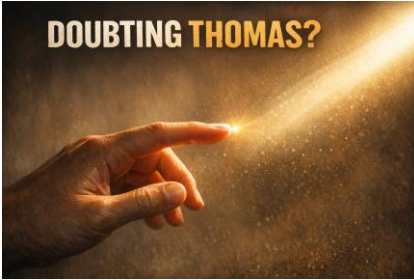


Was 'Doubting Thomas' Really a Doubter?

John 20:25: *So the other disciples were saying to him, We have seen the Lord! But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.*



There are many Bible accounts that have gathered a lot of attention over centuries because of their dramatic content. Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark and David and Goliath are all powerful and dramatic Old Testament accounts filled with action. Two New Testament examples are Jesus in the manger and Jesus on the cross. All of these named stories show us a hero and their experiences. Then we have 'Doubting Thomas.' Here was an apostle who did not betray Jesus and who was ultimately faithful to his calling, and yet we know him as 'the doubter.' Is this a fair and unbiased way to be remembering one of Jesus' closest followers? Was Thomas that far off from faithfulness so as to be labeled as a doubter?

Our considerations today will outline five belief lessons that Jesus taught all of us when he addressed Thomas' inability to comprehend the resurrection.

Let's first review what we know about Thomas.

You might be surprised that Thomas' words and actions are recorded only three times in the entire New Testament, all of them in the Gospel of John. The first comes in **John 11**, when Jesus announces his intention to return to Lazarus in Judea, even though the Jews there had recently tried to stone him.

The apostles were cautioning Jesus against going:

John 11:13–16: *13 Now Jesus had spoken of his [Lazarus'] death, but they thought that he was speaking of literal sleep. 14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him. 16 Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, so that we may die with him.*

Thomas (Aramaic) and **Didymus** (Greek) both mean "twin," so it's thought he was a twin.

Let us also go, so that we may die with him—this is a statement of courage and connection. If Jesus was walking into danger, Thomas wanted to go with him. He did not want to be separated from Jesus!

Next, we hear from Thomas in the upper room the night before Jesus' crucifixion:

John 14:3–6: *3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going. 5 Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going, how do we know the way? 6 Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.*

When Jesus is teaching his disciples, it is rare that anybody comes up to him to say, “Wait, wait, we need to fill in that detail...” Thomas jumps in and says, *How do we know the way?* Jesus doesn’t say, “Shame on you!” He says instead, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* Thomas is reaching out because he didn’t want Jesus to go without him.

This is another statement of courage and connection. Thomas did not want to be separated from Jesus!

These first two examples give us a foundation for understanding who Thomas is.

This brings us to the resurrection appearances of Jesus, and this is where Thomas’ reputation as a doubter is formed. Before we read about this moment, it helps to remember what the disciples had just lived through. They were traumatized, hiding behind locked doors, trying to make sense of the crucifixion. And then, suddenly, Jesus appears to the Ten—alive, standing in front of them, speaking peace over their fear. It is overwhelming, it is unexpected, and it changes everything for them in an instant.

But Thomas wasn’t there, and we’re not told why.

We have the drama of the crucifixion and the bigger drama of the resurrection and appearances, but Thomas wasn’t there. We are going to drop into this account after Jesus appeared to those Ten, where Thomas was not present.

Here is their explanation of what they experienced:

John 20:24–29: *24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, We have seen the Lord! But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

We read these words. On the surface, without any other context, these sound like challenging words of great doubt. *Unless I see exactly what I say, I won’t believe!*

26 After eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, Peace be with you. 27 Then he said to Thomas, Reach here with your finger, and see my hands; and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing. 28 Thomas answered and said to him, My Lord and my God! 29 Jesus said to him, Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.

We see this utterly dramatic turnaround eight days later. We might think Thomas was a terrible doubter but suddenly believed. There is so much more to it than that. Let’s break down these verses and look at this event piece by piece to get an understanding of both where Thomas was in his heart and mind, and what Jesus did about it.

John 20:24: *But Thomas, one of the twelve... was not with them when Jesus came.*

There may be several perspectives on why Thomas was not there. Because we are not told why he was absent, we can choose to speculate.

The question is, are we speculating from a positive or negative perspective? Was he grieving, or did he have something more important to do? We need to be careful when speculating.

