

Introduction1
 Observation #1: Thomas’ ‘Doubting’ had to do with His Temperament.....3
 Observation #2: The Sadness Factor.....6
 Observation #3: The Greatest Doubters Often Make the Greatest Believers!8
 Observation #4: Thomas Met a *Merciful* Jesus10
 Closing16
 Observation #5: Words Spoken from Sadness are Often Untrue18
 Observation #6: Thomas was Not Grandstanding19

“Thomas, Called the Twin” Again, Again (John 11:16)

Pastor Gene Giguere

Reading: John 11:14-16

Now Jesus had spoken of his [Lazarus’] death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Introduction

1) Well, for the past two Sundays we’ve been looking at one of the 12 Apostles – namely, Thomas.

Thomas, of course, has become known throughout the history of the Church as ‘doubting Thomas,’ an unfortunate moniker that I’m doing my best to refute.

We’re studying Thomas because he is introduced into our Text in **John 11:16**, where he makes a startling proclamation to his fellow disciples.

While Thomas is listed as one of the Twelve in all three of the synoptic Gospels, only John lets him speak – and our current verse is the first of *three times* Thomas will have something to say in John’s Gospel.

- 2) Rather than presenting Thomas as ‘doubting,’ we’re – rightly I think – presenting him as heroic.

That characterization far more accurately presents the biblical evidence, as well as the traditions and writings of the early Church Fathers.

We’ve seen that rather than being the doubter he’s often portrayed as being, he was actually a man of extra ordinary courage who died as a martyr in India.

Thomas traveled nearly 4,000 miles in order to bring the Gospel to the Indian subcontinent – resulting in one of the earliest and purist Christian communities in the history of the Church.

- 3) This morning, I’d like to make four observations about Thomas which I think are instructive to us as we seek to follow Jesus with 2025 on the horizon.

As we consider these, let’s learn from the life of this magnificent Apostle.

I’ve drawn from a number of sources in this study of at Thomas.

Two that will figure prominently this morning are, *The Training of the Twelve Apostles* by Alexander Bruce – a classic study of the life of the Apostles first published in 1889.¹

And Dr. John MacArthur’s book, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, both of which I’ll quote from this morning.²

The reason I mention these sources is that I hope you’ll read one or more of them yourselves in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the men whom Jesus hand-picked to turn ‘the world upside-down.’

That is, after all, what the opponents of Paul and Silas charged them with!

They went to the city authorities, shouting, “These men *who have turned the world upside down* have come here also!” (**Acts 17:6**)

¹ Bruce, Alexander Balmain, *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 506–14.

² MacArthur, John F., Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), pp. 157–65.

- 4) So, let's wrap up our study of Thomas' life, by looking at these four observations (plus two more in the asides) that I think encapsulate the most important things we should know about him.

Observation #1: Thomas' 'Doubting' had to do with His Temperament

- 1) OK, so the first observation I'd like to make is: *Thomas' questioning had more to do with his natural temperament than his doubting the supernatural.*

We are all 'wired' differently.

God made some people to be trusting to a fault – some might even say gullible.

Others are skeptical by nature, wanting to fully understand every mystery and seeming paradox.

Most people are somewhere in the middle of these two poles.

There are three different ways by which we can perceive truth.

- ✚ We can perceive truth empirically – using our senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste.

I know something is salty because I taste it and my taste buds affirm that it is.

John appealed to this when defending the humanity of Christ – that He was truly a human being with flesh and blood, and not merely a spirit as the (heretical) Gnostics supposed.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us ...” (1 John 1:1-3a).

‡ A second way to perceive truth is through reason: $1+1=2$. It always does, unless you're in base 8, where $1+1=16$.

$1+1=2$ whether or not you *believe* that it does. This equation is not a matter of faith, it's a matter of mathematics, the mother of all sciences.

Copernicus developed his theory of a heliocentric solar system – the idea that the planets revolve around the sun and not around the earth – *because the math worked*.

Einstein proved his theories of general and special relativity *because the math worked*.

Isaac Newton basically created his own math – infinitesimal calculus, or simply, calculus – to prove his theories of physics.

