

Be a Doubting Thomas

John 20:24-31 HCSB But one of the Twelve, Thomas (called "Twin"), was not with them when Jesus came. (25) So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe!" (26) After eight days His disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace to you!" (27) Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer." (28) Thomas responded to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (29) Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who believe without seeing are blessed." (30) Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. (31) But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.

Introduction:

Can reasonable people believe the things that are crucial to Christian faith?

I would imagine that only Judas among the twelve apostles has been subjected to more critical and unkind judgments than Thomas. Though his nickname within that group was "Didymus," or "the Twin", we know him better known as "Doubting Thomas" because of his reaction to the first reports brought to him about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He insisted that he would have to have hard proof before believing it was so. To the other ten, he said, "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" Because of that statement, Thomas has been reproached across the centuries.

OK to Doubt: But I would be among those to speak up in his behalf. Because I believe that in Thomas' demand for proof, he is to be admired rather than ridiculed. In fact, Jesus himself said:

- **Matthew 24:26 HCSB** So if they tell you, 'Look, he's in the wilderness!' don't go out; 'Look, he's in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.

And there are too many people today who believe too much on the basis of too little. I am appalled at how much irrational garbage people are willing to swallow without a particle of solid evidence to back it up.

People read horoscopes,
lay out Tarot cards,
and call 900-numbers to learn their futures.

A few will even follow David Koresh to Waco, give their 12-year-old daughters to him as sexual partners, and proclaim him to be Jesus Christ come back to teach again.

Thirty-eight people followed their so-called "spiritual leader" in drinking a fatal cocktail in order to leave this earth and hop a ride to paradise on a UFO that was following the Hale-Bopp comet.

Call me a Doubting Thomas, too, if you please. But I'm not about to believe
Dionne Warwick,
David Koresh,
or Marshall Applewhite

without some proof — some good, solid proof. Too much is at stake for me to accept just any claim someone makes. Not the least of the things at stake is my intention to be a discerning and responsible human being.

Even God's Word tells us,

- **Hebrews 11:1 HCSB** Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

I don't want to be such a radical skeptic that I set standards of proof so high they can never be met. Neither do I want to be so gullible that any sort of alleged proof will count as an actual one. Fair and reasonable standards, however, ought to be imposed on every proof offered for any point of view.

Jesus must not have been offended by Thomas' request, because he invited him to see the evidence he had requested. He said, "*Put your finger here; look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*"

Someone might say, "That's my problem! If I could see and touch God, I would believe in him. If I could see and touch the risen Christ, I could accept the claims you Christians make for your religion. But until I have that sort of evidence, well . . . I just refuse to believe."

The existence of God is the most basic of all religious considerations. If there is no God, then the Bible is worthless, Jesus Christ was a deceiver, our soul is not immortal, and no one should be at all concerned about their actions. But if there is a God, our hope is not in vain and man does have a purpose upon this earth.

But can we prove that God exists? Certainly not the same way that you would prove a book weighs 2 pounds or that a truck is blue, because God can't be seen, heard, or touched with human senses. We can't see him in a microscope or a telescope. The Russian cosmonauts went into space and when they came back to earth they said, "There is no God. We didn't see him."

Fingerprints: We can't prove God by any test of the human senses. But, on the other hand, we shouldn't believe anything without evidence. There are proofs of God's existence, what I like to call the "fingerprints of God". I'm sure you're aware that every human being has a unique swirl of lines on the tips of his fingers, a pattern not found on the finger of any other person on the face of this earth. We leave minute traces of oil in the pattern of these swirls on everything that we touch. If you watch any television program or movie involving mystery you have seen investigators pull out their little kits and dust for fingerprints. Someone who is trained in this field can not only detect these prints, but he can determine who those prints belong to.

Those fingerprints are proof of where someone has been. In the courtroom, even if there is no eye-witness, the fingerprints can be proof enough to find someone guilty. Even though no one saw you at the scene of the crime and even though no one heard you at the scene, they can be certain that you were there because your fingerprints were left behind.

