

My Lord and My God!

John 20:24-31

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²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- John 20:24-31, ESV

Intro: Thomas the Twin

For thousands of years, the Apostle Thomas has been known as “doubting Thomas.” I don’t know if that nickname is really fair or not. With the exception of John, who saw the grave clothes and believed, none of the other apostles seemed to come to faith until they actually saw the resurrected Jesus on that first Easter evening. And yet Thomas was the last apostle to see Jesus alive again and thus the last apostle to believe in the resurrection, so he’s been labeled as Doubting Thomas, and anyone who is ever skeptical of anything runs the risk of being called a “Doubting Thomas.”

I think we ought to look at Thomas differently. Thomas was called “the twin,” which likely means he had a twin brother. Strangely, we’re never told who his twin brother was. We know Peter’s brother is Andrew and James’ brother is John, but who is Thomas’ twin? We don’t know. Here’s a thought: Maybe instead of labeling him “Doubting Thomas” and distancing ourselves from him, we should consider whether or not we might qualify as his twin, whether or not we’re more like him that we’d like to think.

The truth is that Thomas could just as easily be known as “Thomas the Confessor” as “Doubting Thomas,” for his powerful confession of faith in verse 28 is as remarkable as his powerful doubt in verse 25. He refused to believe until he was thoroughly convinced, and then once he was convinced, he believed and confessed his faith in the strongest and clearest terms recorded from the lips of anyone in any of the Gospels.

A. “Unless I See . . . I Will Never Believe.”

Our passage opens with the statement that Thomas “was not with them when Jesus came.” Where was Thomas? We don’t know, and it must not be important. What we do know is that Thomas refused to believe the disciples when they told him they had seen Jesus alive again, that He had come and stood in their midst and proclaimed peace to them.

He said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

This is pretty strong language, a bold and defiant rejection of the testimony of the other disciples. Yet, from what we’ve seen of Thomas in John’s Gospel so far, it’s not entirely surprising. Thomas has consistently been a pretty bold and outspoken guy who tends to take either a realistic or a pessimistic perspective, depending on how you consider him.

The first place we see Thomas speak up is after the death of Lazarus. Jesus and his disciples were staying clear of Jerusalem, because the Jewish leaders and their mob had twice tried to stone Jesus. But now Lazarus has gotten sick and has died, and Jesus decides He will take the disciples to Bethany, only a mile-and-a-half away from Jerusalem, to see Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sister. Here’s what we read in John 11:14-16:

Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

To say Thomas is not optimistic about their chances would be an understatement of British proportions.

Then, a few chapters later, we hear from Thomas again, as Jesus is teaching His disciples in the Upper Room, after the Last Supper, in His final teaching time with them before His betrayal:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Thomas was a concrete realist, a guy who liked to deal with tangible realities and wasn’t afraid to ask hard questions. For such a guy, a pessimistic realist, a brass-tacks straight-shooter, “We have seen the Lord,” was a story too good to take on faith.

And yet this is exactly what God asks us to do, isn’t it? God asks us to take the testimony of the disciples, including that of Thomas, on faith. To help us, He invites us to walk with Thomas on his

journey from hard skepticism to saving faith so we would see through his eyes how foolish he had initially been and how he should have believed his fellow disciples.

B. “My Lord and My God!”

God is so gracious and so patient.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus shows up on the next Sunday. Why wait a week? Why leave Thomas in suspense? Well, clearly, part of what Jesus is establishing here is that Sunday, the day of Resurrection, is the day when He will meet with His gathered people. Just as in the beginning at creation, God rested on the seventh day and made it holy by His rest, so in the new creation, Jesus rose again on the first day and made it holy by His resurrection. To drive that point home to them, He appears to them the first time and the second time on Sunday.

The language John uses is intentionally a mirror of the first appearance of Jesus the previous Lord’s Day evening. Jesus is graciously giving Thomas the exact same gift He gave the other disciples. Only this time, Jesus adds more, making it clear that He knows exactly what Thomas has been demanding:

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

How did Jesus know exactly what Thomas had demanded as proof? Did someone tell Him? No, of course not. The disciples had witnessed Jesus repeatedly be able to know what was in someone’s heart and mind without them speaking it out loud. Now they knew that He knew what they said and thought, even when He wasn’t physically present with them.

This kind of intimate knowledge of someone’s thoughts and words was not an entirely new concept to the disciples. They knew the Lord had this intimate knowledge of His own from Psalm 139 –

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. (vv. 1-4, ESV)*

And here was Jesus, displaying to Thomas the kind of knowledge the disciples knew God alone could have.

