

Following Jesus  
*The Skeptical Christ-Follower*

**Introduction**—Several followers of Jesus, especially in our culture today, often encounter a crisis of the faith for various reasons that will often stir up feelings of doubt, uncertainty, and even a skeptical attitude toward the Christian faith. I think our post-resurrection narrative centered around the disciple Thomas makes this clear but also offers us insight into how we should work through these moments.

**I. The skeptical Christ-follower may seem like an oxymoron but it's a real identity for some who follow Jesus**

**A. Thomas (one of the 12) proves this reality**

1. Not much is said of Thomas in the Gospel accounts (cf. Peter and John)
2. But he does have a few infamous moments that set him apart from the others

- a. Served as the spokesman for the twelve on one occasion and did so with a "Peter-like" boldness

*<sup>14</sup> So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus." John 11:14-16, NLT*

- i. Thomas displayed strong leadership traits in this moment
- ii. He was calling the disciples to "choose death" with Jesus over "life without Him"
- iii. The rest of the crew were trying to prevent Jesus from going back to Judea, but Thomas was pushing them to go

*<sup>7</sup> Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." <sup>8</sup> But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?" John 11:7-8, NLT*

- b. He seemed to be the most honest and vulnerable follower about his lack of understanding when it came to Jesus' mission

*<sup>4</sup> And you know the way to where I am going." <sup>5</sup> "No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" John 14:5, NLT*

- c. In Synoptic Gospels he shows up in the list but has no prominent role

3. He's most known for the post-resurrection encounter with Jesus

- a. It's here, in our narrative, where he gets the nickname "Doubting Thomas"
- b. Thomas wasn't with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them in the upper room on the day of His resurrection (24)
- c. Not sure why: struggling with the cruel death Jesus experienced and simply processing everything that had just taken place?
- d. The disciples noted they had seen the resurrected Lord (25)
- e. But Thomas said he would NOT believe unless he saw and touched the nail scarred hands and the wound in his side for himself

***But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." John 20:25, NLT***

#### 4. Thomas' skepticism of Jesus' resurrection ran deep

- a. Could someone truly survive such a brutal death?
- b. He couldn't fathom believing such a verbal report unless he saw it with his own eyes
- c. One of those "I need to see it for myself" moments

**NOTE**—Thomas shouldn't be given a bad reputation for not believing the word of the disciples because the disciples themselves didn't necessarily believe Mary Magdalene's testimony at first

#### B. Skeptics exist both inside and outside the church

- 1. According to PEW Research Center in 2022, 25% of Americans are skeptical about Christianity (i.e. biggest struggle is with Jesus' divinity and the need for a relationship with Him)
- 2. A skeptical Christ-follower inside the church often reaches this stage in life for various reasons (hard situation, unfortunate circumstances, unanswered prayers all call into question God's existence, His love, and His presence)—Psalm 13
- 3. For some, it's a faith crisis they are in—maybe you are here or someone close to you has reached this point
- 4. A skeptical Christian is a REAL thing and we cannot ignore this reality

#### **II. The skeptical Christ-follower may be wrestling with serious doubts, real uncertainties, and have specific demands for God, but ALL of this is known by God and is safe in His arms**

- A. Skeptical Thomas had some serious uncertainties regarding the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which led to his tall ask

***But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." John 20:25, NLT***

- B. These demands were NOT articulated to Jesus by Thomas, but when Jesus shows up a second time in the room unannounced one week later, He invites Thomas to put his fingers into the nail wounds and to place his hand into the wound on his side

***<sup>26</sup> Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. John 20:26-27, NLT***

1. Jesus, in His omniscience KNEW what Thomas wanted without Him verbalizing it to Him
2. Jesus willingly responded to Thomas' request and then called him to believe

- C. Powerful implications for Christ-followers today

1. Our uncertainties surrounding faith, our skeptical attitudes, our list of questions, and our deepest doubts are NOT too much for our God to handle
  - a. We should run to Him not the wisdom of the world to get clarity
  - b. We should rely on the Holy Spirit, the one who leads us into ALL truth
  - c. We should ask for wisdom because He gives it freely
  - d. God isn't afraid of your skeptical attitude or deep doubts, so go to Him
2. Our thoughts are not hidden from God, He already knows
3. God is prepared to break down barriers, open our minds to the truth, and provide clarity to our walk with Him, but we need to be open for Him to work

### **III. The skeptical Christ-follower doesn't need our well-articulated apologetics or even our stern correction, they need a simple encounter with Jesus**

- A. Thomas' skepticism was overcome NOT by touching the wounds of Jesus but by simply seeing the resurrected Christ

1. He was invited by Jesus to touch his wounds
2. But there is no indication He did
3. Thomas' only response when Jesus appeared was simple: "My God and my Lord"

***<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" <sup>28</sup> "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. John 20:27-28, NLT***

4. Some see this as the FINAL confession of John's Gospel if the last chapter is viewed as an epilogue

**B. How do we deal with our own skeptical attitude or the attitude of others as Christ-followers?**

**1. Find ways to meet with Jesus—He is the truth**

- a. Pray for signs and wonders to be done and the miraculous to take place so we can see and experience God's power (i.e. John all about signs)
- b. Go back to the Scriptures where Truth can be found—dwell on His Word, think on good things, have our minds transformed
- c. Share your frustrations, your concerns, and your doubts with God (i.e. Psalmist)
- d. Model a faithful commitment and ongoing attitude of worship unto Christ in EVERY season so others can see the faithfulness of God
- e. Position ourselves in places where God is often working (Thomas wasn't present the first time)—local church with the body of Christ
- f. Be disciplined in our private time of prayer, study, and worship so Christ can be encountered regularly (Sunday morning isn't enough)

**2. Don't be shocked or surprised by the presence of doubts along your faith journey, but be sure to examine them carefully to determine how formidable they may be**

**Randy Newman of the C.S. Lewis Institute wrote the following:**

*Sometimes doubt wields a power it really doesn't deserve. Pausing to evaluate might reveal doubt to be more like an earthworm than a boa constrictor. We need to define or describe our doubts and subject them to rigorous inquiry to see what they really entail. Just how big is this particular doubt or question?*

*Are you doubting that God exists? Or do you have a pretty high level of confidence that he does exist but you're confused about why he doesn't run his universe the way you think he should? Those are two rather different levels of doubt. Or maybe you believe in God and accept his rule but struggle to see his goodness. It may not hurt to try to write down exactly what you're struggling with. Asking a good friend to listen and offer feedback can clarify things as well. Sometimes we feel engulfed by a huge black cloud. But when we shine a light on it, we may find it to be rather small or not so dark. This is not unlike when you go to a doctor with a vague pain and he asks if it feels like a burning sensation or a stabbing wound or a low-level ache. The more precise the description, the greater likelihood of proper treatment.*

**3. Draw the conclusion that some questions will be left unanswered because we presently look through a glass dimly (i.e. perspective is limited)**

**<sup>24</sup> The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:24, NLT**

## Conclusion—

- Skeptical Christ-followers DO exist (maybe you are in that position or know someone who is)
- Don't be afraid to take your concerns, your doubts, and your questions to God because he knows and he can handle them
- Don't try to skillfully persuade yourself or others with cute little arguments, but put yourself in a place where you can simply BE with Jesus