

Series: Help My Unbelief	Reference: John 20:19-28	Title: Debbie Downers	Date: 02.27.2022
Website Writeup:			
Have you known a Debbie Downer, a wet blanket? What they say is true, just negative. No one wants to be called a 'Doubting Thomas' who never believes anything & always looks at the negative. However, just like Thomas, for whom that term was coined, our doubt can show how close we actually are to God; we can be transformed by Jesus in our state of doubtfulness. Christian maturity allows our doubts to be challenged by God's truth & faithfulness.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ1AjaNjack>

Have you known a Debbie Downer, a wet blanket? What they say is true, just negative. No one wants to be called a 'Doubting Thomas', who never believes anything & always looks at the negative. However, just like Thomas, for whom that term was coined, our doubt can show how close we actually are to God; we can be transformed by Jesus in our state of doubtfulness. Christian maturity allows our doubts to be challenged by God's truth & faithfulness.

Turn with to John 20:19-28 on p741 in your pew Bibles to the story of Doubting Thomas which says...*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came & stood among them & said, "Peace be with you!"* ²⁰*After he said this, he showed them his hands & side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* ²¹*Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* ²²*And with that he breathed on them & said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³*If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

²⁴*Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.* ²⁵*So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands & put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

²⁶*A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came & stood among them & said, "Peace be with you!"* ²⁷*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand & put it into my side. Stop doubting & believe."* ²⁸*Thomas said to him, "My Lord & my God!"*

Thomas was one of the original twelve disciples. We find quotations of Thomas throughout the Gospels. When Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, He was warned by the disciples that Jews wanted to stone Him (John 11:5-8). Thomas interpreted Jesus going to be with the deceased Lazarus as a part of his plan to restore God's kingdom. **The zealous Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Thomas believed in Jesus as the Messiah - to the extent of willing**

martyrdom! Very contrary to his unfortunate later moniker, Doubting Thomas. In actuality, he wasn't a disciple who was lukewarm or skeptical. He had a close relationship with Jesus & would follow Him to the end. So, why the change?

We can only imagine for a guy like Thomas what it meant to follow Jesus. To walk with Him for years, see all the miraculous signs of the prophesied Messiah fulfilled in Him, to hear His words of hope & place so much hope in Him. Finally something was happening in his mundane average life! He was part of something great, something life changing! For 3 years everything was looking up!

Then it all came to a crashing halt on the cross! To see his hope so brutally tortured & murdered hanging on that tree! The depiction in the movie *Passion of the Christ*, was probably not too far off, if you've seen it. Jesus was beaten & bloodied, scourged by whipping, a crown of thorns pressed down on His brow, His flesh flayed open, proof of His death by the spear in the side, and then a burial in a solid sealed tomb for 3 days - no one could've survived.

All your dreams & hopes crushed in one afternoon after years of so much wonder & promise now locked away forever in death behind an unmovable stone. That must've been devastating. Depression & disillusionment must've settled on his soul.

It's no wonder Thomas said... *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands & put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* Standing on the other side of the story the statement seems so petulant. But logically, there'd be no reason to believe such an outlandish story even from good friends - although Jesus had even said it would happen Himself. And even after Thomas witnessed himself Lazarus being raised after 4 days in the tomb, Christ's resurrection still wouldn't be believable until you saw it yourself. I get Thomas. And I don't think he'd given up all hope. Why? Because he was still there, still gathering at the table with the other disciples. He hadn't cut & run. He was walking in doubt as a Believer, not Skeptic. He knew there was something to all this, although he couldn't accept it until he saw it.

When doubt settles on our soul, it's important to stay in the room, to keep going, processing in the community of believers. He must've wandered streets in his own thoughts, recalling all the moments with Jesus, wondering how it all could've been so real, and why it ended as it did. He was still in the game, but what he did not do, and this is what we can learn from him, is he did not listen intently to Jesus words.

Jesus had said in Matthew 16:21...*that he must go to Jerusalem & suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests & the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed & on the third day be raised to life.* When we look at the Transfiguration moment in Matthew 17, God speaks to Peter, James & John at that moment saying... *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

Thomas, like so many of us, need to work on our listening skills. If he had, he would've heard that last line from Matthew 16:21 Jesus had spoken...*and on the third day be*

raised to life. Possibly the simple act of listening & believing would've made the difference. But, it's as if he had not even heard that last phrase Jesus uttered. Many times God speaks something which we can't yet see, and we must simply listen, be obedient & patient in waiting.