John 20:25: *So the other disciples were saying to him, We have seen the Lord!*

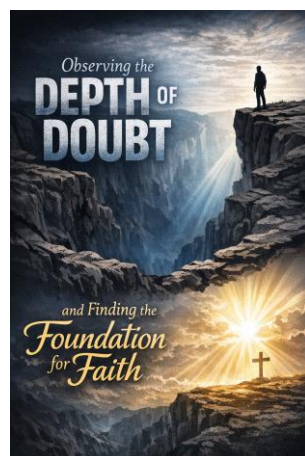
While the Scriptures do not pinpoint when Thomas came to them, it seems likely that it was later that same day after Jesus had appeared to the Ten. Why do we think this? Because the next verse, **John 20:26**, says *eight days later*, which brings us to the following Sunday.

We have seen the Lord! John only records this phrase, but we think it's reasonable to assume they told Thomas the whole story—the locked door, their fear and Jesus calming them with his words and presence.

Luke fills in a few more details:

Luke 24:38–43: *38 And he said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement (this was the kind of momentary disbelief when something is “too good to be true”), he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? 42 They gave him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and he took it and ate it before them.*

Eating the fish proved to them he wasn't some vision or hallucination. He was physically resurrected and standing right in front of them! He is present with them! They likely would have told Thomas about *Peace be to you*, about their commission to be sent out to preach and about Jesus telling them of the comfort of the holy spirit coming to them, and the forgiving of sins. They would have told him everything, so excited and overjoyed to share.



Rather than speculating on the why of Thomas' doubt, it is far more productive to establish the groundwork of who Thomas was and what he may have needed.

When I see someone who is unsure and in doubt, is it easier for me to speculate, or is it easier for me to pause and consider the whole picture?

Which do we naturally seem to go towards?

What *should* we spiritually gravitate towards?

The more we are willing to pause and consider the whole story of Thomas, the more we will be able to see the blessings of his learning.

**Now we are ready to dive into the plainly stated doubt of Thomas.
What will we find when we get there?**

What we will find is a very deep and emotional doubt. As we work at uncovering it, we will need to look under the surface to try and grasp not only why it was there, but what would be needed to handle it. As we go through this exercise, it is imperative that we remind ourselves that Thomas' doubts were revealed to teach us powerful lessons of faith. Are we paying attention?

We're not told why Thomas wasn't with the other Ten, and Scripture never criticizes him for it. Based on what we do know—his courage, his loyalty, his desire never to be separated from Jesus—it's very likely he was simply crushed by grief and withdrew. Some people run toward community when they're hurting; others pull away. Whatever the reason, he missed the moment that turned the others from terrified to joyful.

John 20:25: *So the other disciples were saying to him, We have seen the Lord! But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

And here's where Thomas earns the nickname that has stuck for 2,000 years! Many Bible commentaries keep reinforcing this myth.

(Source: *Eclectic Notes on the Bible*) *Unless I see... I will not believe* Slow of heart to believe, he missed the early taste of the blessing, and abode in the darkness of his own unbelief, whilst the rest were filled with gladness.

"Abode in the darkness of his own unbelief" implies Thomas *chose* darkness.

(Source: *Bible Commentary by J. Vernon McGee*) *Boy, is he a doubter! He has enough evidence to make him a believer, but he is not. But at least now it appears that he will stay with the other disciples.*

"He has enough evidence"—but did he? Thomas only heard traumatized men say something that was unbelievable. We believe commentaries like these are harsh. There has been a long tradition of interpreting Thomas through a lens of failure and not simple humanity.

Two important points:

1. Thomas had just watched the one he loved be brutally killed. People in deep grief often need more reassurance, not less.

2. The assumption is made that he should have just believed the account of the other apostles who had that personal encounter with Jesus. But those others didn't believe a personal account either! The women Jesus first appeared to reported the resurrection, but the disciples don't believe them. Jesus appears, offers the wounds for inspection and even eats fish, and THEN they believe. Thomas wasn't there, so he's simply asking for the same experience.

There is certainly more to, *Unless I see the wounds and touch them, I won't believe.* Regarding Thomas' strong reaction, what might be a more positive way for us to look at it?

Maybe he found it difficult to believe the words of anyone who told him that a person whom he had seen dead and laid in a tomb three days before could possibly be alive, especially if that dead man was Jesus, the only human who could raise the dead.

