

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

18 Kevin Heider The Faith & Doubt of St Thomas, Part II

Hey everybody! This is Kevin Heider here. Once again, I am not going to be on the screen for very long. I just wanted to encourage you, if you're starting with part two, don't do that. Go back and watch part one because this one will pick up right where part one left off.

Part one dealt exclusively with details of the painting, and in things that we can kind of, you know, spiritual and psychological insights that we can learn from them. This one, part two, deals more with the person of St. Thomas, as he is depicted through Scripture, but we're also going to be kind of filtering that a little bit through this scene.

This painting as it's imagined by Caravaggio Works of art like this point to mystery and when we contemplate the art, we inevitably move deeper into the mystery it points to. And the mystery that Caravaggio points to here is the person of Jesus Christ and how each of us encounters him uniquely, in our own life, and in our own way, in our own faith, and in our own doubt. And in contemplating this mystery I have found the person of St. Thomas to be a mirror unto myself.

As I've encountered other works of art over the years that consider Thomas's faith and doubt in earnest and artful ways. The mystery starts to get even deeper. Take for instance, a song by one of my favorite bands, The Collection. The song is called The Doubtful One. This is the first verse: "Oh brother Thomas, did you walk away from Jesus wondering if it was all a dream? Did all your doubts creep back and tell you that your fingers hadn't ever touched a single thing"? That is such a brilliantly insightful lyric. It isn't pessimistic. It isn't cynical. But it also doesn't presume that Thomas never wavered or was tested in his faith again.

After Jacob wrestles with the angel in the book of Genesis, it says, "At sunrise as he left Penuel, Jacob limped along because of his hip." Jacob wrestled with the angel, and he won. But then his walk became a limp. And that's not a minor detail. Do you know what it's like to walk with a limp? It's hard. It makes any journey take longer. The few times in my life when I've injured a foot or an ankle and I've had to walk around in public with an obvious, embarrassing limp, I get really self conscious. I can walk with confidence, but it's a lot harder to limp with confidence.

I think that's what's going on in this song from The Collection. It's asking, was Thomas cured of all his doubts? Or did they ever creep back in? Was a doubt something he'd have to wrestle with for the rest of his life? Did Christ help him wrestle this Proverbial Angel? But now Thomas would have to walk with a limp, always wondering, always tempted to be self conscious about his own perceived

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

inadequacy, about his need for proof when his brothers all seemed to be able to accept so much freely on faith. Are any of these questions resonating with you? Do you feel like you've been walking your faith journey slowly, struggling trudging along? If you feel like you're barely limping along in faith, just keep limping. If you're doubts keep creeping back, keep wrestling with them.

Jacob starts limping in chapter 32 of the Bible. If he stops walking right then in there because he's tired from wrestling all night and this limp is destroying his confidence. We don't get the next 1157 chapters of the story. -Which means Caravaggio never paints this. And in every possible potential parallel universe, I need this painting to exist, because it's beautiful, and beauty by pointing to mystery, which leads to God who is love will save the world.

Speaking of parallel universes, do you remember the show Lost? Don't go anywhere, I promise, this is entirely relevant. And we're almost done and this is seriously the best part. This is where it all comes together. I mentioned earlier that I thought that St. Thomas's common nickname, Doubting Thomas was unfair. Well, my thoughts on this, honestly, were inspired by an episode of Lost. If you never watched the show, don't worry, you don't need to. It was huge at the time and I always enjoyed all the ways in which the show incorporated religious imagery, philosophical concepts and the struggle between light and darkness. But there's a scene in an episode of season five, that delighted me because it featured this painting. You don't need any context for this discussion. You don't even need to know who the characters are. All you need to know is that one of them is confident about what needs to happen, and the other one is not.

(Clip from Lost)

[Kevin] Thomas the apostle. When Jesus wanted to return to Judea, knowing that he would probably be murdered there, Thomas said to the others, "Let us also go that we might die with him." But Thomas was not remembered for this bravery. His claim to fame came later, when he refused to acknowledge the resurrection. He just couldn't wrap his mind around it. The story goes, that he needed to touch Jesus wounds to be convinced.

- So was he?

