

“There were twelve disciples
Jesus called to help him Simon Peter, Andrew,
James, his brother John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew,
James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas
and Bartholomew.
He has called us too. He has called us too.
We are His disciples. We His work must do.”

Thomas

What do we know about the Apostle Thomas?

1. We have little background material on Thomas (he is mentioned eight times in the Bible, mostly in lists). His name is Aramaic (Thomas, the language of the land), though he is also identified as “The Twin” (Didymos) which is Greek, the language of ancient oppressors (“Thomas, called the Twin,” John 11:16, 21:2).

This suggests that he was a Galilean living in a mixed Jew/Gentile society (“Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isa. 9:1, Matt. 4:15-16).

2. Thomas appears independently only three times in the Bible (we have no record of his spiritual sojourn or his call to discipleship).
 - a. In the context of the death of Lazarus (16:1-16)

Jesus received notice that Lazarus had died. Two days later, he said that he was going to the city that he stated four times would be the scene of His death. When Jesus announced his departure for Jerusalem, the disciples are horrified by the pending danger.

Leading the disciples, Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him (v. 16).”

What can we learn from this episode?

1. Thomas displayed deep devotion to Jesus and was willing to share in His fate. He was willing to give his life away!
2. Thomas understood that Jesus was going to die. Yet, he seems conflicted as to the advent of the Lord’s kingdom. Most of the disciples rejected the concept of suffering before the crown.
3. John interprets the event through the words of Jesus. First, in the raising of Lazarus, He would be glorified, meaning many would accord Him messiahship leading to the hallelujahs of the triumphal entry and His crucifixion (v. 4). Second, the resurrection of Lazarus was a teaching moment for the disciples. Just as He can bring life from death so He will be also. “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. Let us go to Him (v. 15).”



Since Lazarus was dead four days before his resurrection (one day for the news to arrive, two days remaining where they were, and one day travel), Jewish tradition suggests that his guarding angel left him after the third day. Jesus was dead only three days, He was provisioned by angels.

- b. In the Upper Room Discourse (14-17), Thomas asks a stunning question (14:1-7).
 - 1. Jesus, to comfort his disciples, explains to them that He would prepare a place after departing from them. Jesus says clearly that He will return to them and take them to be with Him (vv. 1-3). The comment “you know the way... (v. 4)” causes Thomas to pose a question. “Lord, we do not know where you are going (v. 5).”
 - 2. Jesus’ answer is confusing (v. 7) because it can be read two ways: first, “If you had known me...” or, second, “If you really knew...” (that you do not know me or you do not know me deeply). The latter seems the most consistent option since he is willing to die with Him and he had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus.

What can we learn from this episode?

- 1. Thomas found it hard to connect all the dots of Jesus’ teaching. He had significant misunderstanding, yet he knew and loved Him.
 - 2. He did connect the dots, finally, and so will we!!
- c. The unwillingness to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, demanding physical proof (20:24-28).
 - 1. Thomas found the witness of his friends to be shocking (vv. 24-25). He demanded specific evidence or “I will never believe.”
 - 2. Eight days later at the same location, Jesus appeared with Thomas present and offered the proof he sought!!
 - 3. Thomas believed with shocking post-resurrection evidence.
 - 4. Thomas was the first of the disciples on record to confess Him to be God (“My Lord and my God,” v. 28). The dots connected!!!!

What can we learn from this episode?

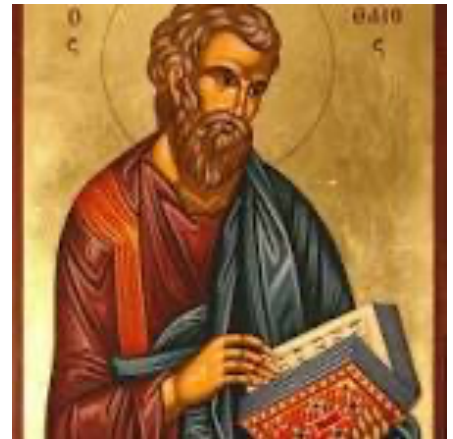
- 1. Simple faith obtained through testimony is more blessed than extreme proofs though God was kind to Thomas saying, “Do not disbelieve, but believe (v. 27).”
 - 2. It tells us that Jesus’ resurrection body bore the marks that procured our redemption. Jesus will possess evidence of its physical cost forever. Our Lord’s body will be scared, our bodies unblemished. “... one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain... (Rev. 5:5-6).”
 - 3. The witness of tradition suggests that Thomas labored in India where he experienced martyrdom. A large segment of believers there claim to be “Christians of St. Thomas.”

