

## **Introduction**

Why do you doubt?

We all doubt, but have you ever wondered why?

It seems as if doubt is something that exists in all of our lives. It seems like it is just a part of human nature. Particularly in our society today, it is tempting to doubt *everything*.

Since doubt is such a pervasive part of our lives, it very easily weasels its way into every facet of lives, including our relationship with God. Doubt is destructive to relationships in general, but especially in your relationship with God. Before you know it, you can begin to doubt that God really loves you, that he really cares about you, that he wants what is best for you. You might even begin to question whether he is there at all! And, if you don't have a relationship with God, doubt might be one of the biggest roadblocks in you coming to know Jesus.

A week ago, we celebrated Easter, the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, when his victory over sin and death was finally realized, and our freedom from sin and death was secured. It is always a wonderful time of celebration and worship in the church, and has been for centuries.

However, there's something interesting that happens a week after Jesus' resurrection, in the story of Scripture. A week after he walks out of the grave victorious, trampling sin and death in his wake, we get one of the most famous stories of doubt recorded in the Bible, found in John chapter 20.

This is a famous story which you are probably already familiar with. It is the story of Thomas, doubting Thomas, as we call him, one of the disciples who has not yet seen Jesus alive. He has appeared to the other disciples, but not yet to Thomas. And Thomas is not quite ready to believe.

## **John 20:24-21**

**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.

### **I. Thomas' Doubt (24-25)**

#### **A. Get to Know Thomas**

1. Specifies that Thomas was “one of the 12”
2. “the Twin”
  - a) Probably not an actual twin - it would be weird to name your son “twin”
3. The small amount of evidence seems to paint a picture of a pragmatic realist, perhaps someone who does not have time for speculation and deliberation
  - a) Jesus is going to see Mary and Martha after Lazarus' death, even though that area was currently very dangerous for Jesus.

**(1) John 11:16 - “So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us go also, that we may die with him.’”**

b) Jesus is talking about the place he is preparing for his followers, and that they will be joined with him and the Father eternally.

c) **John 14:5 - “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”**

B. “Doubting Thomas”

1. Thomas is probably most famous for being called “doubting Thomas,” based on this story.

a) Probably not fair.

2. Thomas is not the only one who doubted the resurrection of Jesus! All the disciples did at some point.

a) Mark 16:9-14

(1) **9** Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. **10** She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. **11** But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. **12** After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. **13** And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. **14** Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

(2) This story is repeated in Luke 24:10-11

b) Even in Matthew 28:16-17, where Jesus is about to give them the Great Commission:

(1) **16** Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

3. Also, at this point in the story, the other disciples had already seen Jesus!

a) John 20:19-20

(1) **19** On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

**20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

- b) The other disciples had seen Jesus, seen his hands and his side, so they already knew!
  - c) Thomas is just asking for what the other disciples have already received.
4. **BASED ON ALL THIS** - There is no evidence to suggest that somehow Thomas was "more" doubtful than the rest of the disciples, or that he possessed some kind of special disbelief. He is in the same boat as the rest of them.
- a) We have to ask ourselves then, why is Thomas singled out? - return to this later.

C. Regardless, at this point Thomas is the only one of the disciples who hasn't seen Jesus

- 1. "kept telling him" - this was an ongoing conversation with Thomas
  - a) Have you ever insisted that you were telling the truth and they just don't believe you? - very frustrating.

## II. Jesus' Response to Thomas (26-29)

A. The Setting

- 1. "Eight days later"
  - a) The way this is written is a bit confusing - but most scholars believe that this is Sunday, a week after the Resurrection
- 2. The disciples (Thomas is with them this time), are locked inside this house again
  - a) They are still afraid of the Jews
  - b) Interesting because the first time Jesus came to them a week ago he breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit, and sent them out to continue his mission on earth (20:21-22)

- c) There seems to still be some roadblock keeping the disciples from moving forward in the mission Jesus has given them.

#### B. Jesus' Appearance

1. Jesus appears again, exactly the same way he did before, disregarding the locked door and saying "peace be with you."
2. As soon as he does this, he turns and focuses his attention on Thomas - imagine how he feels
3. Jesus tells Thomas to touch his hands and side, just as Thomas had said he wanted to
  - a) Thomas hear his own words in the words of Jesus
  - b) We don't know that Thomas actually touches Jesus - it doesn't seem like he needs to. Seeing him is enough.