Before Jesus' crucifixion, he raised Lazarus who had been dead four days. It could be done, but Jesus was the one who did it, and now he's the one who is dead. How could this possibly change? Perhaps this is what Thomas was thinking, and it was piled on top of his grief and sadness at being left leaderless.

When Thomas says, *I will not believe*, the Greek phrase is *ou mē pisteusō*—a conditional expression meaning, "I am not able to believe unless this is shown to me." So, this isn't a defiant declaration. It expresses impossibility *given the current conditions*. It does *not* mean permanent refusal. It means: "Given what I know right now, belief is impossible for me." Really what it is saying is, I need help. Show me.

Next, we find that Jesus is ready and able to rise above Thomas' doubt, grief and frustrated questioning at the appropriate time:

John 20:26: *After eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them.*

This is eight days later, again on Sunday. Again the doors were shut and this time the eleven apostles are all there. This means Thomas has had a whole week to replay the crucifixion, question if the others really saw what they said they did, feeling left out of their joy, probably kicking himself for why he didn't stay with them.

And then Jesus recreates the event. The verse continues with:

Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, Peace be with you.

Again, just like the first time, *Peace be with you* is the introduction. There is nothing better than being given peace by our Lord and Savior, Jesus. This wasn't something that Jesus just made up in his resurrected appearances. Jesus had spoken about peace in the upper room before his crucifixion.

He planted seeds of peace in their hearts and minds before all the tragedy happened:

John 14:27: (KJV) *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

Those were the seeds Jesus was going to draw on now after his resurrection, because they had witnessed the horror of the crucifixion. Jesus planted the “peace” seeds beforehand, knowing their belief would soon be profoundly challenged.

In a precise way, Jesus recreated the initial event of eight days earlier, likely for the benefit of Thomas. He had given the others the hope of his resurrection and would do it now for Thomas. This is an incredible lesson of compassion and faith building. Jesus was not there to crush or to correct; he was there to build faith.

John 20:27: (KJV) *Then saith he to Thomas, 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.*



Here we have the upward steps of faith development:

27 Then saith he to Thomas...



Belief Lesson 1: Jesus first speaks directly to those who have experienced a lack of conviction.

He is talking to Thomas, even though all the rest are in the room. He goes straight to the one with the doubt. This is in direct contrast to his dismissing the fault-finding of the Pharisees. This is encouragement in the face of doubt and compassion in the face of weakness! This is Jesus building and not taking apart.

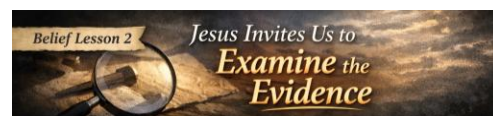
Jesus treats honest doubt different than hard-hearted resistance. Jesus is trying to steady Thomas' faith after trauma. But the Pharisees were different. They weren't struggling to believe—they were refusing to believe. They were trying to trap and undermine Jesus, so he exposed their behavior for what it was and moved on.

Jesus treats Thomas in a compassionate and respectful way. This is a lesson for us: Jesus assures his followers that their personal doubts and confusion are all individually important. Jesus isn't going to directly speak words to us, but his life example and all the Scriptures “speak” what we need to hear to remove our doubts.



John 20:27: (KJV) ...*Reach* <5342> *hither thy finger...*

Reach: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5342 *pherō*; a primary verb; to bear or carry



Belief Lesson 2. Then Jesus invites the doubt to be removed.

The Greek literally means, “Bring your finger here.” It's not Jesus saying, “Fine, if you insist; go ahead and touch me.” It's an invitation. Jesus is drawing Thomas close, meeting him in his grief, and giving him exactly what he asked for without even a hint of shaming him. “Bring what you have—your questions, your need, your grief—and come close.”

“Bring your finger here to my hands.” Jesus doesn’t remove the doubt, but he intentionally welcomes Thomas to take the action of reaching out. These gentle instructions demonstrate compassionate accountability.



As Jesus reminds him of his doubts, he simultaneously presents evidence to dissolve them.

