt himself above the others; he merely encouraged them to follow Jesus to the end – the bitter end.

Don't we all need someone to challenge us the same way? Don't we all need a cause worth dying for? Maybe, as Christians living in the 'West', we need to get back to where Thomas obviously was. To see our relationship with Jesus as more than a religion, more than an optional add-on to our materialistic lifestyle, and see it once more as a fundamental, vital, living relationship with none other than the Son of God.

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### **Lesson 1 continued: Thomas – Let's Die With Him**

#### **Thomas would say to us today...**

Don't take your relationship with Jesus lightly. Jesus died so you could be free. He demands your total commitment, whatever the cost is to you. Are you prepared to die for your faith? What price are you prepared to pay?

#### **Prayer**

*Father, please forgive me for so often taking my Christianity lightly or mechanically. Help me remember that it is the very fabric of my being and the very reason for my breathing. And may I never forget that it is a wonderful intimate relationship with You. Help me keep my eyes and focus on Eternity. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Daniel 3:8-30; Matthew 26:31-35; Romans 12:1-21.

#### **Questions**

What difference is your relationship with Jesus going to make to your life goals this year?

What can we do to make our Christian walk vibrant?

Have you got a 'cause' worth dying for? (Or living for?)

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### **Lesson 2: Thomas – How Can We Know The Way?**

#### **Reading**

John 14:1-14.

#### **Only the real Truth will set you free**

I love Thomas, don't you? He is not one of those 'super-spiritual' Christians, is he? Rather he's very down to earth and honest. *"Jesus, we have no idea where You are going so how on earth are we supposed to know the way to get there?"* Praise God for Thomas! Why? Because on hearing Thomas' outburst – Jesus replies with one of the most profound and wonderful statements He has ever made! Thank you Thomas – If you had kept quiet, we may never have heard that most awesome of all truths.

What was Jesus' reply? *"I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life, NO ONE comes to the Father except through ME."* Wow! The very stumbling block for all false religions. The fundamental exclusivism of Christianity! The proclamation of exclusive Truth and Divine Spiritual Reality. The 'in-your-face' and 'up-your-nose' radicalism, which has challenged and irritated all opposition. It's the watershed of faith.

God hates compromise! All through the Old Testament, there is one example after another of the disastrous results that flow from ignoring God or compromising His demands. It began in the Garden of Eden and continued throughout the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Yes, Jesus claimed exclusive rights to God. He claimed to be God and that no one else could get us access to our Creator, as Our Heavenly Father. Oh yes, you can know God without Jesus! Every living human being has a spiritual dimension, which seeks a connection with God, his or her Creator. The only problem for most is that they want to initiate it their way – so instead of knowing God as Father, they end up 'knowing' Him as some aloof, far off Being of Judgement and fear. James tells us that even the demons believe in God and tremble!

So we are right to be exclusive. If we want to know God as our Father, then there is only one way and that is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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### **Lesson 2 continued: Thomas – How Can We Know The Way?**

#### **Thomas would say to us today...**

If you want to know the Truth, if you really want to know the Way to God and to know Him intimately, as your Heavenly Father – know this – you will only ever experience that wonderful and fulfilling relationship through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the Saviour of the World.

#### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, thank You so much that You initiated the Way for us to relate to You. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for our sin and selfishness so we could come back into a vibrant, close and open, eternal relationship with You. And Thank You, Jesus for making it possible. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

2 Kings 17:27-41; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:13-21.

#### **Questions**

Why is it important to know the Truth?

What are the hallmarks of the Life Jesus offers us?

How can we best tell others that there is only One Way?

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### **Lesson 3: Thomas – Unless I SEE The Nail Prints... I Will NOT Believe It**

#### **Reading**

John 20:19-29.

#### **he evidence is overwhelming!**

“Jesus has risen from the dead!” “Yeah, right!” Was Thomas the inspiration for the Tui ads, I wonder?

This is the ‘bit’ we all know about Thomas. First of all, he was absent that day Jesus came and revealed Himself to His disciples in all His resurrection glory. No, Thomas was missing. Where was he, I wonder? Was he having his own ‘pity-party’? Was he hiding like the others had, but on his own because he couldn’t understand all that had taken place and he just had to get away on his own to try and process it and see if he could make any sense of it at all? Whatever the reason, Thomas missed it and missed out!

Jesus had come – Jesus had proved to the others that He was alive. Oh, yes we criticise Thomas for unbelief – but weren’t the others just as doubting when the women told them that they had seen Jesus? Not so vocal perhaps, but just as faithless! Now they were the privileged believers and Thomas the only doubter. But is doubt a sin? Isn’t honest doubting a prudent emotion? Shouldn’t there be evidence for our faith? If our faith is based upon mere speculation, myth or some other irrational, ethereal mysticism, we become gullible and open to all sorts of superstitious nonsense.

