

THE DOUBTING ONE
(A Fictional Portrayal of Doubting Thomas)

I am Judas. Not Iscariot. He is long since dead. He hung himself after he turned Jesus in to the authorities.

No, I am Judas the Twin. But because of the other Judas I am just as glad to be known by my nickname Didymus. It is Greek for twin. You probably know me as Thomas.

I grew up, though, as an only child. And with no mother. It was just my father and me. I have no real idea how all that impacted my growing up, save to say that I always was questioning why other boys had mothers and I had none. I always was asking why they called me the twin when I had no brother.

Finally, when I was about seven or so, my father told me about the day I was born. My birth, he said, was uncomplicated. My mother's labor was short and I came into the world within four hours of her first contraction. But then things took a turn for the worse. And despite the best efforts of the midwife, my twin brother was choked to death on his own cord. There was a great loss of blood, and my mother, completely spent by the ordeal, died the next day.

I was glad that my father finally answered my questions, but I hated the answer. And for years I blamed myself for their deaths. I know it makes no sense—how could I, a newborn baby, have caused their demise? But, still, I felt responsible. I wondered why I lived and they died. Was I specially blessed, or specially cursed?

I guess that is why I was always asking questions, why I was always raising doubts. When your whole life is constantly being called into question, when you are filled with self-doubt, how can you but help it?

My father was a farmer. He grew barley and wheat. We had a few sheep and goats for milk. Ours was a simple life. As I grew older we worked side by side. Most of the time we said very little to each other. Not because of any animosity. But just because there was little to say. My father never really got over the death of my mother and brother, and I just absorbed his grief.

On the Sabbath we would both go to the synagogue and join in the prayers. We would listen to the elders as they taught about the Law. But I never really believed in God. In my mind I questioned most everything they said. After all, if God was real, why was my mother dead? Why had my brother choked to death? I had my doubts, but I rarely spoke them aloud, for to do so would have caused great trouble for my father and for me.

Then one day, I heard that a traveling rabbi, a man said to be a healer, was going to pass through town. People said that he was very wise, and very kind. For some reason I don't fully understand, I decided to go hear him preach. I think in the back of my mind I hoped he would be able to alleviate my fears and answer my doubts.

I was amazed at the number of people who gathered outside our village to hear him preach. Some were sick, and no doubt hoped to be healed, but many were there simply to listen.

It appeared that he did heal some of the sick, though I could not help but wonder if they were merely planted in the crowd to make him look powerful. Still, one of the sick ones was my neighbor Benjamin. Benjamin had been blind since birth, and with a simple word and a gentle touch, this Jesus of Nazareth seemed to give him new sight. Sceptic that I am, I was still hard pressed to explain that one away. In fact, I began to wonder if he could heal my wounded heart, for I too had been injured from birth. Not in body, but in spirit.

After he was done preaching, I went to speak to him personally. And to my astonishment, he knew my name.

"Ah, Judas," he said as he looked me in the eye, "You are wondering how all this is done, aren't you? You, my friend, have questions about the healings, but I suspect, you also have other questions. Questions about God. Questions about faith. Questions about love. Am I right?"

I stammered. Of course he was right. It was as if he could read my mind.

"I will tell you what," he said, "Why don't you come and follow me along as I travel. Perhaps in our working together, you can find what you need."

And so I did. Just like that. I left the farm and my father, and followed Jesus.

For three years we wandered the countryside. And I saw many incredible things. And I grew to really love him. Still, there were those who insisted he was the Messiah, and that just didn't seem right, somehow. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to give us victory over our enemies? I just couldn't picture Jesus leading an army against Rome!

Many though must have thought that to be the case, for increasingly we discovered the crowds included scribes and Pharisees, and others in power, who questioned his every word, who made veiled threats. And it became clear to me that we would do well to avoid the authorities.

But still, we went to Jerusalem. I thought it was foolhardy. And I questioned it. But Jesus said we must go—so we did.

It was almost time for Passover. So Jesus had Peter, James and John, arrange for us to eat the Passover Meal. And when we gathered, he took it on himself to wash our feet. I had no idea why he did that. It seemed to wrong, so improper. I agreed with Peter—we should have washed his feet!

Then, at supper, he told us he was going away, and he would prepare a place for us. But he didn't say where he was going or how to get there. So I asked.

“Lord,” I said, “we don't know where you are going! How can we know the way?”

His answer was no more satisfying than my father's had been so many years ago when I asked about my mother and brother. For he said “I am the way.”

I had no idea what he meant. At least not then.

After the supper we went with him to the garden of Gethsemane, and while he prayed, we slept. That is until we heard the sound of approaching feet. Many feet. In a moments time it was sheer chaos, as a contingent of guards swarmed around him, captured him, and marched him off.

I was terrified. And, I am ashamed to say, unlike Peter, who at least followed at a distance, I ran as far as I could. I had no interest in being arrested.

And so I hid out with several of the others in the upper room where we had eaten the Passover Meal. At first we all stayed out of sight, but gradually, some of our number ventured out into the streets to see if they could find out what had happened. But when they returned the news was not good. Jesus had been tried. And he was going to be crucified.

A shudder went through our group. After that only John had the courage to leave. He even went to Golgotha, to stand by as they hung Jesus up on the cross.

Later he came back, and told us all about it—and he told us that a man named Joseph had taken the body for burial. It was over. And so I decided to go home.

It was a two days journey, but for some reason, I decided to turn back. Maybe, I thought, maybe if I am with the others, I could still experience some of the peace I knew with him.

But when I got there, instead of the deep grieving I expected, there was excitement. They all stumbled over each others words.

“We have seen the Lord, Thomas, he is alive!”

“He’s been raised from the dead, Thomas!”

“He spoke to us!”

I shook my head. How could such a thing be? “No,” I said, “you must be imagining things. Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, unless I put my hand in the wound on his side, I just will not believe. I cannot believe.”

The others tried to convince me, but I remained firm in my disbelief.

Still, I did find the comfort in their midst I had hoped for. And it was wise for us to remain in hiding. So I stayed with them throughout the week. We passed time telling stories, and remembering the things he had said. And in some ways, it was as if he were still with us.

A week later at supper I was serving the soup, when suddenly everyone was silent. I looked up from the bowl I was filling, and there stood Jesus. I could hardly believe my eyes.

“Peace be with you,” he said to us all. Then, holding out his hands and looking right at me, he said “Put your finger here, Thomas, do not doubt, but believe.”

And in that moment, I realized it was all true. Jesus was alive. He is the Messiah! And God’s love is real. God’s power is beyond comprehension!

I fell to my knees. “My Lord,” I cried out, “My God!”

There is more to my story, but the truth is, you have heard the most important part. From that time on, I joined with the other disciples in spreading the good news. Some of us stayed in Jerusalem, others traveled afar. I went to India, myself. And there helped form a new community of believers.

There are days when I still question. Even times when I doubt my own experience. But I can say with great surety, Jesus loves me. And that, in the end, is enough.

John H. Danner