John 20:27: (KJV) ...*Reach hither thy finger, and behold <2396>, (*a form of <1492>) my hands...*

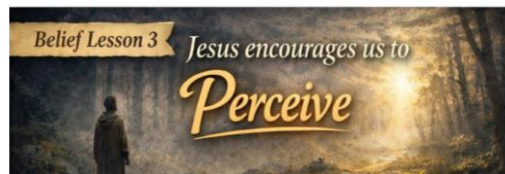
Behold here means to grasp, to understand; not just, “I saw something with my eyes.”

Behold: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #2396 *íde*; second person singular imperative active of #1492; used as an interjection to denote surprise; lo!—behold, lo, see

#1492 *éidō*; a primary verb; used only in certain past tenses, the others being borrowed from the equivalent #3700 and #3708 properly, to see (literally or figuratively); by implication, (in the perfect tense only) to know:—be aware, behold, can (not tell), consider, (have) know(-ledge), look (on), perceive, see, be sure, tell, understand, wish, wot

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon #1492 1) to see 1a) to perceive with the eyes
1b) to perceive by any of the senses 1c) to perceive, notice, discern, discover

*Different study tools sometimes use different Strong’s Concordance numbers for the word *behold* or *see* because the Greek has several verbs that all get translated the same way in English. The tools aren’t disagreeing about the verse—just about which Greek nuance to highlight.



Belief Lesson 3. Jesus then encourages those who doubt to perceive what they are experiencing, so it will stay with them.

It’s not enough to just see it and say, okay, there is a solution. The remedy for doubt is to truly perceive and ingest what we are seeing and experiencing, making it transformational and lasting.

It is one thing to have an experience and another thing for it to take root in you. We think that’s why Jesus waited a full week before addressing Thomas’ doubts. He let Thomas feel the weight of his questions so that when the answer came, it didn’t just pass through him; it transformed him. The delay prepares Thomas to be one of the clearest witnesses to the reality of the resurrection. Thomas isn’t just told the truth—he is standing in the presence of the risen Lord and believes it! He is standing in the presence of the truth, not just hearing it from an intellectual perspective.

This is the same word as eight days earlier when the disciples “saw” Jesus:

John 20:20: *The disciples then rejoiced when they saw <1492>* the Lord.*

*Some Bible resources show this word as Strong's 3708 in this and other verses in this chapter. Greek uses several different verbs for "seeing," but English flattens them into one word, which makes them look interchangeable. Strong's 1492 (*eidō*) comes from an older verb meaning "to see," but in New Testament Greek it means "to know" or "to perceive mentally." By contrast, 3708 (*horaō*) describes truly perceiving or recognizing, and 2334 (*theōreō*) means to observe attentively. Because Strong's groups entire word families under one number—and because English translates all of these as "see"—different study tools sometimes assign different Strong's numbers to the same English word. The Greek verbs themselves aren't interchangeable; it's the English that makes them appear that way.

Eight days later means this was a Sunday to a Sunday. Why didn't this reveal happen on Saturday, the Jewish Law's Sabbath, the day of rest? We think it's because this was starting the new age of Christianity, and Sunday was the first day of a new week. This was a new dispensation for the world. It was now the age of the gospel message. This is why Jesus was raised on a Sunday, appeared to the Ten on a Sunday, and then on the next Sunday, appeared to the Eleven. He is teaching them their new life.

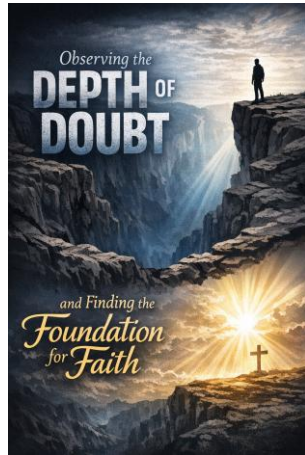
So, Jesus is gently saying, "Bring your finger here to me so you can behold my hands, so you can see with your eyes and feel with your own hand the evidence that you felt you so desperately needed."

When Jesus did appear to Thomas, he offered to have him touch the wounds, though this wasn't necessary to convince him. He never touched Jesus and immediately recognized him by sight as the Lord. In fact, there is no record that any of the disciples needed to actually touch the wounds.

One of the most beautiful parts of this account is how personally Jesus responds to Thomas, reminding us of:

Belief Lesson 1: Jesus first speaks directly to those who have experienced a lack of conviction.

Instead of feeling left out during those eight days, he is now singled out, but in a personal, compassionate way. Jesus doesn't give him a lecture, he doesn't push him away, and he doesn't shame him for struggling. Jesus acknowledges the doubt is real, brings it into the light and dismantles it step-by-step.