In a similar fashion, I would suggest that our God has left his fingerprints all over this world. Listen again to what Paul said:

- **Romans 1:18-22 HCSB** For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, (19) since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. (20) From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. (21) For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools

This passage tells us that God's existence can be known through his creation, through his fingerprints. But this passage also teaches us that some people have closed their eyes to this

evidence. We need to realize that the fingerprints that point to God are sufficient to prove his existence, but they are not coercive.

The fact that God has left his fingerprints clearly for all to see doesn't mean that everyone will accept his existence. The pagan world that Paul described didn't want to recognize God. But in doing so, Paul wants us to know that they were without excuse because the fingerprints are there.

I. The Argument From Existence

Campsite: Let me share with you an analogy: Suppose you are walking in a forest and come to a clearing. There is a tent, hot coffee over a fire, and other evidences of human presence. As you look around, though, no one is in view. You call loudly, and apparently no one hears you. At least, no one answers. How would you react?

It is in the nature of our human thought processes to assume that the site belongs to someone who has been present before you arrived. You might look around to find the person or persons who made the campsite. You could decide to wait around for a while to see who returns to the site. Or you might simply go on your way. But I dare say it would not occur to you to say: "Well, fancy this! What a stroke of luck, what a coincidence, that I came upon a site so perfectly suited to my needs!"

I doubt you would walk in, claim the camp as your own, and never entertain the possibility that you were encroaching on what belonged to someone else. When we see such things, we don't assume they just somehow happened. We know somebody set it up.

By investigating the camp, looking at clothes drying on a line, and seeing footprints near the fire, you might even have a good idea about the number of persons and why they are in the woods.

The apostle Paul asserted that men and women have some knowledge of God simply by seeing the world he has created. In the first-century city of Lystra, Paul told a group of its citizens:

- [Acts 14:15-17 HCSB](#) "Men! Why are you doing these things? We are men also, with the same nature as you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, **who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.** (16) In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way, (17) although He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did good: giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness."

This sort of reasoning is sometimes called "natural theology." It is theology (that is, thinking about God) that results from our reflections on the natural world in which we find ourselves. The universe we inhabit either (1) popped into existence from nothing or (2) was called into existence by some Eternal Force that pre-existed it. Philosophers from at least as early as the time of Plato have reasoned from nature to nature's Creator, from a habitable world to a world-arranger.

That's the point of the campsite analogy. We know campsites don't just pop into forest clearings. Humans are generally too bright to accept an "it's-just-that-way" explanation for tents, hot coffee, and sleeping bags.

But we humans have come upon a campsite in the cosmos. Planet Earth is here and habitable. "It's just that way" might seem a sufficient explanation initially. But the more we think about it, the more we know that is no explanation at all. So we begin looking around for clues that might offer us a reasonable account of why the clearing is here and why it has its particular form. In fact, we eventually realize that our own presence in the clearing is something in need of explanation itself. As the Hebrew writer put it,

- **Hebrews 3:4 HCSB** Now every house is built by someone, but the One who built everything is God.

Look around at the universe and the world in which we live. You see flowers, trees, birds, insects, dogs, cats, people. Where did they come from? The very fact that something is here demands a conclusion that someone put it here. Things just don't appear out of thin air.

Where did man come from? Some insist that we evolved from lower animals – monkeys, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, plants, bacteria, and one-celled organisms without any outside intervention. But where did they come from? Even if they say they came from explosive gases, where did that come from? Whatever was in the beginning had to come from someone or something.

Mind or Matter: There are two possibilities -- mind or matter. One of them has to be eternal. Either the materials in this universe have always existed and have evolved by chance into the world we know today, or in the beginning there was an eternal intelligent, powerful being who created this world. These are the only two possible choices.

To be fair, we need to point out that no person, living or dead, has actually observed either of these possibilities. No one has actually observed God in the process of creation. And certainly no one has ever observed one life form evolving into another life form -- or more importantly, life evolving from non-living matter.

