

A Dual Personality?



What's in a name? The name 'Didymus' (Greek for 'twin') stuck to Thomas (John 11:16, 20:24). It may have referred to his family status, but it equally fitted his disposition. He had a dual character. Within his personality, damaging and uplifting forces were just about equally poised.

This fine balance or human nature is not unfamiliar to us. Robert Louis Stevenson elaborated on it when he wrote about the two-in-one Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The Apostle Paul stresses the same characteristic see-saw between human impulses and depicts the struggle between good and evil in every heart:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (Romans 7:19).

We cannot ask honestly or hopefully to be helped to overcome temptation unless we ourselves have honestly and firmly determined to do the best we can to keep away from it. If you have no head for heights it is common sense to keep away from the cliff edge or a precipice. Everyone's heart is a battleground in this sense. Our desires to do

good and our tendencies to do evil are perpetually opposing each other. Likewise, Thomas was swayed by his doubts and his love of Jesus. His head and his heart would frequently have been at variance.

Doubting

It was as natural to Thomas to harbour unbelief as it is for others to cherish hope. There are some unhappy individuals who seem constitutionally unable to look on the bright side. They cannot see the blue sky for clouds.

After the death of Jesus, we can imagine how swiftly Thomas may have discredited the testimony of every witness who claimed to have seen the risen Lord.

He could not accept the evidence of Mary Magdalene. She was (to him) a hysterical woman from whom 'seven devils' had been cast out; she was utterly unreliable.

It was reported that "*The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!*" (Luke 24:34). Yes, but everybody knew Simon Peter. No-one doubted he meant well, but he was rash, headstrong and impulsive, a man of action, not thought. He was, Thomas reckoned, incapable of making cool, calculated judgements. As for John, everyone knew he was a dreamer, his flights of fancy could easily lead him astray.

We can imagine that Thomas prided himself on his superior judgement. He could not be deceived. Even when the other disciples together had met the risen Jesus, Thomas was ready with the cynical answer:

Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe (John 20:25).

For more than a fateful week doubting Thomas remained aloof from his friends. The Bible does not tell us how he passed the time. Maybe he often yielded to melancholy and brooded in solitude. His doubts would be gnawing away at his love for Jesus.

Seeing is Believing

Sometimes on a stormy day, after being obscured for hours, we have seen the sun burst through the clouds and set in incomparable splendour. So it was with Thomas, the man with the twin personality. His love, dimmed for a time by the pall of melancholy, found its resurgence when Jesus appeared to him in person and every last vestige of doubt was dispelled. Thomas then made his great confession to Jesus, who gave this blessing:

Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (v27).

The Blessing of Belief

This is the message of hope for us. Here we are, often perplexed, maybe defeated by our doubts, dreads and sins. Yet Thomas's experience can inspire us to overcome.

Jesus is described as *"the resurrection and the life"* (John 11:25), and the Gospel records are *"...written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:31).

And so we come back to our opening question: what's in a name? In the name of Jesus, we read, is life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The promise of Jesus to Thomas brings this priceless gift nearer to us, who have not seen Jesus in person. The name of Jesus sums up the things he came into the world to do – and which only he can do. He's the saviour who alone can deliver us from the grip and consequences of sin.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Belief in the saving work of Jesus and his name can give us great confidence and hope, in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6–9).

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