Thomas is singled out so that he can be built up. For true believers, Jesus will always provide sufficient evidence for us to be able to let go of our doubts. However, sometimes our hearts are so burdened that we pile doubt upon doubt in our frustration. Thomas seems to have done this eight days previous. The beauty is that this frustration does not lessen Jesus' ability to solve our dilemmas.

The power of doubt is a formidable foe. It is with a great sigh of relief that we can observe and embrace the compassion and wisdom of Jesus to handle it.

**Jesus is now dismantling Thomas' doubt, small step by small step.
How far would he go to rekindle Thomas' faith?**

There is a humble and beautiful lesson unfolding here for every true believer who struggles from time to time with doubt. Jesus is plainly showing all of us that he will give us what we need to not only face our doubts, but also to use them in a way that they will press us into a deeper and more active faith. Our job is to pay attention.

Thomas shows us that doubt isn't the opposite of faith. It can lead to even greater faith. Thomas wasn't rebellious. He had been shattered by violent trauma; everything he thought he knew turned upside down.

This is the beauty of Thomas' story: when we bring our questions, our confusion and even our pain to Jesus, he meets us with compassion. For anyone struggling with doubt, we recommend listening to Episodes #1302 and #1303: "How Can I Doubt My Doubts?"



Let's go back to taking apart verse 27:

John 20:27: (KJV) ... *behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side...*



Belief Lesson 4. Jesus further encourages those who doubt by giving them an even deeper ability to perceive what they are experiencing. Why this step? It shows that the truth and power of Jesus' life is confirmed by overwhelming evidence!

It's not just one piece of evidence; it's many pieces of strong and powerful evidence. *Reach hither thy hand*—not just a finger. "Bring your hand to this wound so you can be overwhelmed with belief!" What a beautiful, compassionate response focused on Thomas.

Remember, Jesus had given the other apostles this same demonstration of his authenticity:

Luke 24:38-40: (KJV) 38 *And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see... 40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.*

Jesus gave them this opportunity. They were all invited to touch with their own hands so they could perceive and therefore believe. Thomas is given exactly what they were given, the same invitation.



What about us? Do we deeply examine the evidence of Jesus and the gospel being absolutely present in our lives? What are we actually perceiving? Where is Jesus offering evidence in my life that I'm only noticing and not truly perceiving?

There's a big difference between knowledge that feels good and truth that actually transforms us because it is in our heart.



John 20:27: (KJV) ... *and be not faithless, but believing.*



Belief Lesson 5. The whole reason to allow our doubts is to teach us deeper faith. Jesus continues the lesson by summing up what is now obvious to those who have doubts: God's will, power and providence are stronger than any human fear or imagination!

Doubt tends to spiral and build more doubt upon doubt, which results in layers of doubt needing to be dismantled.

Thomas, like the other disciples, had fallen into a pattern of doubt. *None* of them believed the reports of the women about Jesus' resurrection. Peter didn't believe even after seeing the empty tomb, though John did. Thomas was simply the last of the eleven to be granted an overwhelming personal demonstration by Jesus that it was really he who was with them again. They needed something personal to guide them. All of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection did exactly that.

This was not a new way for Jesus to teach his followers.

Throughout his entire ministry, Jesus had given his disciples lessons on developing their faith:

Luke 17:5-6: 5 *The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith! 6 And the Lord said, If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would obey you.*

Jesus' analogy: *If you have faith like a mustard seed.* Notice, it's not "faith as *small* as a mustard seed," as some people assume. It is about faith which, like a seed for a mustard plant, will grow to a good size. This is faith with GREAT growth potential!

Jesus had all along allowed his disciples to have doubts. This wasn't the first time they had doubts. He allowed those doubts so they could have opportunities to grow their "mustard-seed faith" to a greater magnitude.

We are reminded of Jesus calming the stormy sea, as recorded in **Matthew 8:23-27**, **Mark 4:36-41** and **Luke 8:22-25**. This was a matter of growing faith. Up to this experience, Jesus had taught and healed as his Father had directed him.