He developed these insights during the ‘plague years’ of 1665–1666, which he later described as, “the prime of my age for invention and minded mathematics ... more than at any time since.”³

So, we can certainly perceive truth through *reason*.

Furthermore, believers are to be able to present a “reason” – to make sense of the why we've put or trust in Jesus – to everyone who asks.⁴

‡ But there's a third way of perceiving reality. Any guesses? Right! Faith.

Faith allows us to see the invisible.

“By faith Moses ... left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible” (**Hebrews 11:27**).

Furthermore, while unbelievers in the world will never understand this, faith is EVIDENCE, faith is assurance, faith is PROOF of things in the invisible realm.

³ Newton, Isaac, *The Waste Book*; <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-04004/1>.

⁴ 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” The word translated “defense” here is **ἀπολογία**, a logical defense. It refers to the “*defense* which a defendant makes before a judge.” Cf., Raymer, Roger M., “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), II, 850.

We find this clearly stated in **Hebrews 11:1**.

I think the NLT captures the essence of it well: “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.”

Or the original NASB: “Now faith is *the* certainty of *things* hoped for, a proof of things not seen.”

Or the CSB: “Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.”

2) Well, I’ve said all that to bring us to Thomas’ so-called ‘doubting.’

Listen to Alexander Bruce’s comment here:

“The skepticism of Thomas was, we think, mainly a matter of temperament, and had little in common with the doubt of men of rationalistic proclivities, who are inveterately incredulous respecting the supernatural ... Nowhere in the Gospel history do we discover any unreadiness on his part to believe in the supernatural or the miraculous *as such*.”⁵

Bruce thinks that Thomas may have had a proclivity to look at things from a ‘gloomier’ side than some of the other Apostles, but he was no rationalist.

Thomas never denied the supernatural or the miraculous.

Thomas was no rationalist, in the modern-day sense of the word: ‘Unless I can see God, I’ll never believe in Him.’ He had a deep and abiding faith, and he wanted to understand it fully – not only the points that Jesus made, but their implications.

But that doesn’t make him *a doubter* – it makes him an *engaged learner* – a disciple, a μαθητής.

Some who paint Thomas as a scientific rationalist would have you believe that Thomas put his finger into the holes on Jesus hands and side in order to conduct a forensic investigation of the matter.

⁵ Bruce, Alexander Balmain, *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 506–14.

But this is sheer nonsense. There is nothing in the Text that indicates that.

Jesus ‘invited’ him to do so because of the words he’d spoken in Jesus’ absence – words spoken in the midst of the deepest grief: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (**John 20:25**).

But, as soon as Jesus spoke to him, he made the greatest profession of faith we find in the Gospels.

“Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God” (**John 20:26-28**).

There’s no attempted *autopsy* here, *no probing of the wounds*.”⁶ Only an immediate confession of faith in Jesus’ divinity!

Observation #2: The Sadness Factor

1) A second observation is one that I will call, ‘*the sadness factor*.’

I mentioned this last time as we walked through the three episodes where Thomas speaks in the Gospel of John, but I want to explore it further.

What we saw in Thomas was a man who desperately wanted to remain with Jesus, regardless of the cost.

So, after the death of Jesus, Thomas is in deep grief.

⁶ Bruce continues: “Did Thomas ... actually put his fingers and hand into the nail and spear wounds? Opinions differ on this point, but we think the probability is on the side of those who maintain the negative. Several things incline us to this view. First, the narrative seems to leave no room for the process of investigation. Thomas answers the proposal of Jesus by what appears to be an immediate profession of faith. Then the form in which that profession is made is not such as we should expect the result of a deliberate inquiry to assume. “My Lord and my God!” is the warm, passionate language of a man who has undergone some sudden change of feeling, rather than of one who has just concluded a scientific experiment.” *Ibid.*, Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, pp. 506–14.

No one knows why, but Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples in the Upper Room. I agree with those who think his absence had something to do with his *sadness*. Some people prefer to grieve alone. But, whatever the reason, he was absent.

All he heard were the testimonies: Jesus had appeared, passing right through closed doors, and that He was not dead but alive!

His response is famous: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (**John 20:25**).