#### C. Jesus' Command

1. Jesus has appeared and offered up his hands and side for a specific purpose - he wants Thomas to believe
2. However, it is interesting that Jesus saying "stop doubting and believe" sounds like a command not based on feeling.
  - a) There is a switch from unbelieving to believing which may be more intentional that we are comfortable with.
  - b) Jesus says "look, touch if you want to, but the most important thing is that you would believe."

#### D. Thomas' Confession

1. "My Lord and my God!"
2. Thomas becomes a Christian
  - a) D.A. Carson - "...Thomas' words are a *personal* declaration of faith. Thomas thereby not only displays his faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but points to its deepest meaning; it is nothing less than the revelation of who Jesus Christ is. The most unyielding skeptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession."
3. Thomas' confession is significant - equating Jesus w/God

- a) Of all the post-resurrection confessions, Thomas is the one who seems to “get it” the most - the resurrection clearly is evidence of Jesus’ divinity and authority over life and death.
- 4. It might be easy for us to say “of course Thomas believed, Jesus gave him just what he asked for! That isn’t fair!” However, it is very interesting what Jesus says next.
- E. “Have you believed because you have seen me?”
  - 1. Not necessarily a rebuke of Thomas
    - a) A statement of fact. Every other disciple had believed for the same reason. Thomas is not special.
- F. **BUT** - “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”
  - 1. Why Thomas is singled out - Thomas is used to emphasize that now there is coming a time when people will not longer be able to see Jesus face-to-face, and they will rely on the Holy Spirit, the testimony of others, and ultimately the Word of God.
  - 2. Thomas did not *have* to see in order to believe - and neither do those who come after Thomas - including you.

### III. The Cure for Thomas’ Doubt (30-31)

- A. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”
  - 1. Jesus has just said this.
  - 2. Now John says that Jesus did many other things that 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.**” (v. 31)
  - 3. In other words, since Jesus has said that those that have not seen and yet believed are blessed, John has written this book - that you and I might believe and be blessed - accepted by God.
- B. John has written this book and recorded this intentional sampling of what Jesus said and did in order that you and I might come to faith in Christ and also persevere in faith in Christ.

1. J. Ramsey Michaels - “He has rolled away the stone, made himself known to Mary in the garden, appeared suddenly within a locked room (twice), showed the disciples his hands and side, breathed on them proving that he is alive, and invited them to touch him. What more is needed? This, the writer insists, is only a sampling of all that Jesus actually did, yet it is—or should be—more than enough to engender faith among those who have not seen any of it, but who now read what is ‘written in this book.’”

## **Application**

### **I. Your Doubt**

- A. Thomas and the disciples doubted - you doubt.
- B. Doubt is natural because of our fallen humanity - we all doubt, some more than others.
  1. Human beings were not created to doubt - doubt comes because of sin
  2. Gen. 3 - doubt is first introduced to Adam and Eve
    - a) Adam and Eve had no concept of doubt in God before it was introduced to them
    - b) Because of that first sin - now you and I are almost hardwired to doubt everything
  3. Often doubt is rooted in hurt - someone or something at one time hurt you, and so now you doubt
    - a) Relationships are a great example of this - how easy is it to doubt that someone could ever love you or care for you after you have been hurt so badly?
    - b) Maybe you think God is the one who hurt you - so you doubt that God really cares.
  4. Regardless, we have to start to see doubt for what it is - rooted in sin. There would be no doubt without sin. You would have no reason to doubt God, and no reason to doubt others, because they would have never hurt you in the first place, causing you to doubt! Doubt does not exist without sin.

