

Vs. 24 – “Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.” This is the same “Thomas” who was not only one of the “twelve” (cf. Mat. 10:3), he was also the one who was ready to die with Jesus in Jerusalem (cf. 11:16), and he was greatly concerned that he did not know the “way” to follow his master (cf. 14:5). On the significance of “Didymus,” see notes 11:16.

Vs. 25—Jesus sent the disciples to proclaim the gospel to all (cf. vs. 21). And so, John tells us that the “other disciples” told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord.” But as we’ll see, the man didn’t believe his friend’s report. Ironically, the apostles were “immediately rejected by one of their own—indeed, by one who had already exhibited belief in Jesus.”¹

The repetitive use of personal pronouns (“I/my”) conveys Thomas’ focus—i.e., he must be shown these things *personally*. Though the report of Jesus’ resurrection had come to him from reliable eyewitnesses, he demanded confirmation *firsthand*. Skeptics of every age have made similar demands despite the reliability of the Scriptures. And, in little more than seventy-two hours, optimism had been replaced by skepticism in one of Jesus’ closest followers. This is why he is often referred to as “Doubting Thomas.”

On the one hand, such incredulity is surprising, considering that, by this time, quite a few people had interacted with Jesus. On the other hand, perhaps such pessimism speaks to how discouraged Thomas had become. The apostle might’ve been so forlorn that not even those closest to him could not break through the ink-black malaise that had darkened his heart. If so, grief had made Thomas unreasonable. So much so, he said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Notice how the verbs Thomas uses get progressively more intense, going from an inquisitive “see,” to an innocuous “put,” culminating in a rather intrusive “thrust.” The saying, “hurt people hurt people,” is not without merit. Curt, gruff, or even rude speech is often the language of the bereaved. Bereavement can cause even the most loving people to lash out.

Thus, considering the context, would it not be better to call him Doleful Thomas? Does he not relate more to those in depression than disbelief? The man doesn’t appear to have become atheistic; he is *mourning*. And as many Christians know, great tragedy can weaken even the most vigorous faith. Those who’ve never experienced significant loss will only see Thomas’ doubt, while those who understand what actual loss is cannot help but see his despair. A crisis of faith is often a companion to disaster. Sometimes, things seem so bleak that no light could

¹ Klink (2016), p. 876.

ever break through. Thomas did *not* demand *palpable* and *personal* proof of Jesus' resurrection because he was simply stubborn. Such an approach to the text ignores the context. Thomas was grieving. And it was because he was *hurting* that he became *hardhearted*.

Vs. 26 – John advances the narrative “eight days,” aka the Sunday after Easter. The reason why the disciples were still in Jerusalem a week after is likely because, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, long-distance travel was generally discouraged. Interestingly, Jesus will instruct them to tarry even longer until they're “endued with power from on high” (Lu. 24:49) on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Ac. 2).

As before, John informs us that the disciples, including Thomas, were “inside” a room with the “doors” securely “shut,” when “Jesus came and stood among them.” This entrance by Jesus is nearly identical to the one described a week earlier (vs. 19), save for the mention of the disciples' fear. As such, one might assume that the disciples were no longer afraid, but the Greek term John used to describe how the 'doors' were 'shut' is the same word used in vs. 19 to describe how the entrance had been *locked*.² Thus, despite most of the disciples having encountered the risen Lord by this point, they still cowered in fear of the Jews.³ Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the apostles had no way to stem the tide of their anxiety. This is why, once again, Jesus reassures them by saying, “Peace be unto you.” His appearance was meant to put them at ease.

Vs. 27-28 – After encouraging the group, the Lord addresses Thomas *directly* and says, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing.” How gracious of our Lord that he would submit to his disciple's demands. Though Jesus gently chastises the man, his words are not a hollow invitation. He meant it when he told Thomas to “reach” out his finger, to “behold” the imprint on his “hands,” and to “thrust” his hand into his “side.” These verbs mirror those of vs. 25. It is apparent that, though Jesus was not *visibly* present when Thomas said those words, the Lord must've heard them anyway. Like God, Jesus is omnipresent, something we've known since the Lord interacted with Nathanael (cf. 1:47-51). We need not see the Son of God to know he's by our side.

Furthermore, this scene teaches us that close inspection does not threaten the Lord. To all who come to him, he beckons them to look long and deep, for in him, there is no trickery, only truth. And by peering into this Well, those fathomless waters not only *reveal* who God is (cf. Heb. 1:3),

² BDAG, p. 546, indicates that the primary usage of **κλείω** (*kleiō*) is “to prevent passage at an opening, shut, lock, bar” (cf. Lu. 11:7; Ac. 5:23; 21:30; Rev. 20:3).

³ Carson (1991), p. 657; Köstenberger (2008), p. 578.

but they also *reflect* the human condition, stripped bare of its defenses. Thomas was confronted with the folly of his own words. But such confrontation was for his benefit as it is for anyone who dares search the Word incarnate. Doing so will not leave the searcher "faithless but believing."⁴ Jesus Christ gives dry and thirsty souls "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (4:14). This is why, rather than taking Jesus up on his offer, Thomas, who once spoke more like an atheist than a believer, can say only, "My Lord and my God."⁵ Notice his use of the personal pronouns again. His suspicions, which he had once held so dear (cf. vs. 25), had been replaced with an unshakable conviction that Jesus Christ was *his* divine Sovereign.