- Of course he was. We're all convinced sooner or later Jack. *[Kevin]*

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Within the context of the series, that scene is pivotal. So the fact that it took place in a Catholic Church featured this work of sacred art offered a genuinely insightful perspective on scripture, and was viewed by 12 million plus people as it aired on a major television network owned by Disney was so cool to me at the time. I really appreciated the character's attempt to rescue St. Thomas from his unfortunate nickname. But it also got me thinking, was it true? Was what the character said about Thomas accurate? Or did they just write it into the show as an inspirational plot device? I'm a nerd. So I decided to fact check it.

I went back through the Gospels and noted every instance in which Thomas speaks. And he only does so in four separate scenes, all in the Gospel of John. The first is as the character on the show mentioned. In John chapter 11. Upon learning that his friend Lazarus, had died, Jesus says to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea," but his disciples argue with him, and eventually, Thomas speaks up. So Thomas called Didymus said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him."

The second time Thomas speaks, is during Jesus's discourse at the Last Supper. It's in John chapter 14. Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God have faith also in me, where I am going, you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" And the third and fourth scenes take place after the resurrection. We've discussed them thoroughly at this point.

In all the Gospels, Thomas only speaks four times. And I see a pattern. The first time he speaks, he speaks as confidently as one can, in the face of martyrdom. *"Let us also go to die with him,"* he says. The second time he speaks, he questions the truth of Jesus's words, *"Master, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* he asks. The third time he speaks, he doubts, *"Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* And the fourth time he speaks, he confesses, *"My Lord and my God."*

This is the pattern: Confidence, Questioning Doubt Confession. I have seen this pattern in my own life. I see it in the lives and faith journeys of others. Confidence, questioning, doubt, confession. It's simply a fact of being human and having to wrestle with the way and the truth and the life that surpasses all understanding. The strength of our faith ebbs and flows.

Sometimes we're up all night wrestling, sometimes we acquire a limp but we have to keep going. As The Collection sings in their song Birds. Sometimes you ask too

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

many questions. You start too many fires, you dream of resurrection. But you're too scared to die. Sometimes we doubt. Sometimes we lose heart, we lose faith, we question things. But we know that all that has been lost, can be found. And in one of the most difficult seasons of my life, I was truly moved by this passage from, "The Imitation of Christ," by Thomas a Kempis. I highly recommend it. He writes of spiritual consolation and desolation of life in the garden and death in the desert, of the ebb and flow of faith and doubt, he writes, quote, "*When therefore, spiritual consolation is given by God, receive it gratefully. But understand that it is his gift and not your meriting. Do not exalt. Do not be overjoyed. Do not be presumptuous, but be the humbler for the gift. More careful and wary in all your actions, for this hour will pass, and temptation will come in its wake. When consolation is taken away, do not at once despair, but wait humbly and patiently for the heavenly visit, since God can restore to you more abundant solace. This is neither new nor strange to one who knows God's ways. For such change a fortune often visited the great saints and prophets of old. If this is the case with great saints we who are weak and poor ought not to despair, because we are fervent at times and other times cold. For the spirit comes and goes, according to his will.*" End quote.

I'd like to close this out with a song. I am a songwriter after all. I wrote this about seven or eight years ago now, but I've just finally recorded it and I'm getting ready to release it. So this version that you're about to hear isn't exactly the finished final track, but its close. And this song isn't necessarily inspired by or about all of the things I've just mentioned. But it comes from the same place and I think you'll see the connecting threads. I offer this song now as my closing prayer with the hope that you continue to have a blessed and fruitful Lent. This is called The Stranger.

“From all the fires that consume me, from all the terrors of this night, from all the earthly shadows looming, send you word to set me right. From all my distant exhortations, From all my foolish revelry, From all the dangling conversations Send your truth to set me free.

Cause I want, I want your freedom and oh, I need to know your name, Am I a stranger now unto you? Was your love bled in vain? Happy is a heart unfettered. Blessed is the soul who knows - All the mercy in your silence, and how in agony it grows, for I have cried to you in mourning, and I have died calling your name. But you're a stranger now unto me Oh, stranger come pierce my shame The spirit comes, the spirit goes But when it goes, it's never gone And when it calls me, I will answer, to make right what I've done wrong. For in this season of my longing, hope sounds in this refrain. Love don't let me be a stranger, bleed my heart speak your name.”