

*Loosely based on John 20:19-31*

Hi, my name is Thomas. Well, actually it's pretty much only my mum who still calls me that... especially when she disapproves of something I've said or done, and then I get my middle name as well. Most people who know me just call me Tom. Except for one auntie who calls me little Tommy and ruffles my hair every time she sees me, like she did when I was a kid. Of course I make a great show of being annoyed with her, but secretly I kind of like it. Don't you dare tell her I said so though!

Anyway, you might have heard of me by another name that's going around, kind of a nickname I suppose you could say. Ah... I can see by the look on your face that you have. Yes, alright, I'm *that* Thomas, the one they call 'Doubting Thomas', one of Jesus' followers. But that only tells half the story and isn't at all fair!

Look at Peter. When Jesus was arrested and everything was going crazy Peter flat out denied knowing him. Swore blind he'd never even met him. But do they call him 'Peter the Denier'? Oh no they don't... and yet they call me 'Doubting Thomas'! Does that sound fair to you? Let me tell you what happened and you can make up your own mind...

Everyone knows that from the moment they took Jesus, even before they crucified him, Pilate's men were rounding up everyone they could find who had anything to do with him. If you'd even been seen in the same postcode as him you were taken in for questioning. There were soldiers practically camped at the end of my road and I couldn't leave the house for days.

When they took him down from the cross and buried him in that Arimathean's tomb it got even worse. They posted guards at the tomb so nobody could even get near it, they were so afraid of what might happen. When Jesus' body disappeared they were in a right state and patrols were doubled everywhere.

The rest of the guys managed to meet up in secret that night, but there was no way I could join them. They tell me there's a new word around, 'fomo', that apparently stands for 'fear of missing out'. I don't know how you get to make up new words. I'm sure I do it every time I overdo it with the wine, but nobody says, "That's a great word, can I use it?"

Anyway, I was afraid for my life that night, and I certainly missed out, because even though the meeting-place was secret and the doors were locked, Jesus was with them. He had risen, just like he said he would! They saw with their own eyes the wounds in his hands, and the gash in his side where one of the soldiers had stuck a spear in him to make sure he was dead. And he told them to be at peace. They were all as high as kites!

Believe me, I heard all about it. Every time I saw one of them for the next week they were full of it, telling me how fantastic it had been to see him. Can you blame me if I wasn't altogether sure at first? They'd all seen him for themselves, I was the only one who hadn't. I'd seen Jesus do some amazing things, but coming back from the dead, that's a whole new level! I wanted it to be true, but it's asking a lot, isn't it?

So I told them, "I'll believe it when I see it for myself!" What else could I say? And if you think none of them said or thought the same thing before they saw him you don't know them like I do! Of course they did, and it was hardly my fault I wasn't there when they met him.

To be honest, after a week of that, and getting called 'Doubting Thomas' all the time, I was starting to get a bit cheesed off, but everything changed then. We were all meeting up, and the patrols were easing up so I'd managed to get there this time.

I know the doors were locked because I was the last to arrive and I'd seen a servant lock them right after I went in, but suddenly, while we were talking to each other, Jesus was just there among us. It takes more than a locked door to stop him!

He wished peace upon us all, but then he spoke to me directly, face to face. He wasn't angry with me, all I sensed was love and forgiveness, and maybe a little disappointment. He told me to look at his wounds and

feel them, and said "Stop doubting and believe." And in that moment I did! Any doubts I had just melted away. I was then, and am now, more certain than I've ever been about anything in my life that Jesus rose from the dead. I didn't even have to touch his wounds, I'd seen all I needed to.

It was like I suddenly saw him more clearly than I ever had before and knew exactly who he was and that everything he had told us was true. I couldn't help myself, I just blurted out, "My Lord and my God!" For a moment everyone went quiet. You could have heard a pin drop! Then they all started saying it too, and everyone was speaking at once, and Jesus said I had believed him because I saw him, but those who believed without seeing him were even more blessed.

It was incredible, the best moment of my life! And I can't wait to see what will happen next, what else Jesus will do now he's risen from the dead. It's going to be amazing, believe me... this is just the start!

So that's my story. Did I doubt Jesus had risen? Well, yes, maybe for a while... but not now, so please stop calling me 'Doubting Thomas'. I believe, and so should you!

#NoDoubt #BelievingThomas

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So we've met Thomas and, with a bit of creative licence, heard his story in his own words. Is it fair that he has been forever labelled as 'Doubting Thomas'? I'd have to say no. Almost certainly he only expressed what others had already thought or felt at some point, and what we ourselves might think or feel sometimes.

Would we like to have one fault, weakness or failing forever linked to our name? Of course not! I admit that sometimes I am proud of my intellect, even though I know that I can take no credit for it and am just the way God made me, but I would shrivel up in horror if I thought that two thousand years from now people might still be referring to me as 'Proud Paul'. And we heard Thomas's mention of 'Peter the Denier'...

Jesus forgave Thomas for his doubt, just as he forgave all his sins, and just as he forgives ours. Remember what God said in *Jeremiah 31:34*, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (also quoted in *Hebrews 8:12*).

We should also give Thomas credit for his astonishing profession of faith and belief in Jesus, whom he called his "Lord and his God" *John 20:28*. The word we translate as "Lord" is the Greek word κυριος (*kyrios*), chosen by those who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek in the Septuagint, and by the writers of the New Testament, as an equivalent for 'Yahweh', the name for God so holy they would not speak it aloud, and the word "God" is the Greek word θεος (*theos*), from which we derive the word 'theology'.

As our imagined conversation with Thomas tells us, in that moment he understood exactly who the risen Jesus is, not only more clearly than *he* ever had before but more clearly than *anyone* had. Perhaps it would be more fitting to remember Thomas for that than for his short-lived doubt... those were not the words of a doubter!

It's now a week since we celebrated Easter. Thomas's own encounter with the risen Lord Jesus came a week after the resurrection, and serves to remind us that we can have our own *personal* Easter any, and *every*, time we meet with the risen Lord. We should always celebrate the risen Lord Jesus!

I nearly made it to the end without quoting a song... but not quite! The words of 'Hot Chocolate' from their 1980 hit 'No Doubt About It' come to mind: "It wasn't an illusion, Oh no, No doubt about it". As memorable as the song might be, they were actually singing about an encounter with a U.F.O. If they could assert that they had no doubt about *that*, and not be afraid or ashamed of being ridiculed, how much more should we be proclaiming that Jesus is risen from the dead, and there is no doubt about it?!

Jesus is risen, hallelujah!