

## Why Jesus Asks Thomas to Examine His Wounds

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John 20:24-31 NLT

24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

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.”

26 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. 27 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!”

28 “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

29 Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

If you have ever heard someone called a “doubting Thomas,” now you know where that expression comes from. We use it as a way of challenging someone we think is too skeptical or cynical, someone who should “trust God more” and instead embrace “blind faith” – another expression we use a lot but isn’t actually in the Bible.

I think Thomas gets a bad rap. He’s an empiricist. Like all good citizens from the fine state of Missouri, Thomas lives by the motto: Show me. In that sense, I think Thomas is a person

with whom many of us can relate. We all feel better when we have “hard data” to substantiate what sounds like a too-good-to-be-true claim.

We tend to assume that the thing Thomas doubts is the resurrection. And perhaps it is as simple as that. Perhaps he has a hard time believing that someone can come back from the dead. But the proof that he requires points something more. When the other disciples tell him that he missed out on seeing the Lord, Thomas doesn't just say, “Well I'll believe it when I see him too.” No, he demands something much more specific. He insists that he won't believe unless he not only sees but also touches Jesus' wounds.

Perhaps worth noting that nobody else in the New Testament makes demands like these before believing. It may indicate that Thomas was skeptical than the others, and, of course, he may have been. But another possibility is that he was still in utter shock by the tragedy and the brutality of the crucifixion. Can someone come back from illness? Certainly, Thomas might say. He had seen Jesus bring their friend Lazarus back after he succumbed to illness. But this is different. Jesus – his real friend Jesus – had his hands torn apart by the nails. And Jesus – his real friend Jesus – had his actual lifeblood emptied out of his body at the end. Jesus' body didn't merely give out. It had been utterly destroyed. Nobody comes back from that.

When I think all the awful things people can and have experienced, I realize how much like Thomas I am. Can somebody really come back from that?

Can a baby really come back from being born addicted to drugs and living his early years in squalor and neglect?

Can a young woman come back from a childhood trapped in human trafficking?

Can a soldier come back after the trauma of war has left her body mangled and her mind broken?

Can a family come back from years of domestic abuse?

Can a neighborhood come back from generations of poverty and organized violence?

And for us this week:

Can a Christian community come back from the trauma of alleged abuse and betrayed trust?

Of course, we know that people can, and do. We have heard their stories. And no matter how many times we see a child going on to live a full life after brain cancer or watch a veteran run the 200 meters on prosthetic limbs, we know we are witnessing a miracle. When a student defies the odds and graduates, it's a miracle. Whenever a couple reconciles, it's a miracle. Whenever we forgive, it's a miracle. Whenever we accept forgiveness, it's a miracle.

These are all resurrection stories. Each small miracle points to One Great Miracle – the one described right here.

Why does Jesus ask Thomas to examine his wounds?

So that Thomas may know that there is an even greater miracle than coming back from the dead. Jesus presents himself as the embodiment of the greatest miracle, the greatest mystery.

This encounter between Thomas and the Risen Jesus is not really a story about believing in the fact of the resurrection but a story about believing that someone could be wounded and also resurrected at the same time! That is quite a different message and still desperately needed. "Put your finger here," Jesus says to Thomas (John 20:27). Like Christ, we are all indeed wounded and resurrected at the same time. In fact, this might be the primary message of the Gospel.

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