It's unfortunate he's labeled Doubting Thomas. He's not called that in the Bible. It's a label we put on him - a bit unfair. How many of us would've done the same? Wouldn't we have given up all hope at the crucifixion? Not having listened well ourselves, we of little faith! Thomas must've been heartbroken. The disciples weren't any less doubting than him. After Jesus' death, they were in hiding & had the doors locked for fear of the Jews, thinking they'd be next (John 20:19). It was only after Jesus appeared to them they believed as well.¹

But, even in his doubtful moment he was close to Jesus & didn't even realize it as Jesus stood before him inviting him to do just what he'd said - *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand & put it into my side. Stop doubting & believe."* **Thomas' zeal is restored, "My Lord & my God!"** He's back to his old self! If he doubted before, he didn't now. Jesus took the time to guide his hands into His wounds, a physical resurrection! Jesus was alive, just as He'd predicted & promised! And Thomas makes the first public profession of Jesus as being both Lord & God!

The once zealous, later doubtful, then zealous again Thomas went on to evangelize eastern Asia & is well known in church history for bringing the gospel to India during the first century. Some say he got as far as China & maybe even Indonesia! Many Indian Christians bear his name to this day as the patron Saint of India. This is one of the greatest testaments to the veracity of Scripture & Truth of the Biblical account. That these disciples, scared & hiding one minute, turn & give their lives in very brutal ways for something they saw with their own eyes & believed in as a result - the resurrection & ascension of Jesus. Thomas ironically, it's said, died by a spear to his side in the same place he'd touched Jesus wound. This at the hands of angry Hindus because so many were coming to Christ through his ministry.

As all Christians are, Thomas was called to spread the Gospel to all people groups as we find in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). Seeing Jesus resurrection ignited this passion in him to obedience which took him far. Peter & Paul were said to have brought the gospel to Greece & Rome. Thomas was said to have taken it eastwards as far as India or farther - he was no slouch. The churches of Malankara in India trace their roots back to Thomas who, according to local tradition, arrived along the Malabar Coast in the year 52 AD.² He apparently spent 20 years in that region proclaiming Christ to people very unlike himself dying there for the sake of Jesus whom he was 100% convinced was the hope of salvation for the world because he'd seen Him & touched His

¹ <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/the-apostle-thomas-biography-doubting-life-and-death/>

² *New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Saint Thomas (The Apostle)," [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Thomas_\(the_Apostle\)](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Thomas_(the_Apostle))

wounds! No one gives their life for lies or false narratives! Thomas was changed from doubtful to zealous again because he witnessed the resurrected Christ!

It's been written that - Through St. Thomas the error of idolatry vanished from India. Through St. Thomas the Chinese & Ethiopians were converted to the truth. Through St. Thomas they accepted the sacrament of baptism & the adoption of sons. Through St. Thomas they believed in & confessed the Father, the Son & Holy Spirit. Through St. Thomas they preserved the accepted faith of the one God. Through St. Thomas the life-giving splendors rose in all India. Through St. Thomas the Kingdom of Heaven took wing & ascended to China.³

Thomas is historical proof that Jesus can handle our doubt, and will meet us in it unexpectedly leading us through it by the hand. In his book on questions & answers in the Christian faith, theologian Roger Olson says, "The reflective Christian is one who questions what [they] believe while continuing to believe what [they're] questioning."⁴ Thomas seems to have done this. It's okay to believe while living with questions. To allow our doubts to be challenged by God's truth & faithfulness. To face our doubts as Believers who simply have more to learn, not as Skeptics trying to redefine & reinterpret due to intellectual, emotional, or moral doubt.

Remember we'd said a few weeks back, intellectual doubt is when our minds are unsure whether the teachings of Christianity are true. And there are many convincing intellectual arguments & proof to the veracity of the Christian faith available. Books & other writings on the trustworthiness of the Christian account, archeology & textual criticism help us. But the story of Christ isn't something someone can put in a test tube & prove with a litmus test - it's just not that kind of thing. It is not scientifically verifiable just as any historical story is not verifiable, but it's shown to be historically, archeologically, geographically, textually true & trustworthy from many different resources, Christian & non-Christian alike.