When Jesus invited Thomas to verify His resurrection body in these very specific ways, He says to Thomas, “Do not disbelieve but believe.” Another way to translate what Jesus is saying is “Stop being

unbelieving and start believing.” In other words, Jesus is calling Thomas to salvation by faith; to give up his skepticism and unbelief and believe in Christ and so receive salvation by faith.

Did Thomas ever reach out his finger and touch the wounds in Jesus’ hands? Did he ever reach out his hand and touch the wound in Jesus’ side? We don’t know for sure, but it seems rather unlikely. Instead, what Thomas did was fall to the ground and cry out, “My Lord and my God!”

Matthew Henry comments: “And now faith comes off a conqueror, after a struggle with unbelief. Thomas is now fully satisfied of the truth of Christ's resurrection-that the same Jesus that was crucified is now alive, and this is he. His slowness and backwardness to believe may help to strengthen our faith; for hereby it appears that the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, who attested it to the world, and pawned their lives upon it, were not easy credulous men, but cautious enough, and suspended their belief of it till they saw the utmost evidence of it they could desire.”

Thomas’ confession of faith is the strongest and clearest profession of anyone in any of the Gospels. My Lord – meaning, my Master, but also *Kurios*, the Greek word for “Lord” was the word used to translate YaHWeH, the name of the LORD from the Hebrews Old Testament into Greek. And “my God” – Think about what this means for Thomas, for an orthodox Jewish man who was staunchly monotheistic, who all of his life has professed the Shema, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD your God is one God.” Think how similar this wording is to the Shema. Thomas is professing that Jesus is the Lord, the one true God, the God of Israel in the flesh.

Jesus responds to Thomas by saying: *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

All through his Gospel, John has been exploring the nature of faith. What does it mean to believe? Why do people believe? John has pretty consistently depicted four different reactions to Jesus:

1. Those who rejected Him and refused to believe in Him. This is no faith at all.
He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. – John 1:11
2. Those who made a profession of faith of some kind, but it was insincere. We could call this “false-faith”
“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people” – John 2:23-24
3. Those who believed because they saw signs and wonders. We could call this “sign-faith.” This is true faith, but it is weak.
When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Many of the Jews therefore, who had

come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him – John 11:43-45

4. Those who believed because they heard the Word and believed. We could call this “Word-faith” and it is the best faith in John’s Gospel.

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” – John 4:40-42

The difference between the third and fourth reactions to Jesus lie behind Jesus’ words to Thomas here. Thomas has believed only because he has seen definitive proof, Jesus Himself in the flesh, alive again, presenting His wounds from the cross for close inspection. Thomas believes powerfully, but only after seeing powerful, irrefutable evidence. It is much better to believe because you trust God’s word and accept the testimony written in the word.

This is how Romans 10 speaks of saving faith:

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?^[a] And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

- Romans 10:8-17, ESV

C. “That You May Believe . . . and Have Life”

The issue of faith is the central issue in the Gospel of John: Who is Jesus and do you believe Who He says He is? And so this is how John brings this main part of his Gospel to a conclusion:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The different Gospels record different miracles of Jesus and, for the most part, John doesn't repeat the same miracles recorded in the other Gospels, with the exception of the Feeding of the 5,000 and the resurrection.

John reports the eight miraculous signs he does for one purpose: *“so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”*

In Jesus earthly ministry, John records seven signs:

1. Turning water into wine, John 2:1-11: This shows that Jesus is bringing the joy of the kingdom of God to transform life.
2. Healing an official's son in John 4:46-54: This shows Jesus' power to heal, even at a distance, to restore life with His powerful word. This sign was in response to faith.
3. Healing a lame man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:2-9: This shows Jesus' power to heal is not dependent on the faith of the one being healed, but that He sovereignly exercises His power as He sees fit for His kingdom purposes.
4. Feeding the 5,000 in John 6:1-13: This miracle, followed in John by the Bread of Life teaching, shows that Jesus is the satisfaction for His people's hunger.
5. Walking on the Water in John 6:17-21: This shows Jesus' power over the forces of the natural world, that He is Lord of Creation.
6. Giving Sight to a Blind Man in John 9:1-8: This sign shows that Jesus is the light of the world, the One who opens blinded eyes so we can truly see the light of life.
7. Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11: This shows that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that whoever believes in Him will have life in His name.
8. And then, finally, Jesus' resurrection, which is the 8th sign, the number of new beginnings or new creation, shows that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, the beginning of the new creation.

These signs are all recorded. Almost all of them were done publicly with multiple eye-witnesses, including eye-witnesses who were enemies of Jesus and who never believed.

What is your response? Do you believe? And believing, have you received life in His name? If you have, have you done what John does in his Gospel and shared the good news with others, that they may believe and have life?