Now, what’s happening here? Here’s what I think:

As I said last week, I think Thomas was living through the very thing he’d feared most since he’d first met Jesus: *he was no longer where Jesus is*.

And in his grief, I think, he shot off at the mouth and said something we’ve all said a million times; something like, ‘*Yeah, right!*’

I think what we’re hearing are the words of a man whose heart is deeply broken.

‘Sure. But I think I’ll have to see that for myself! Because, if Jesus is alive, where is He?’

2) I think Dr. John MacArthur speaks to this in his book, *Twelve ordinary Men*:

“[I]t is clear from this account that Thomas did not want to live without Jesus. ... Here is a man with deep love. He is a man whose relationship with Christ was so strong that he never wanted to be severed from Him ... The thought of losing Christ paralyzed him ... [And so, the death of Jesus] was overwhelming for Thomas ...

[When Jesus appeared to the others in **John 20**,] Thomas missed the whole thing. Why wasn’t he there? It is possible that he was ... absolutely destroyed, and he was probably off somewhere wallowing in his own misery. ... He may have still been thinking he would never find the way to get where Jesus was ... Thomas may well have felt alone, betrayed, rejected, forsaken. It was over. The One he loved so deeply was gone, and it tore his heart out. He was not in

a mood to socialize. He was brokenhearted, shattered, devastated, crushed. He just wanted to be alone. He simply couldn't take the banter. He wasn't in a mood to be in a crowd, even with his friends.

The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.'" They were exuberant. They were ecstatic. They were eager to share the good news with Thomas. But someone in the kind of mood Thomas was in was not going to be cheered up so easily ... So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' [But then,] suddenly, Thomas's melancholy ... tendencies were forever banished by the appearance of Jesus Christ."⁷

This is what I mean by the 'Sadness Factor' in Thomas. I think it more than explains his reaction to the testimony of the others that they'd seen the Lord.

3) Alexander Bruce concurs:

"[Thomas' doubt] did not proceed from *unwillingness* to believe. It was the doubt of a sad man ... [But understand:] nothing could give Thomas greater delight than to be certified that his Master was indeed risen. This is evident from the joy he manifested when he [exclaimed] ... "My Lord and my God!" [T]hat is not the exclamation of one who is forced reluctantly to admit a fact he would rather deny."⁸

That's very well said.

We should understand that Thomas, rather than being a man determined to doubt, was a man who wanted more than anything to believe!

Observation #3: The Greatest Doubters Often Make the Greatest Believers!

1) The third observation I'd like to make is this: *the greatest doubters often make the greatest believers.*

⁷ MacArthur, John F., Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), pp. 157–65.

⁸ Bruce, Alexander Balmain, *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 506–14.

Thomas' confession – “My Lord and my God” – was the noblest confession you will find in the Bible.

Yet it came from a place of questioning, of inquiry, of finding it hard to believe.

It reminds me of another disciple, Nathanael. Do you remember how he came to faith in Jesus? We studied it in **John 1**:

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (**John 1:45-49**)

Well, Nathanael became one of the earliest followers of Jesus and declared Him – very early on – to be “the Son of God” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) and “the King of Israel (βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ)!”

And *from where* did this confession testimony arise? From doubt and skepticism! “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

His doubt was apparently based on the idea that the Messiah would not have Galilean origins (as discussed in **John 7:40–44**).

But this very fact indicates that Nathanael as a serious student of the Scriptures.

Well, what began in doubt became rock-solid faith!

We're not sure how Nathanael died, but we do know, though, that he was still following Jesus after His death and resurrection, because he's mentioned among the disciples to whom Jesus appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee:

“After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias [which is another name for the Sea of Galilee, cf. **John 6:1**], and he revealed

himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together” (**John 21:1-2**).

Interesting group, right? *Denying Peter, Doubting Thomas, Doubting Nathaneal* – all now amazingly strong believers!

- 2) The great English Nonconformist churchman and theologian Richard Baxter, wrote insightfully: “Nothing is so firmly believed as that which hath once been doubted.”⁹

Thomas’ response to Jesus’ invitation to examine His wounds is the response of someone who finally, at last, gets it! It’s epiphany! Eyes wide open stuff!