Why did early Christians place an emphasis on connection to an apostle (Peter and Paul to Rome, James Zebedee to Spain, Andrew to Scotland, Thomas to India)? The issue was evidence and authority of His message coming from persons close to Him. It was used to validate the message of the Gospel when very few possessed a copy of the Bible in their own language. The message of Jesus' person and claims were passed orally without a text. When asked about the credibility of their message, the earliest defense was apostolic succession (God-Christ-Apostle-pastor-me).

Matthew

What do we know about the Apostle Matthew?

1. It is striking that, apart from the lists of the twelve (Matt 10:3, Acts 1:13) and corporate action by them, we have few references to the writer of our first Gospel. What we can safely state is:
 - a. Matthew was the "son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14)." (Another apostle, James, was a "son of Alphaeus [Matt. 10:3]," but there is not evidence that they were brothers.)
 - b. He was a Jewish man who, at least later, became so knowledgeable of the Hebrew Scriptures that he quotes from more than any Gospel writer.
 - c. That he was a Galilean being in the employ of the regional tetrarch, Herod Antipas.
 - d. That he has two names: Matthew (9:9) and Levi (Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-28). The former was his Greek name and the latter his Hebrew. This suggests, along with the comment above (b) that he resided in the "Galilee of the Gentiles". A parallel example of double naming would be Saul/Paul.
 - e. We know from the synoptic writers that Matthew was formerly a tax collector (Matt. 10:3) in the employ of the Roman Empire under the regional authority of Herod Antipas, though the tax was the least offensive tax to the Jews, a toll tax used for internal improvements. A Jew in that profession, at that time, was viewed as a traitor to national identity. Tax collectors obtained their salaries by raising more than the required tax and keeping it. John the Baptizer told tax collectors to "Collect not more than you are authorized to do (Luke 3:12-13)" when steered toward repentance.



Capernaum was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee near the road from the Fertile Crescent to the Mediterranean Sea (the Via Maris) as well as central hub for commercial traffic from the north to the south.

- f. Matthew had a home in Capernaum since he entertained Jesus after his conversion ("in his house..." Mark 2:15, Luke 5:28).
 - g. Tradition tells us that Matthew labored among Jews principally in the Near East eventually joining the martyrs.
2. Matthew's redemption reveals not only the depth of the love of Jesus, but the miraculous transformation that salvation brings.

- a. Matthew's devotion to Jesus came abruptly, at least as recorded by himself, Mark, and Luke contain no elaboration. "And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he got up and followed Him (2:13-14)." Luke comments that "He left everything behind... (5:28)."
- b. Matthew, having met Jesus had a concern for others (Matt. 9:10, Mark 2:15, Luke 5:28)." He arranged for a banquet inviting Jesus, his disciples, and Pharisees along with many "tax gathers and sinners (Matt. 9:10)." "And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there were a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them (Luke 5:29)."
- c. Jesus made the point when questioned by the Pharisees concerning the violation of purification ritual (corruption emanates from contact, not the heart) that he came for such. "But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. 9:12-13)." According to Mark's account, "And hearing *this*, Jesus said to them, "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous... (Mark 2:31-32)."

What can we learn from these connected episodes?

1. That no heart is beyond reclamation, should Jesus extend an invitation. He is willing to hear the cry of the spiritually needy no matter how prosperous they may appear outwardly.
2. When the light of the gospel scatters the calloused heart, there is a remarkable change of priorities.
3. No one is beyond the touch of Jesus when faith is expressed.
4. Redemption brings with it a care for others. When you have found a "treasure in the field" or a "pearl of great price," you just want to share it.
5. I wonder how the disciples felt when Matthew joined the group, especially Simon the Zealot (a corrupt traitor and a right-wing patriot). What does it tell us about the life-change that redemption brings in interpersonal relationships?