No! Thomas proves for us that Christianity can weather doubt! It is open to examination. It is NOT just a moral code or set of impossible rules. It is based upon a person and its foundation is fact. As all honest doubters who have bothered to examine the evidence have found – Jesus Christ lived, was crucified, died, was buried AND ROSE AGAIN. The historical evidence is there open for all to explore.

If I may remind you again – If Jesus didn’t bodily rise from the dead – where is His body? The embittered Jewish Leaders never found it. The barbaric riot subduing Romans never produced it. Both of those groups would have done everything within their powers to do so as it would have been the simplest way of ending those Christian lies! But they never could – because the Body was gone! Yes, but not stolen – resurrected – and went around alive for 6 weeks before departing for Heaven. Yes, there were many eye-witnesses – even 500 all at the same time!

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### **Lesson 3 continued: Thomas – Unless I SEE The Nail Prints... I Will NOT Believe It**

#### **Thomas would say to us today...**

Expose your doubts – be honest about them. But then make a good hard open-minded look at the evidence and you will find, just as I did, that the evidence stacks up. *“I saw the nail prints, I saw the wound in His side from the spear – they were real, they were fatal. BUT I saw Jesus alive, in the flesh – resurrected from the dead.”* And so you don't need to doubt any longer. Take my word for it – because I'll stake my life and reputation on it!

#### **Prayer**

*Father, thank You that You allow for my doubts and questions. Thank You that our faith is based upon historical fact and not some wishful thinking. Help me to be bolder in my witness for You, knowing that my faith has a firm foundation and the evidence does indeed stack up for those open to see it. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 & 50-58; Colossians 1:1-15; 2 Peter 1:12-21.

#### **Questions**

Why is it so important that Jesus was actually crucified?

Why is it important that Jesus rose bodily from the dead and grave?

What difference is the resurrection of Jesus making in your lifestyle this year?

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### **Lesson 4: Thomas – My Lord And My God**

#### **Reading**

John 20:24-31.

#### **Everyone including You need an encounter with the Living God**

The bit we overlook! Thomas saw the living resurrected Jesus and exclaimed, *“My Lord and My God.”* So far as I have read, I have never seen it recorded that any of the other disciples ever said those words. Oh yes, Thomas had his doubts but when the evidence was standing right there in front of him, he sank to his knees and worshipped the Lord.

These Scriptures depict another incident revealing the grace, mercy, forgiveness, longsuffering and patience of God. We saw last time that Thomas was missing when Jesus arrived to let the disciples know that He was alive and had triumphed over Hell and Death. Jesus was determined to reveal Himself to Thomas so that he could get back into unity with all the others. No, He didn't say to Thomas – because of your doubts you can rot in Hell! Rather, He was moved by compassion and made sure that He answered all of Thomas' uncertainties. He went so far as to pick up on Thomas' own words and so point to His wounds in His hands and side. He even invited Thomas to put his finger into the evidence so he would be fully satisfied.

I don't think Thomas ever did, do you? I think the evidence was so overwhelming that Thomas immediately dropped to his knees and cried out, *“My Lord and My God.”* What a wonderful response to seeing Jesus! Nothing held back, total unreserved worship. The cry of a humble, surrendered, repentant yet committed heart, soul and life. He saw LIFE, he saw POWER, he saw INVINCIBILITY, and he saw DIVINITY in their fullest form and so yielded up his fear, his doubts, his scepticism and his selfishness to ONE WHO IS GOD!

Thomas would never be the same again. He had experienced an awesome encounter with the Living God and had yielded himself and his agenda completely to the will and purposes of God for the rest of his life.

And there's more... It caused Jesus to say, *“Thomas, you believe because you have seen... Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* Hello, isn't that us – you and me? No, we haven't seen and yet we do believe. Aren't we blessed! Yes we are, and let's be thankful and equally humble enough to exclaim or to worship like Thomas with those immortal words - MY Lord and MY God!

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### **Lesson 4 continued: Thomas – My Lord And My God**

#### **Thomas would say to us today...**

I saw Him. I SAW HIM! I saw the nail prints. I saw the sword-thrust wound. They are real. But – YES - Jesus is alive. He is Risen from the dead. Believe me, He is everything He ever claimed to be. Yes, He IS GOD! Oh please believe me and acknowledge Him as your God and your Lord, too.

#### **Prayer**

*Dear Lord Jesus, Thank You for dying for Me. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me in such a way that I now know You are none other than the Son of God, My Saviour and the Saviour of the world. Please accept my worship as I confess before You today that You are My Lord and My God. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

1 Peter 3:15-22; 1 John 3:1-3; Philippians 2:5-11.

#### **Questions**

Have you ever had a dynamic encounter with Jesus Christ?

Have you ever said to Jesus – My Lord and My God?

How are you showing in your lifestyle that Jesus Christ is your Lord?