Alexander Bruce adds:

“[M]en who have doubted, and now ... believe, have ... their peculiar joys ... Theirs is the rapture of Thomas, when he exclaimed, with reference to [his] Savior thought to be gone forever, “My Lord and my God!”¹⁰

My point is simplicity itself: only when we’ve been in the lion’s den with Daniel, will we have the faith of Daniel. Do you think Daniel ever doubted the Lord after the lion’s den? I don’t think so.

And so, the greatest doubters often make the greatest believers.

Observation #4: Thomas Met a *Merciful* Jesus

- 1) The fourth and final observation I’ll make this morning is that *the Jesus who Thomas met was merciful*.

You know, there is a movement today which tries to make Jesus more relevant to popular culture called the ‘*He Gets Us*’ movement.

⁹ Powicke, Frederick J., *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1924), p.54.

¹⁰ Bruce, Alexander Balmain, *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 506–14.

I think that movement is misguided and confused, but in a very real sense Jesus does get us – He understands exactly what we’re thinking and why we’re doing what we’re doing.

Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Everyone has *down stretches*, and everyone has *up stretches*. And the Lord is merciful to us in both.

- 2) Temperament has something to do with how we perceive things. There are times when we *want* to believe but *find it hard*.

There is a real struggle within truly blood-bought Christians: the old man, the old sin nature, wars against the Spirit who dwells within us.

Paul described it in **Galatians 5:17:** “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

There’s a song by a folk singer I like a lot, Richard Shindell.

He was once a student at *Union Theological Seminary* in New York, although I don’t know if he’s a believer; *Union* is a VERY liberal seminary.

I do think his time in seminary, though, has richly informed his songwriting.

There’s a profound line in the song’s second verse that references the poem, *The Tyger* by William Blake.

Blake’s poem wonders at the Divine God who sends the Lamb because of His great love, but who will also send the final apocalypse.

The Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



It reads in part,

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? ...

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Well, in his song, *The Next Best Western*, he sings through the voice of a long-haul trucker who is finding it hard to believe.

Next Best Western

by Richard Shindell

It's the middle of the night
Near the Indiana line
I'm pulling in a Christian station

The signal's crystal clear
But I cannot really hear
What he says about the Revelation

I am wretched, I am tired
But the preacher is on fire
And I wish I could believe

Whoever watches over all these truckers
Show a little mercy for a weary sinner
And deliver me, Lord, deliver me,
Deliver me to the next Best Western

Did he who made the lamb
Put the tremble in the hand
That reaches out to take my quarter

I look him in the eye
But there isn't any time
Just time enough to pass the tender

The highway takes its toll
The green light flashes go
And it's welcome to Ohio

Whoever watches over all these truckers
Show a little mercy for a weary sinner
And deliver me, Lord, deliver me,
Deliver me to the next Best Western

At four a.m. on 80 East
It's in the nature of the beast
To wonder if there's something missing

I am wretched, I am tired
But the preacher is on fire
And I wish I could believe

- 3) Do you know there are people like that? People who – at times – *want to believe but find it hard?*

It reminds me of the desperate father of the demon-possessed boy who came before Jesus asking Him for help.

Jesus said to him, “All things are possible for one who believes” (**Mark 9:23**). And “immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; *help my unbelief!*” (**Mark 9:23**)

Sometimes people look at their own personal loss and can't make sense of why God would allow it to happen – and of course the enemy is always happy to cast doubt within us.

Job had a million questions in his time of suffering; his suffering was, of course, satanically-sponsored.

There are others who look at the state of the world and despair over it.

✠ Why are millions starving in a planet so rich in resources?

✠ Why are so many people dispossessed because of war or rogue governments – we think of Haiti or the Ukraine or a hundred other lesser-known places.

Mature Christians can reason from a healthy orientation to the sovereignty of God, but *less mature Christians often cannot* – they’re just not there yet.

And so, they wrestle with the human condition. And, you know what? *Jesus gets them*. And He’s merciful to them.