Yet, the fact that we exist demands that one of these two processes actually occurred. If matter is eternal, then think about what that means: it means that rocks and dirt somehow changed themselves to become living things. Notice nobody else changes them, they just happen to change themselves. Plants grew arms and legs and heads and became animals. Granted this is supposed to take place over millions of years, but this is still supposed to be what happened. And animals changed themselves to become thinking, intelligent moral human beings. And if that's the case, then there is no real difference between a human being and a pile of dirt in my back yard other than a billion or so years of pure, blind chance!

The alternative is to believe that all things that exist owe their existence to the creation of the Supreme God who spoke this world into being, a God who created the stars and the seas, the plants and the animals, and set them all into place on this planet we call Earth. There are no other choices. Believing either way requires a step of faith because nobody saw it happen. But it seems to me that the evidence weighs strongly in favor of an eternal God. The mere fact that you and I exist is itself a fingerprint of God.

II. The Argument From Design

Rock Island Car: Let me offer another analogy to show the evidence from design. Suppose I show you a car. Four tires made of rubber, nylon, and steel cords connected to two axles and a steering column. On top, it has a steel body with four doors, glass windows, and comfortable seats. There is a heater, an air conditioner and an AM/FM radio. Under the hood, there's a six cylinder engine. Outside, a beautiful paint job and chrome trim.

You ask me where it came from and I tell you, "People think the Ford Motor Company built it, but I have my own explanation. Nobody designed or manufactured this car. It came out of the Rock Island County garbage dump. One night during an electrical storm, some pieces of metal, plastic, rubber and glass were hit by lightning. The molecules were changed and molded together, and in a billion to one chance, when the storm was over, this car had evolved and was just sitting there."

Now if I honestly believed that, you'd probably be calling the men in the white coats to come take me away. And yet that's not a bit more unreasonable than an atheist who looks around and says, "This world that is so intricately designed just happened to fall into place." The design of an automobile is nothing when compared to the universe.

This proof for God's existence is technically called the "teleological argument". That simply means an argument from design. Have you ever thought about how minutely perfect everything in this world is for our well-being?

The design of this world is a fingerprint that points to God. David said,

- **Psalms 19:1-3 HCSB** For the choir director. A Davidic psalm. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands. (2) Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. (3) There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard.

The creation all around us points to the God who is there. Take a look at nature.

What about **instinct**? How is it that birds always know to make the same kind of nest? How do fish know exactly where to go to spawn?

Look at the **balance of nature** -- flowers and birds need insects. If flowers were around for millions of years before insects came along, they would have died. Insects are necessary for flowers to live. But if insects had evolved before birds, they would have covered the earth because there would have been nothing here to eat them. All of nature is in a delicate balance that evolution can't explain.

Look at **the human body**.

Our **brain** -- no computer can do what one cell in the brain can do. Which was created and which evolved?

Our **respiratory system** is amazing -- Air and blood are able to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide. How long do you think it would take for a complex system like that to evolve? If it took more than 5 minutes, everybody would have died.

Our **eyes** -- No camera can do what they do. Which was created and which evolved?

Imagine, if you would, two pictures. One is of a picture of a human **hand**, the other a picture of a mechanical hand. You would know that the mechanical one had to have intelligence behind it because of its intricate design. But we are being taught that the ultimate source of the natural hand was non-living material like rocks and dirt! I find that incredible!

One of the most amazing designs in the universe is **human birth**. Let me share with you a beautiful design involving the heart. The human heart is divided into different chambers. This is to separate the pure and impure blood. One side handles the blood after it receives oxygen from the lungs and the other side handles the impure blood on its way back to the lungs. If blood were to flow through from one side to the other, we would die.

But in an unborn infant, the division between the different chambers isn't necessary because it gets its blood from the mother and it is all pure. So there is a passage from one side of the heart to the other. And the moment a child is born, there is a muscle that contracts and closes that passage. This is the only time in our lives that muscle is ever used. Let me ask you a question -- How many millions of years do you suppose it took for that muscle to evolve?