For instance, you believe Shakespeare existed & wrote plays because you have the plays with his name on them. You've been told he lived, wrote & died. But even if you could dig his body up & DNA test it, you can't prove any of that because it's not scientifically verifiable in that way. Yet we don't question it, even when we have much less trustworthiness in the veracity of his writings than we do the Scriptures! The sciences of archeology, geography, history & textual criticism all attest to the Scriptures to a great degree, more so than any other ancient documents. If you have intellectual doubt, may I suggest you probably just haven't done the work. (Click [HERE](#) for resources)

We have copies of the manuscripts & throughout history these copies show the Bible's been transmitted accurately. Despite common skeptical claims the Bible has often been

³ Translated by Athanasius Kircher in *China Illustrata* (1667), *Office of St. Thomas for the Second Nocturn*, Gaza of the Church of St. Thomas of Malabar, Chaldean Breviary

⁴ Roger Olson, *Questions to All Your Answers: The Journey from Folk Religion to Examined Faith* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 153

changed throughout the centuries, the physical evidence speaks to the contrary. The New Testament records are incredibly accurate. There are minor differences in manuscripts, called variants, but none of these variants impact or change key Christian beliefs or claims.

Other physical evidence includes archeological finds. The Archaeological Study Bible presents many notes & articles documenting how archeology has again & again proven the Bible corresponds to historical reality.

There are other kinds of evidence which speak to the Bible's veracity. These have to do with internal consistency & coherence. Although the Bible was written over many centuries by different writers, the messages it contains are coherent & consistent. The Bible presents a coherent theology & worldview presenting its material consistently from beginning to end. Moreover, the Christian worldview is robust, reasonable & grounded in history.

If it can be shown that the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke & John – present an accurate record of the life & ministry of Jesus, then Jesus Himself becomes an argument in support of the Truth of the Bible. If the Bible has been shown to be reliable, this line of reasoning isn't circular, but rational. In other words, what the Bible records about Jesus, including what He says about God, human nature, salvation & the Old Testament record, can then be trusted.

What does Jesus say about God's Word? He says, "*the Scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35, NIV), speaking to the authority of the Bible. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them,*" meaning Jesus believed & trusted the Old Testament Law & Prophets. Jesus also said, "*It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'*" (Matthew 4:4). He believed God spoke through the Bible, He overtly upheld belief in Old Testament stories, and revered the Bible as holy & authoritative.

The cornerstone of Christian belief is the resurrection of Christ. Even Paul the Apostle admitted if the resurrection didn't happen, Christian faith "*is futile; you are still in your sins*" (1 Corinthians 15:17). In this sense, making a case for the truth of the resurrection also makes a case for the truth claims of Jesus and, in turn, the reliability & truth of the Bible.⁵ In reality, the intellectual doubt cast upon the Bible doesn't stand up under scrutiny, and those who do the work see that clearly.

Emotional doubt is most often associated with pain when Christianity doesn't feel true. When we suffer, someone doesn't get healed, or evil happens. Emotional doubt's difficult, but it helps to realize Jesus promised these things, that there is evil in the world, sin does exist & the Bible's honest about it, and there are reasons why these realities exist. Answers don't come easily, it takes a slow bake over a long time to gain

⁵ <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/how-do-we-know-the-bible-is-true-2/>

understanding. Walked out in a lifetime embedded in the Scripture, in submission to the Spirit, and in community with other strong caring believers.

Moral doubt usually happens when we're tempted to disbelieve Christianity because we don't want it to be true. We've looked at the Bible & the doctrines of Christianity through a cultural lens allowing the world to redefine what goodness & morality are, or who God is, instead of allowing Himself to define these things. Currently there's a push to redefine Love to be something it's not, and to elevate it above Truth. Love without boundaries accepting of anything - which philosophically & practically doesn't work. Remember, Love without Truth lies, Truth without love kills. And, old is better than new, and there's nothing really new under the sun anyway as Ecclesiastes tells us. Thought patterns, worldviews, and behavioral norms cycle throughout history, nothing is new - we only think we're progressive because we don't know history. If the Scriptural account can be trusted, then we have to regard history as His-Story, and that the Creator always know best for His creation despite what culture or our own hearts tell us.

We might see our struggles & doubts as evidence of how far we are from God. But those struggles & doubts might in fact show how close we actually are to Jesus. Just like Thomas, in our doubt Jesus appears & we're transformed by Him in that state of doubtfulness. If we stay in the game exhibiting Christian maturity which allows our doubts to be challenged by God's truth & faithfulness walking them out as Believers & not cynical Skeptics. As Roger Olson said, "The reflective Christian is one who questions what [they] believe while continuing to believe what [they're] questioning."