This event, however, would break new ground, as Jesus was about to show them the power of God's spirit in a whole new way:

Matthew 8:24-26: *24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus himself was asleep. 25 And they came to him and woke him, saying, Save us, Lord; we are perishing! 26 He said to them, Why are you afraid, you men of little faith <3640>?*

Little faith: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3640 *oligopistos*; incredulous, i.e. lacking confidence

In the depth of the tumult of the storm, Jesus challenged his disciples regarding their faith. The boat is rocking, the waves are coming over, the wind is howling and Jesus asks, *Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?*

Why is he challenging their faith at this point? They were frightened for their lives, and the only one who could possibly protect them was asleep! They figured they had to be afraid, because Jesus was asleep and unaware of the danger. But he's there...!

Little faith sees the magnitude of the experience and knows but does not yet trust in the solution. That is why he said, *Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?*

Jesus is not ridiculing their doubts; he is using them as a tool to build their faith, and the disciples are following him in this because his guidance is so clear.

Let's get back to this stormy sea and wrap up this piece of our lesson:

Mark 4:39-41: (KJV) *39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

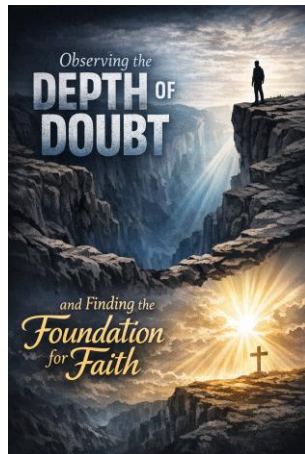
Jesus says, *Peace, be still*, and all the tumult goes away. Remember when Jesus entered the upper room both times after his resurrection? What did he say? *Peace be unto you*. There is a theme running throughout that Jesus brings peace, no matter what the circumstance, no matter what the event.

On this occasion, Jesus calms the storm in an instant. His lesson was clear—in his presence there was nothing to fear, even from the arising of a great storm.

- Before he calmed the storm, his message was to rise above fear.

- After calming the storm, his message regarding their lack of faith was a physical verification that they were in the company of God's chosen one—because nobody else could have done what he did.

This great example of his calming the storm helped prepare them for the tragedies to come later. As we realize the magnitude of any experience, like the disciples, we must learn to also realize the magnitude of the solution, the magnitude of who and what we believe in!



Thomas' doubt wasn't rebellion, cynicism or distrust of Jesus. It was a heart trying to reconcile trauma and grief with hope.

Like Thomas, our doubts can feel overwhelming when they are just sitting there before us. Jesus is teaching us to proactively reach out to the evidence of his presence in our lives and the unfolding of God's plan so those very doubts can be transformed into a growing and healthy faith.

That is what Jesus had taught them all along. The lessons here are nothing short of dramatic. Jesus shows us that our doubts can be opportunities if we reach out in faith!

**Jesus had given Thomas everything he needed to extinguish his doubts.
What would Thomas' reaction be?**

The magnitude of this lesson only gets bigger! Thomas had been given dramatic and irrefutable answers to his doubts and now he was ready to respond. As we shall see, his response was overwhelmingly positive and powerful. We need to pay close attention to this so we can use it as a template for our own responses to God through Jesus resolving our own doubts.



Let's look closer at the verse:

John 20:28: (KJV) *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

What joy! Thomas' response, *My Lord and my God*, is one of the strongest declarations of faith in the entire New Testament. The so-called doubter becomes the apostle who speaks with the greatest clarity.

After all the fear, trauma and confusion of the crucifixion, Thomas finally "sees"—he perceives, he understands—that this is the risen Jesus standing before him, and everything snaps into place. His words are the outpouring of a heart that has been shattered and then rebuilt by overwhelming evidence and overwhelming, individualized grace.

In that moment, Thomas shows us that if we have honest doubt and we bring it to Jesus, it can lead to a deeper and more personal conviction than we ever imagined.

Thomas' response is proof that his doubt was an honest reaction to grief and frustration and not understanding, versus a doubt that was just skeptical and angry.

For us, the lesson is that our doubts are permitted. Why? To teach us deeper faith.



Jesus begins to wrap up this whole lesson:

John 20:29: (KJV) *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast **seen** <3708> me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not **seen** <1492> (or <3708> in some concordances), and yet have believed.*

Seen: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3708 *horao*; properly, to stare at [compare #3700], i.e. (by implication) to discern clearly (physically or mentally); by extension, to attend to; by Hebraism, to experience; passively, to appear

Jesus is adding another dimension. You'd think it would be enough to quell the doubts and have everybody say, "We have been so blessed!" But no! Jesus doesn't stop there; he uses this as a starting point for an even deeper lesson.

