

April 7, 2013

A LITTLE DOUBTING THOMAS MIXED WITH A LOT OF PRAISE

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John 20:19-31, Psalm 150

I wonder how many of us have had someone tell us a pretty amazing story. Fish stories come to mind – particularly about the one that got away. Suddenly, something goes from the size of a minnow to the size of a whale! Naturally, we are skeptical.

Our first question, of course, is, “Where’s your proof?” Doubting someone’s claims, particularly of the far-fetched or literally impossible, is a normal, healthy response.

How often have we asked God for a sign to let us know we are going in the right direction, or doing what God would have us do, or even just give us a hint? We do this all the time. We want proof as thinking, intelligent human beings. We want to believe God with our hearts and our minds.

Given the fact that we, too, have questions, isn’t it reasonable to assume that there is a little Thomas in all of us? When we voice our questions and concerns, we are being honest with ourselves and with God.

We need reassurance and guidance and hope. We need to know that, when we take that next faithful step, we aren’t going to fall flat on our faces, curse God and turn away. We need to feel cared for by the God of wonders and miracles.

I think because it is so natural and normal for us to doubt, maybe this is why Thomas has gotten such a bad reputation over the years. We even refer to him as ‘doubting Thomas’ ignoring his faithfulness to Jesus during his entire ministry. When Peter tried to keep Jesus from returning to Jerusalem because he was afraid Jesus would be killed, it was Thomas who said, *‘let us go that we may die with him.’* Without a doubt in his mind, Thomas was ready to die for what he believed.

I am thinking Thomas was really concerned for his fellow disciples and the followers who had claimed to have seen Jesus alive. Surely, they must be suffering from hallucinations or stress-induced visions or something. He was the only realist in the group – he wanted the tangible like we often do.

Thomas may very well have just been showing concern for his friends, yet I believe he was also showing doubt that we all face when dealing with God. Everything is not always tangible.

At times things happen that are beyond our understanding. Jesus' resurrection is one of those things. I'm guessing that we, too, have a hard time believing that one, in spite of the evidence presented by countless witnesses, including Thomas. It wasn't humanly possible for someone to rise from the dead after being in a tomb for three days. It wasn't humanly possible for someone to bear the severe torture inflicted on him and survive. It wasn't humanly possible to have the Romans, who were experts in human torture and suffering, be wrong about Jesus' death. But we are not talking about a mere human – we are talking about the Son of God. We are talking about the one who experienced human life and suffering yet maintained the divine element of God as part of his very being. We cannot explain Jesus in human terms – it is just not possible. But our hearts tell us to believe. Our minds are able to leap beyond what should be a human impossibility to a divine reality – Jesus the Christ has risen from the dead. Jesus understands our doubts and our fears.

Can we believe that we are God's chosen ones, even when we question what is going on in our lives, and maybe at times wonder where God is in a given situation? Can we cling to a shred of faith when all seems lost?

Thomas did. We do not know why Thomas was not with the others when Jesus appeared the first time. But because he wasn't there, he not only maintained the burden of the death of Jesus but the possible mental loss of his friends. How could they say such things to him? He saw Jesus die with his own eyes. He knew where the body was laid – even if the tomb was now empty, isn't it possible his friends succumbed to stress, imagined seeing Jesus because they so badly wanted to see him, simply because someone had moved his body? Thomas still cared for his friends, and they still cared for him even when they did not agree.

He was with them a week later when his life was changed forever. Jesus did indeed appear again just as he had the first time. The small group was together, huddled behind closed doors wrapped in their fear, when Jesus suddenly appeared to them with the same words, "*Peace be with you.*" Jesus always seems to know the right thing to say, doesn't he? To be a follower of Jesus was indeed a death sentence. Yet Jesus appeared, once again in the flesh, conquering the impossible and bringing a message of peace to a hurting world.

