

Outline

Me and My Gang – The People Jesus Loves! Me and My Skeptical Pessimist

When I was a kid, I always watched every Winnie the Pooh episode. I don't know if I should admit that, but it's true.

- I also watched Peanuts and was a big Fat Albert fan!
- If I was growing up today, I would be a huge fan of Sponge Bob and an I Carly groupie – wait a second, I am.
- But Winnie the Pooh was one of my favorites.
 - Not sure what the point of Hefalumps and Woozles was other than animators in the '70's that got a hold of some bad weed or something (insert Hefalump and Woozle clip so audience can see what I mean.)
 - One character that got on my last nerve was Eeyore – the pessimistic donkey that always knew something horrible was going to happen – and you know what? It usually did – like a self-fulfilling prophecy – (insert the Eeyore clip to illustrate what I am talking about.)

Well, Jesus had an Eeyore in his gang, but his name was Thomas. I mean Thomas, the few times we get to see this guy in action in the New Testament, is always seeing the glass half empty. Jesus did not have to invite Thomas to be with Him and His Gang and yet He did. Thomas strikes me as the type that just does not leave you guessing about his outlook on life. You know the type. You can spot them a mile away. They just see life in a different color than everyone else – all shades of blue and gray. Their gaze is usually down toward the ground and they sigh a lot. They have never met an idea they liked and they just know that nothing that you want to try is going to work and it will end up in disaster. You just know that they are going to quit the gang at any moment, but they never do. That is Thomas. I mean the first time we see him in Jesus' gang, this pessimistic spirit comes right on out:

Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." They said, "Rabbi, you can't do that. The Jews are out to kill you, and you're going back?"... That's when Thomas said to his companions, "**Come along. We might as well die with him.**" John 11:7-16 TM

Thomas is willing to follow Jesus into Jerusalem, but the perspective he has is that Jesus is going to get Himself killed (which He does, by the way), and that everyone else, including himself is going to get killed too. (It says a lot about his love for Jesus.)

There are two other references to Thomas in the Bible and, in each, Thomas is quite skeptical in his estimation of the situation and what is going to happen and as to the truth of the situation.

"Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking."

Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?" John 14:1-5 TM

In other words, "Wait a sec. If you leave, how are we supposed to find you? We will be lost without you. We won't make it. All will be lost!" The meaning of what Jesus is saying is not lost on Thomas and he very authentically lets Jesus know that this makes no sense and will probably only result in disaster. Jesus chooses to encourage his Pessimist by reassuring him that he will not be alone in his search for the Truth.

Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. **From now on, you do know him. You've even seen him!**" John 14:6.7 TM

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The last time we see Thomas in the Bible is after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus when Jesus has appeared to all the disciples and they have in truth seen him, **except that Thomas was not there.**

Now Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **Where was Thomas?** We don't know – probably out doing his Eeyore thing – somewhere depressed and wondering what to do next or imagining what dreadful thing was going to happen to him next. He just could not bear to be with these other disillusioned souls. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

And look at his response when the other disciples catch up with him and they tell him that they have seen the Resurrected Jesus – living just like He said He would - But he said to them, "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 it." John 20:24, 25 NIV - **Negative and unbelieving.** Thomas is definitely a glass half empty guy and a skeptic that has to have all his questions answered before he will believe.

You know, the cool thing about God is that He is just fine with us expressing our sincere doubts in Him and in His Truth. He is patient with us and He will wait until we can see for ourselves the truth of Himself – Look at Jesus' response to Thomas's Pessimism and lack of belief:

A week later (Jesus did not hurry to solve Thomas's issues – no panic) his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:26-29 NIV

What do we learn about the people God loves from Thomas?

- **God loves and accepts us in the midst of our weaknesses.** Jesus chose Thomas to be in the gang in spite of his skeptical pessimism, because Jesus saw his potential. God shows us through His acceptance of Thomas that He is cool with our lack of belief and our honest questions. It's other Christians that are often impatient with the weaknesses of others and their tough questions.
- **God loves and accepts us in the midst of our questions and doubts.** Thomas is full of doubts and questions, always needing answers and solid proof for his faith, but he still followed Jesus and Jesus accepted him in His gang even in the midst of his constant doubt and questions. Thomas was not afraid to ask the questions and Jesus was not afraid of his questions. **It is interesting to note that Jesus also challenged Thomas to believe in spite of his questions.** Jesus loves the authentic person who questions everything about Him and His Gospel, for Jesus knows that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Question God all you want, but do it honestly and genuinely.

So how should you allow Jesus choosing Thomas to be in His gang affect you?

- **Accept the personality type that God has given you and seek its strengths.** (For Thomas it was a realistic authenticity that he brought to the table. He did follow Jesus to Jerusalem even though he knew it was certain death for them all.)
- **You will have moments of doubt in your relationship with God, so don't be afraid to authentically question God and the Bible and Christianity.** You will always have questions that are not answered and this side of Heaven you will not get God figured out. **This is how God matures your faith as you seek the answers from Him.**
- **Know that God loves you enough to not allow you to stay the same.** He told Thomas to stop doubting and believe. **Thomas obeyed God's voice in his spirit** and said "My Lord and My God." The disciples had told Thomas the same thing, but Thomas did not change for them. **Only change for God.** What is He telling you in the fleeting thoughts of your spirit today? What do you need to do about choosing to believe about Him even in the midst of dark pessimism and unanswered questions?

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Can you say with me today – **“My Lord and My God!”** As we close with this last song, make that your prayer today – that even in the midst of tough times and unanswered questions, you will choose to obey what God tells you about Himself.

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