The lesson here again is focused on deep and abiding faith that has the potential to grow—mustard-seed faith. Let's go deeper and see where Jesus is going with this.

Remember, the apostles had up to this point lived at the time of Jewish favor under the Jewish Law. They lived in a time when physical evidences showed God's favor. This was a time of "seeing is believing." God's overruling providence and power were unmistakably with the Jewish people.

Jesus was now showing Thomas and the other apostles that their new experiences would be in the context of "not seeing and yet believing."

This is a different way of looking at things and applies directly to us in this day, because we are never going to be in that upper room. We will not have the physical experiences the apostles had.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were not only needed to confirm that he had indeed risen—they were also shaping them for the work they would soon do when he would no longer be physically present.

Jesus is clearly using Thomas' experience to compare these two approaches to faith:

1. Physically seeing something and truly perceiving it, truly grasping what we have seen with our eyes to clearly confirm our faith in what was seen.

John 20:27: (KJV) *Then saith he to Thomas, 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.*

The nation of Israel had been used to this kind of belief for generations. But Jesus was transitioning the apostles to a different level of faith:

2. Being able to grasp, perceive and truly believe in something with which we have no direct, physical experience. It is this level of belief that we all should strive for, because Jesus calls this level of belief *blessed!*

This new way to experience faith would now be the responsibility of the apostles to pass along.

The Apostle Paul presses the issue of having faith in that which is not seen. He mentions this several times to the Hebrew Christians.

Let's just look at a few instances.

Hebrews 3:4-6: *4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.*

We know what a house is; we can visualize it, we can mentally walk through the door. Paul next describes a house that is seen.

5 SEEN: Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;

Everyone understood that Moses was behind the building of the physical Tabernacle, delivering the Law in stone tablets, the physical aspect of sacrifices—it was all seen; it was in front of them. The Israelites knew what was happening because they could see it.

6 UNSEEN: but Christ was faithful as a son over his house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Whose house we are—this is something different, something that is not seen, not physical or tangible. Jesus told his disciples in **John 14:2**, *...I go to prepare a place for you. In my Father's house (you don't know where it is, or what it looks like) there are many rooms (dwelling places).* We are to hold onto the unseen. Thomas is learning that lesson along with the other apostles at this point, because they are recognizing they have to go beyond where they have been; they have to grow.

Jesus said this level of faith in the unseen *blessed*. Moses' house was a *house of servants*. But those of us who follow Christ are referred to as a *house of sons*. We are considered family!



What evidence has Christ given me that I've overlooked, minimized or explained away?

Maybe the evidence is already there:

- in God's providence we call "coincidence,"
- in the strength we didn't know we had,
- in the people placed in our path,

- in the Scriptures that spoke at the perfect moment,
- in the emotional healing that happened so slowly we didn't notice it, such as grief that softened, fears that don't have that same hold on us, a sense of peace that didn't match the circumstances, or
- in something that didn't work out but turned out to be for our protection.



How much doubt has resulted from my not paying attention to the evidence!

One final lesson on having a vital faith in that which you have not physically seen:

Hebrews 12:1-3: *1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,*

What witnesses? The previous chapter was all about the faithful individuals of the Old Testament. They are the witnesses. They witness to the faithfulness of God as they worked through very difficult and trying experiences, and we have them to refer to. We can't see them, but we can read about them and believe even though we do not actually experience their lives alongside them. It is historical evidence.

...let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus,

Fixing our eyes on Jesus... can we actually see him? No, but we are fixing our eyes on the vision of who he is, what he stands for, what he did, how he did it, what he taught and how he served his Father with every breath of his life from beginning to end. So, we fix our eyes on that example, not seeing physically, but seeing in a way that we can grasp it with our intellect and hearts.

