

## What Thomas Learned from a Terrible Toothache

Everyone warned Thomas that eating sweets between meals was bad for his teeth, but he didn't think about it much. Thomas loved candy. He ate it all day long and dreamed about it at night—fluffy marshmallows, sticky caramel, gummy candy and suckers. Nothing made him happier than leaving the candy store with his mouth full and his pockets bulging with sugary treats. And since his teeth felt just fine, he didn't worry about them, or about anything else except where to get pocket money for more candy!

But one morning, Thomas woke up with a terrible toothache. There was nothing he could do to make it stop hurting. He tried putting an ice pack on his jaw, but it didn't help. Next he tried putting a hot water bottle on it, but his tooth still hurt. It hurt when he sat down, and it hurt when he stood up. Thomas thought that it might feel better if he stood on his head, but that didn't help either. Finally, Thomas went to the school nurse.



“There’s nothing I can do,” she said kindly, “but I know someone who can fix your tooth and make it stop hurting. You need to go to the dentist.” His tooth hurt so much that Thomas could hardly wait!

I should explain to you just what was going on in Thomas’s mouth. All of us have something in our mouths called *bacteria*. These little creatures are so tiny that we can’t see them without a powerful microscope. They aren’t plants, and they aren’t animals. God created them to help us digest our food and to do other useful things, but some things that bacteria do are *not* helpful.

The bacteria that live in our mouths love sweets as much as Thomas does! When we eat sweets, they get to eat them, too. Sweets make the bacteria grow strong and multiply. These strong bacteria attach themselves to our teeth. Big groups of them living together on a tooth make a white film called plaque. You might think of it as a tiny city of bacteria.

This bacteria city is not good for our teeth. Just like a real city produces pollution, a bacteria city produces an acid that eats away the strong white enamel on our teeth. Brushing and flossing help remove this plaque, but if we aren’t careful, the acid that it produces can make a tiny hole in our tooth. We call that hole a *cavity*.

Without help, a cavity will always get worse. It will hurt more and more and the hole will get bigger and bigger until finally, the tooth is lost.

But that doesn’t have to happen! Just like Thomas, we may depend on our dentist to repair the damaged part of the tooth and fill the little hole created by the bacteria. We cannot fix it ourselves, but someone can fix it for us. And that’s just what the dentist did for Thomas! He also explained what Thomas needed to do so that he could keep his teeth healthy and strong.

“But Thomas,” the dentist said, “you have another problem that you can’t fix by yourself. The Bible says that sin is a problem much worse than a cavity. Sin is when you or I do something that is wrong, or bad, like disobeying a teacher or telling a lie. The Bible says that sin causes our soul (the part of us that lives forever) to be damaged and apart from God. And in the same way that your tooth would get worse and worse without help, our souls get more and more damaged and further from God as we continue to follow sin. There’s nothing we can do to fix our souls. We need someone else to help, just as you needed me to fix your tooth.”

Thomas thought carefully about what his dentist said. He remembered times when he had done wrong things, like being selfish and unkind. “Dr. Dentist,” Thomas asked, “Can you fix my soul, too?”

“There’s nothing I can do,” he said kindly, “but I know someone who can fix your soul and give you life with God that lasts forever.”

Do you know who the dentist was talking about? The Bible says that God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to save people who have sinned, like you and me.

Jesus lived a perfect life. He never sinned once! He never was unkind or disobedient, but He always did exactly what God wanted Him to do. Some people hated Jesus, and they killed Him. God accepted Jesus’ sinless death as payment for our sins. He showed everyone this by making Jesus alive again.

The Bible tells us that because Jesus died in our place, He can fix our souls and heal the damage that comes from sin—separation from God. All we have to do is to trust Jesus so much that we want, not only for Him to take away our sin, but also to help us to live in a way that pleases God all the time.

Thomas trusted his dentist to fix a *little* problem that he couldn’t fix by himself. Won’t you trust Jesus with your *big* problem of sin?

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