Alexander Bruce writes:

“[When Jesus invites Thomas: “put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe,]” there may be *somewhat* of reproach here, but there is far more ... considerate sympathy. Jesus speaks as to a *sincere disciple*, whose faith is weak, *not as to one who has an evil heart of unbelief*. When demands for evidence were made by men *who merely wanted an excuse for unbelief*, He met them in a very *different manner*.”¹¹

That’s right. How did Jesus address those who demanded a sign looking for an excuse NOT to believe?

Matthew 16:4, Jesus said to them: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” And then He left them and departed.”

Thomas was not a man who looked for reasons NOT TO believe; he was looking for reasons TO believe. If I might coin a phrase here, Thomas was a man who ‘doubted in good faith.’

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, pp. 506–14.

And Jesus understood Thomas *completely*. Dr. MacArthur is helpful here:

The Lord was amazingly gentle with [Thomas]. Thomas had erred ... But it was the error of a profound love. It was provoked by grief, broken-heartedness, uncertainty, and the pain of loneliness. No one could feel the way Thomas felt unless he loved Jesus the way Thomas loved Him. So, Jesus was tender with him. He understands our weaknesses. He understands our doubt. He sympathizes with our uncertainty.”^{12 13}

Indeed! And, while none of us is eager for such a day, when we do go through our down stretch of faith, when we’re finding it hard to believe, we can be certain that Jesus will be merciful to us as well. As long as *our doubting is in good faith*.

Closing

- 1) Hopefully these past three messages have given you a different, and I hope more accurate, perspective of this great follower of Jesus.

May we all seek to join him in the ‘Radical Discipleship’ to which he called his fellow-Apostles in **John 11:16**. But, as we read through the Gospels, we might come up with another – more accurate – name for this ‘Radical Discipleship’. We might call it simply, ‘*The Normal Christian Life*.’

What is ‘*The Normal Christian Life*’? Listen to Jesus:

✠ **Luke 14:26**: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

✠ **Luke 14:27**: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

¹² MacArthur, John F., Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), pp. 157–65.

¹³ MacArthur continues: “[W]e must ... acknowledge Thomas’s heroic devotion to Christ, which made him understand that it would be better to die than to be separated from his Lord. The proof of his love was the profoundness of his despair ... The strongest traditions say he was martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear—a fitting form of martyrdom for one whose faith came of age when he saw the spear mark in his Master’s side and for one who longed to be reunited with his Lord.” *Ibid.*, MacArthur, John F., Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men*, pp. 157–65.

✠ We'll see in the next chapter, **John 12**, a remarkable statement from Jesus – deceptively simple, but unimaginably profound:

“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also" (**John 12:26**).

And, friends, ‘Where He is,’ is often a dangerous place to be. But, nonetheless, “he must follow” here translates the *present active imperative* of the Greek verb ἀκολουθέω!

“If anyone serves Me [*present active subjunctive* of διακονέω], he must [as an absolute imperative] follow Me.” And that means, ‘Wherever I am, he must also be.’

2) So, we might respond to Thomas’ call to ‘Radical Discipleship,’ AKA ‘The Normal Christian Life’ by asking ourselves:

‘Where am I in my walk on this 3rd Sunday in Advent?’

‘Am I where Jesus is? Or am I somewhere else?’

‘Am I following Him whole-heartedly? Or am I a δίψυχος, a believer with divided loyalties?’

Church, we can’t serve Jesus half way; He’s been very clear about that! We can’t serve God and stuff (μαμωνᾶς) (**Matthew 6:24**).

And we shall all stand before Jesus and give an account as to how we’ve built upon the foundation of the salvation He’s given us (**Romans 14:12**).

Our work will be tested by fire; only that which we’ve presented before Him with a whole-hearted devotion will remain.

It’s my prayer that every member of this local Body will stand before Him with great joy and receive a full reward (**2 John 1:8**).

Amen?

Aside: Two Further Observations

Observation #5: Words Spoken from Sadness are Often Untrue

- 1) A fifth observation I'd like to make is that *words spoken in sadness or anger are often not genuine*.

In such times it's often the anger or the sadness speaking, rather than the clear-thinking person. Husbands can say awful things to their wives – or visa-versa – in anger. But those words are often not true; they're meant only to hurt.