This is a truly remarkable turn of events. Thomas' bullheaded disbelief is replaced with an unshakable confidence that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh (cf. 1:1, 14, 18). As Keener points out, "Thomas's very skepticism makes him the ideal proponent of a high Christology by indicating the greatness of the revelation by which he was convinced."⁶ And undoubtedly, the Beloved Apostle wants all who read his account to respond to Christ as his friend once did. After all, it is one thing to know Jesus as the Lord God; it is something else entirely to know him as "My Lord and my God." What others already knew about the Son of God is what Thomas came to know *personally*, and that made all the difference. The gospel is as much to the *person* as it is to the *populace*.

Vs. 29 – Jesus says, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Considering there's no mention of "touch," we can assume *seeing* Jesus was enough for Thomas. Thus, the comparison being made here is between those who believed by seeing the resurrected Lord—i.e., the first disciples, and those who, by reading the Scriptures, believe though they haven't seen the resurrected Lord for themselves—i.e., future disciples.

At this point, someone might wonder, "If Thomas believed after seeing Jesus, why doesn't God give everyone some kind of supernatural event?" But this conclusion ignores two things. First, as mentioned before, Jesus' words were a mild *rebuttal* (cf. 4:48; Mat. 16:4). Thomas isn't the one who is "blessed," but those who believe without seeing receive the blessing. Better to follow the latter example than the former, no? In fact, by and large, Thomas is an anti-

⁴ Klink (2016), p. 877-878, explains that while ἄπιστος (*áπιστος*), "faithless," generally refers to unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12), we should not conclude that Thomas is apostate. Considering the portrayal of Thomas throughout John's account, it is better to surmise that "he is acting in an unbelieving manner, not that he is an unbeliever."

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 580, explains that, in the Greco-Roman world, terms like "Lord" and "God" were utilized in the worship of the Roman emperor. He says, "Domitian (A.D. 81-96) in particular, during whose tenure the Fourth Gospel most likely was written, wished to be addressed as *dominus et deus noster*, 'our Lord and God' (Suetonius, *Domitian* 13.2)."

⁶ Keener (2003), 2:1211

example—i.e., someone we should see what *not* to do. So, while it is good to see him coming to his senses, he's not the sort of disciple we ought to emulate. Thomas is a *counterpoint* to John. Though he only saw the empty tomb (vs. 8), John quickly believed Jesus rose from the dead. Thomas had multiple eyewitness testimonies and the empty tomb, yet he was still slow to believe. His companions must've tried convincing him of the resurrection for a week, yet he remained stiff-necked and self-willed. This is why Thomas' actual failure wasn't that he wanted physical proof. Given the emphasis on miracles in John's account, seven to be exact (cf. 2:9; 4:50; 5:9; 6:11, 19; 9:7; 11:44), such a criticism would be unfounded.⁷ Thomas's problem was that he ignored the testimony of *ten* apostolic witnesses. Even if it is fueled by grief, such willful ignorance deserves reproof.

Second, as we learned from the episode where Jesus healed the man blind from his birth, seeing isn't necessarily believing (cf. 9:35-38). It is far from a foregone conclusion that miracles generate faith. In fact, an overemphasis on the miraculous is counterproductive (cf. Lu. 23:8). Rooted in the testimony of Scripture, belief is preferable to sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:8).

Arguably, belief based on sight is better than no belief at all. But a faith based on spectacles is subpar because it will never be satisfied; it'll yearn for bigger and better spectacles (6:26-27). In contrast, faith, par excellence, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Unlike spectacle-based faith, true faith has all the hope and evidence it needs; it is satisfied. And though this kind of faith may be intangible and invisible, this makes it no less substantive. Like love, faith is not the sort of thing that can be totally quantified. But just as a person in love will act a certain way toward the object of their affection, someone living by faith will demonstrate that faith by their actions. This is why the fruit of one's life is one of the best indicators of a person's belief system (cf. Mat. 7:16).

Furthermore, faith's immaterial nature does not mean Christianity is without verifiable proof. Despite what some claim, Christianity doesn't espouse blind faith; its' faith is evidence-based. It is the sort of religion established in the written testimony of firsthand eyewitnesses (cf. Lu. 24:39; Eph. 2:20; 1 Jn. 1:1-4). This is why believing something because "the Bible says so" is perfectly justifiable. No text in history has withstood the test of time or scrutiny like the Scriptures. Thus, while Thomas' faith is inferior to those who believe without seeing, the fact that an immovable man like him was swayed to believe ought to give further credence to the apostolic witness. Downtrodden, discouraged, and wallowing in doubt, Thomas was the person *least likely* to trust that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet, despite his disbelief, he believed. As Carson puts it, "The most unyielding skeptic has bequeathed to us the most profound

⁷ Klink (2016), p. 879.

confession.”⁸ If such sincere faith blossomed in a person like Thomas, there's hope for doubters of every stripe. Indeed, even the most obtuse man, though he does not have the same firsthand experience as Thomas, can believe in the testimony of Scripture, and by believing, he can become "blessed."

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 659.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 97 | John 20:24-29

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

In today's passage, Thomas claims he needed to see Jesus to believe. But John shows us that true blessedness is reserved for those who believe without seeing. Of course, this passage isn't promoting blind faith. As we'll see, John structures it to highlight evidence-based faith. Before Jesus appeared to Thomas, the apostle had all the facts he needed to believe. So, his problem wasn't a lack of proof but an abundance of pride mixed with grief.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://bit.ly/4iLQxbj>

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Season 1 | 97