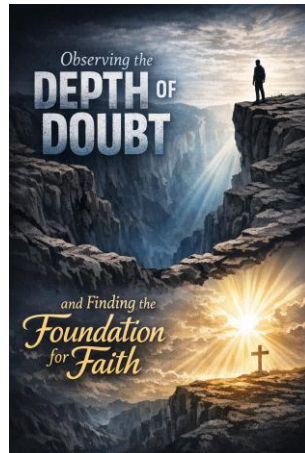
...the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

And so we will not fall into doubt. Consider him who has endured those difficult things, has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. We don't even know what that looks like. We can't even begin to imagine, and yet we believe in this vision even though we cannot actually see it, because we see the evidences of these things. This is the kind of belief Thomas and the other apostles were being told they needed to learn and then teach.

From now on, how about we call him 'Discerning Thomas' or 'Faithful Thomas'!

Faithful Thomas reminds us that Jesus never wastes a doubt. What feels like a setback in our faith can become (if we are humble and reaching) the very place where deeper conviction is born. Thomas walked into that upper room with grief and confusion. He walked out with a faith stronger than ever because he brought those doubts directly to Jesus. His story shows us that honest struggle can press us closer to God, not farther away. If we reach towards the evidence with an honest, humble heart, we will be met with compassion and the personalized strength we individually need to keep believing.

It was an individual lesson taught to Thomas for the benefit of every Christian who has ever lived. Think about the power of that individual lesson and how we can individually apply it.



The lessons we can learn from Faithful Thomas are many. Let us work at standing firm and hopeful in our personal experiences of faith development, recognizing that we are daily undergoing a process of growing into a faith that can move mountains. Let us more and more see with the eyes of faith, touch with the hands of conviction and act with the zeal of God's spirit!

This is what Thomas and the other apostles did. They learned that it's not about physically seeing; it's about the expansion of faith in the unseen things from above. The resulting growth and development is powerful and life-changing. It is what the gospel message is built upon. It is the good news we are to share with others. So, what are we waiting for!? Let's remember Faithful Thomas.

**So, was 'Doubting Thomas' really a doubter?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Episode 1432: After His Resurrection,
What Did Jesus Teach Us About Fishing?



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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Ep. 1397: What Does It Mean to Have Faith as a Mustard Seed?

Establishing the true meaning and power of faith as a mustard seed

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1397-mustard-seed/>

Ep.1302: How Can I Doubt My Doubts? (Part I)

Learning the difference between constructive and destructive doubts

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1302-doubts-part-i/>

Ep.1303: How Can I Doubt My Doubts? (Part II)

Learning to cope with differing kinds of doubt in our Christian walk

<https://christianquestions.com/character/doubts-part-ii/>

(Video) Podcast Highlight: Why did the apostles doubt the women's report of Jesus being risen? <https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-podcast-highlights/apostles-doubt-the-womens-report/>



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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1431: Was 'Doubting Thomas' Really a Doubter?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1431-doubting-thomas/>

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

1. What do we learn of Thomas' character in John 11:13-16, 14:3-6? Does John 20:24-29, where Thomas doubts the apostles' accounts of seeing a resurrected Jesus, indicate a different character? How did Jesus handle Thomas' doubts? (Luke 24:38-42)
2. How can we look at Thomas' doubting (and the doubting of others, including ourselves) more charitably? Was he the only one who initially did not believe in Jesus' resurrection?
3. How did Jesus help Thomas and all the apostles with their grief, doubts and future worries? (John 14:26-27)
4. Describe each of the Belief Lessons below and answer the additional question on each. (John 20:27).
 - a. Belief Lesson 1: Has Jesus spoken to you through the Scriptures when you needed help?
 - b. Belief Lesson 2: What does "behold" here mean? Why is that relevant?
 - c. Belief Lesson 3: Why might it be significant that these appearances are on Sundays?
 - d. Belief Lesson 4: Do I actually *perceive* Jesus' presence in my life?
 - e. Belief Lesson 5: What is the purpose of allowing us to have doubts?
5. What previous lessons had Jesus taught his disciples to develop their faith? (Luke 17:5-6, Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:36-41, Luke 8:22-25)
6. Compare the two approaches to faith:
 - a. John 20:27 and the faith of the Israelites in Hebrews 3:4,5
 - b. Hebrews 3:6 and the faith of the apostles after Pentecost
7. How much doubt has resulted in your life because you overlooked, minimized or explained away the evidence Christ has given you of his presence in your life? Consider some of the issues we listed in the Show Notes.
8. How do we fix our eyes on Jesus? (Hebrews 12:1-3)