The universe is filled with intelligent design. Look at the stars, the earth, nature, our own body. Each fragment is infinitely more complex than a car. If the letters from A to Z were tossed into the air, their chances of falling in order are 500 million, million, million to 1. What are the chances, do you suppose, of them falling and producing "Romeo and Juliet"? Without God, we have to assume the elements of the universe were simply tossed into space and fell down into this order and design which we see around us. I don't know about you, but I find that too incredible to believe.

A boy was once told by an atheist, "I'll give you an apple if you can show me where God is." The boy replied, "I'll give you a bushel of apples if you can show me where he's not." The design of this universe is a fingerprint of God, and the more we learn about this world, the stronger that evidence is.

- [John 1:3-5 HCSB](#) All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. (4) Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. (5) That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.

III. The Place of the Bible

Going back to that encounter between Thomas and Jesus, do you remember how it ended? Thomas was invited to see and touch Jesus. His doubts were banished, and his faith soared. *"My Lord and my God!"* he exclaimed. Jesus' response to that confession is interesting. *"Because you have seen me, you have believed," Jesus told him. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

The apostle John added his own footnote at that point. After affirming that the life of Jesus was filled with other events and signs that are not recorded in his volume, he wrote:

- [John 20:31 HCSB](#) But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.

People who have lived in the generations following Jesus have had to depend on the Scriptures as the basis for our faith in him.

Scrutiny: There is no book that has been subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of its friends and, at the same time, to the contemptuous attacks of its enemies as the Bible. It was once quite fashionable to attack the Bible for its alleged anachronisms, historical blunders, and scientific errors. But there has been a radical-about face concerning attacks on the Bible in the last half of this century.

Archeology: That's due, largely, to the evidence that archaeology has been able to uncover in recent years. No single science has done as much as archaeology to confirm the reliability of the Bible. Archaeologists have discovered people, events and whole civilizations which were previously unknown to historians except for references made in the Old Testament. The **Hittites, the Philistines, King Sargon of Assyria, King Belshazzar of Babylon** -- people said the Bible was a fake because these people weren't known to historians. But one by one, archaeology has confirmed the existence of each of them, just as the Bible said.

The biblical story of **King David** was considered "too fantastic" to be anything other than myth. King David must have been a made-up character, critics said. But, in 1983, Israeli archaeologists unearthed a piece of stone from an ancient monument dated in the ninth century B.C. Inscribed in Aramaic were the words "King of Israel" and "House of David." The skeptical claim that King David never existed except as a drama character has been essentially dropped.

Voltaire: The French unbeliever Voltaire once boasted that it had taken twelve men to set up Christianity, but he would show that a single man was enough to overthrow it. He said that in a hundred years the Bible would be a forgotten book. How many books from Voltaire have you read? How many books of the Bible? In fact, tell me the name of one book written by Voltaire. Tell me the name of any book in the Bible. Hmm. Whose star has faded, and whose is shining brightly?

The Bible is anything but an archaic millstone around the necks of modern people. It is the rock-solid foundation on which faith is built. It has withstood the test of time and survived the violent attacks of unbelief. It is an absolutely reliable source of information about the most important character and issue in human history — Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes through him alone.

Conclusion:

The route to faith for someone far removed in time and distance from the things Thomas experienced is necessarily different. Our proofs for Jesus' resurrection, for example, will obviously not be the same ones Thomas was given. But we need to be reminded that no figure of history — whether Socrates, Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln, or Jesus — is available for immediate sensory experiences through sight, sound, or touch. All of them have to be authenticated to us indirectly through history, archaeology, and documents.

When held to the strictest standards of historical evidence — standards much higher than the ones applied to the ancient Pharaohs or Alexander the Great or George Washington — we have more confirmed evidence about Jesus' life history, and resurrection from the dead than practically any other event in history. It is on the basis of these many lines of proof — not some blind leap of faith or irrational sentimentality — that I stake my life now and my destiny for all eternity. On the basis of that same evidence, I do not hesitate to invite all others to place your faith in him, believe his word and obey his commands.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."