It is interesting that Jesus singled out Thomas by repeating the same ritual he had

done with the others. He told Thomas to feel his hands and his side, even though by this time Thomas did not need the reassurance. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas could not have expressed a more perfect response – ‘*my Lord and my God.*’ From that point on Thomas continued to be the dedicated follower of Christ he had always been. Thomas received his reassurance of faith – ‘*my Lord and my God.*’

So let’s serve a lot of **Praise** with your doubt. Praise and worship time in our services is not just a time to be blessed, it’s the time to become bold and aggressive and begin to do warfare on behalf of those who are bound and oppressed by the devil.

If it seems Satan is gaining ground in your life, then you better check your praise level. (Satan cannot endure the praises of God) If you want to know where God lives, I’ve found his address -**Psalm 22:3** *Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

Psalm 150 provides guidance on praising the Lord in few words. In only six verses, we learn who, where, and how to praise, the motivation to praise, and who/what should do the praising.

WHERE: *"Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty firmament."*

Sanctuary plus firmament means that all God's people, ancient, medieval and modern; those alive now and those alive eternally; all God's people praise God together.

WHY: We are to praise God for his mighty deeds. His mighty deeds are what he has done and what he continues to do. *"Praise God according to his exceeding greatness."* The exceeding greatness of God is who God is in himself, not merely what he has done. This is why we praise.

HOW:

Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!

⁴*Praise him with tambourine and dance;*

praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵*Praise him with clanging cymbals;*

praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

Plainly we are to employ any and all means in our praise of God. The list of musical instruments mentioned in the text is by no means exhaustive. The trumpet was sounded to prepare God's people for conflict. The lute supplied bass notes, the foundational throb of praise, as regular as the throb of a heartbeat. The harp -- made famous by Israel's best-loved king (King David) the harp spoke peace to troubled hearts. The tambourine supplied the rhythm for dancing and always meant celebration and rejoicing. The pipe was used at funerals. Cymbals were used in Israel to express ecstasy. How is God to be praised? By every means, in every mood, on every occasion.

WHO: Who is to praise God? Everyone and everything is to praise God.

All of our faculties are to be engaged in praising God. The breath is used to blow the trumpet and flute; the fingers are used with the harp and strings; the whole hand hits the tambourine; the feet move in rhythm; and the arms are used to clash the cymbals together. Corporate worship is not meant to be passive as if its something that we just watch or listen to. We are to be fully engaged in active worship, lifting our praise to God by engaging our head, our heart, and our hands. The variety of instrumentation gives us freedom to worship God in different ways. There is not just one way to worship or just one musical style that is acceptable to God.

Our challenge is not to prove which style of music or worship is “right,” but rather to grant grace to those who may choose to worship in different ways than we do. The key is to create corporate worship experiences that allow for both rejoicing and reverence.

The meaning of praise: To bestow approval upon, to honor, worship, to glorify; to stretch out the hands, to worship with extended hands. That is to hold up the hands in reverence, to open the hands and let go of everything, just stand and praise God open-handedly! That means you’re not holding on to anything! Our problem is we won't let go of things or let go of our problems! Let them go, lift your hands and let’s give ourselves to praising the Lord! If we hold the Lord in the highest state of respect and admiration, it’ll be easy to praise Him.

As we transition to communion, we want to remember our Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price for our sins and won the victory.

Friends, this morning, the trumpet is sounding and blending together with other instruments of worship. Our Lord has paid the price by shedding His precious

blood once for all. There is now no need for any more sacrifices to be made. As we come to the table of the Lord, let's come with heads, hearts and hands full of joyful praise.

Are we in need of reassurance today? God will provide you with the reassurance you need in order to follow the path that God is calling you to. Each of us is called – none are left out. We are part of the family of God, charged to love and care for one another while clinging to the hand of the crucified Christ. God will provide you with the reassurance, comfort and strength you need to say beyond a shadow of a doubt, “my Lord and my God.”

To God be the glory.