

Equipped to deal with doubt

Are you a doubter, someone who finds it difficult to accept something without lots of evidence? Well you've got company! Most of the disciples of Jesus found it very difficult to believe that He had actually risen from the dead. And can you blame them? After all, people don't rise from the dead, do they? One was particularly sceptical, and he has become known as "Doubting Thomas" an expression widely used for sceptics. But what can we learn from Thomas, regardless of whether or not we are natural doubters?

1. Isolation breeds doubt. Solitude can be beneficial if we use it to clear our minds of junk and focus on God. But, if we're not careful, times of solitude can also be dangerous. Solitude can encourage us to brood on things and develop negative thought patterns. And if our solitude is coupled with isolation from other Christians, we're at high risk of a major doubt attack. The first Easter Sunday evening, when most of the disciples met together, Thomas was nowhere to be found. Perhaps he was on his own, just moping around. If there was ever a time when the disciples needed each other, this was it. They had to stick together, plan the future, and support each other now that Jesus was gone. But Thomas was missing, preferring his own company. Whether we like it or not, we need other Christians. Some of us like to think we are self-sufficient but we need each other.¹ Thomas isolated himself from other Christians and then came the doubt attack.

2. Doubt can be a refusal to believe. It's certainly true that we may be genuinely unsure of something, doubting it, but sometimes what we call 'doubt' is actually a stubborn refusal to believe. When the other disciples claimed to have seen Jesus after He rose from the dead, Thomas' response was "*I won't believe it unless...*"² Not "I can't believe it" but "I won't believe it." "Doubting Thomas" didn't really doubt at all; he refused to believe. He refused to believe eye-witness testimony, as well as Jesus' own promise that He would rise from the dead. If we are having difficulty with doubt, we need to take a long hard look at our motives or attitudes and have the courage to identify if it's really doubt or actually unbelief that's our problem. If we are struggling to believe, let's pray "*I do believe, but help me not to doubt!*"³ But if our problem is a refusal to believe, we need to recognise how displeasing this is to Christ and repent of it.⁴ Only then will we experience the full blessing of His presence and usefulness in His service.

3. Doubt is not a sign of spiritual maturity. I have, on quite a number of occasions, seen doubt presented as something positive, as if it was a sign of maturity or a virtue. The argument goes like this: "It's arrogant to be certain of things in the Bible. Those who are mature are humble enough to acknowledge their own weakness. Doubting biblical teaching is an acknowledgement of weakness, therefore only those who doubt are truly humble and therefore mature." This is certainly not what Jesus thought! Instead of commending Thomas for his humility, Jesus commanded him to explore His wounds so that doubt might be replaced by certainty. "*Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!*"⁵ Doubt cripples our witness for Christ. He wants us to be utterly convinced and strong in the faith.

Are you a "Doubting Thomas?" If you struggle with doubt, don't isolate yourself from other Christians, examine yourself to see if the doubt is actually a refusal to believe, and ask Christ to help you not to doubt but to enable you to confess Him fully as your Lord and God, as Thomas did.⁶ Then go and live for Him with confidence.

¹ Hebrews 10:25

² John 20:25

³ Mark 9:24

⁴ Mark 16:14

⁵ John 20:27

⁶ John 20:27