I think that's the case with Thomas' "unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" words (**John 20:25**).

I think these words were Thomas' sadness speaking. He blurted them out from the midst of deep loss and grief.

- 2) And so, I think we need to be careful of holding people to words that were spoken in anger, or in grief.

Thomas is clearly speaking from his grief. And his very words give us a clue as to what's going 'round in his mind!

When he says, "unless I see *in his hands the mark* of the nails, and place my finger *into the mark* of the nails, and place my hand *into his side*, I will never believe," what is he visualizing?

Notice his emphasis: The 'place of the nails' or the 'imprint of the nails' – or the 'τύπος of the nails': literally, the *impression* or *stamp* of the nails – and the 'wound in His side'?

What is fresh on Thomas' mind? What is he *imagining*? What is he visualizing? It's obvious: he's haunted by a vivid picture of his Master's form as he had seen Him lifeless on the cross. He can't get the image of the crucified Jesus out of his mind.

Remember, Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be “high and lifted up” and that onlookers would be “astonished” by His appearance. And that

“His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind”
(**Isaiah 52:13b-14**).

He’s visualizing Jesus, emaciated and suffering upon the cross; he can’t get that out of his mind.

- 3) It’s only *after* he’s seen Jesus’ ugly wounds and heard His merciful words, that he’s “ashamed of his rash, reckless speech to his brethren, and, [is] overcome with joy and tears, exclaims, “My Lord and my God!”¹⁴

It is a fact of life, friends: words spoken in anger, or in sorrow, are very often lies.

Observation #6: Thomas was Not Grandstanding

- 1) A sixth observation that I’ll make is this: in his statement of **John 11:16**, *Thomas was not grandstanding*.

Many people say things publicly that they think those listening want to hear – words that make them sound courageous, heroic even, or full of faith.

And so, in **11:14-15**, Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died ... But let us go to him.” Thomas replied in verse **16**, but watch it carefully: “So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

There’s no indication that Jesus was actually still there when Thomas made this statement. John is clear that Thomas said this “to his fellow disciples,” not to Jesus.

He was not grandstanding at all. Rather, he was calling his disciple-brothers to a radical, ‘let’s-go-and-die-with-Him’ discipleship.

¹⁴ Bruce, Alexander Balmain, *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 506–14.

- 2) There's a story that comes from the life of Caligula, the perverse emperor of Rome, which serves as a cautionary tale against grandstanding.

At one point, Caligula is said to have become very sick and many thought he was about to die. Some of the senators, clearly grandstanding, placed their hand over their hearts or to their foreheads and publicly declared something like, "I gladly offer my own life in the place of his if the gods will spare him! If anything should happen to him, it would be the worst calamity to ever befall Rome!"

Well, Caligula recovered and a banquet was organized to celebrate his recovery. The senators and other nobility gathered and congratulated him for recovering and wished him good health. But, during the celebration Caligula announced that he had something to say. He said, "Thanks to the gods, I am well and recovered. And now that *they* have kept their part of the bargain, I expect *those* who offered them their lives for mine to keep their part of it." The senators were obviously shocked; a number of them were forced to commit suicide!

The moral of the story is twofold:

First, maybe it's a bad idea to make a 24-year-old lunatic the ruler of much of the world!

And second, we shouldn't say things just because we think it's what people want to hear. Grandstanding can be *dangerous!*

Thomas was certainly *not* grandstanding when he spoke his words in **John 11:16**. His words reflect how he truly felt and they were directed toward his fellow disciples.¹⁵

¹⁵ Edward Klink writes: "As implied by the scene, Thomas is "one of the Twelve" (20:24), and his exhortation to "his fellow disciples" (τοῖς συμμαθηταῖς) ... is probably intended to reflect the feeling of the entire group ... Thomas's statement serves as a reminder ... [that] they must now go [to] Judea ... the same place where the Jews were ... trying to kill Jesus ... Thomas is motivated to respond to Jesus in a fitting manner, even if it involves loss." Klink, Edward W., III, *John*, ed. by Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), pp. 501–6.