### **C. Two kinds of doubt:**

1. Doubt about whether any of this God and Jesus stuff is even real.
  - a) Maybe you have just been checking out this whole church, God, Jesus thing but you just aren't convinced.
  - b) Maybe you wouldn't call yourself an atheist but you just don't really know if you believe all this stuff.
  - c) Maybe you really want it to be true but it seems too good to be true.
    - (1) Could there be a God?
    - (2) Could he really love me enough to die for me?
    - (3) Does he really want to have a relationship with me?
    - (4) Could there really be a thing such as sin anyway?
2. Doubt about whether Jesus is who he says he is - perhaps more common in church.
  - a) You're a Christian. You read your Bible. You pray. You go to church. You know all the right things to say and think, and on the outside you might look like a great Christian.
    - (1) But inside - you harbor significant doubt that Jesus is actually who he says he is, as evidenced by how you act and react
  - b) In other words, although you might say you're a Christian, you're actually just a functional atheist.
    - (1) When the rubber meets the road, you choose to live like God doesn't exist.
    - (2) You try to control your life.
    - (3) You don't think that God actually loves you and cares about you.
    - (4) You don't think that God actually cares about sin and it breaks his heart.
    - (5) You're overwhelmed with doubt, anxiety, and fear and you feel alone because you think God either just doesn't know or doesn't care.
    - (6) You are happy to pay lip service to idea of God being sovereign but you are more than happy to jump back in the driver's seat as soon as you have an opportunity - because you doubt.



## II. Jesus' Response to You

- A. Jesus came to Thomas the disciples in the midst of their doubt - and he comes to you in the midst of yours
- B. The church can be very uncomfortable with doubt
  - 1. Sometimes this can kind of feel like a club where we kick you out at the first sign of anything like doubt.
  - 2. Perhaps you've had bad experiences with churches when you ask good-faith questions and have gotten shut down.
  - 3. It doesn't feel like anyone is okay with any doubt whatsoever - whether it is doubt in whether God really is good, and caring, and loving, or even if this whole God thing is real anyway.
  - 4. Some of you have experienced deep hurt, or perhaps are currently experiencing deep hurt, that has shaken your faith to its very core. Jesus wants to meet you at that place of hurt - and the the church of all places should be the safest place to ask those questions as we grow in faith together.
- C. Jesus came to Thomas and the disciples in the midst of their doubt and showed them his side, and his hands, the proof that he had died and been resurrected.
  - 1. In this we can sometimes miss a dramatically important point: **Jesus WANTS you to believe in him!**
    - a) This is good news! Jesus is not far off from you. He comes to you. He *wants* to have a relationship with you.
    - b) You do not have to climb your way up to Jesus, he has come to you, evidenced by his life and his death.
      - (1) The consistent story of the Bible is God reaching out to mankind, seeking relationship, seeking to save them.

## III. The Cure for Your Doubt

- A. Let's start here: wherever you are with doubt, what do you think would cure it?
  - 1. Have you ever honestly asked yourself that question?
  - 2. What would "fix" it?

3. Seeing Jesus - seeing him face to face - then I'd believe!
    - a) Well, some of the disciples didn't, and they saw the whole thing.
    - b) Many of the people who executed Jesus knew exactly who he was - and they killed him anyway.
    - c) "well okay but If Jesus was just here with me now it'd be better"
      - (1) Actually, it is better that Jesus isn't here with you. We know that because Jesus said it: **John 16:7-11: "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."**
      - (2) Jesus says it is better that he has gone and has sent the Holy Spirit to us to draw us into relationship with God and show us how live in relationship with God.
  4. Maybe you want to see some kind of miracle - something happen that would fix your doubt once and for all.
    - a) But would it? Be honest - would it really? Or would it just hold you over until something else came up that caused you to doubt again?
    - b) That is a band-aid solution.
    - c) Many of the people who turned on Jesus saw miracles and saw him do incredible things - but they still did not believe.
- B. We have believed a lie regarding spiritual doubt - that in order for us not to doubt we need some kind of extravagant, maybe even magical encounter with God that sweeps us off our feet and causes us to never doubt again.
1. And maybe sometimes that happens - it may have happened or might happen for some of you.

2. But it is not normative and it is not a sustainable way to combat doubt in your spiritual life.

C. So what *is* the cure for doubt?

1. It's not complicated: **BELIEF**.
2. This is what Jesus shows as the cure, the true cure, for Thomas' doubt.
  - a) It isn't the fact that he saw Jesus, or could have touched Jesus - it's belief! Jesus says "stop doubting and believe." It is a command.
3. Furthermore, Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who have not seen him, and yet believe. That's you and me! Jesus knew that obviously there would be many more who did *not* see him than those that saw him, but the command remains the same - believe!

D. Belief in what?

1. Here's the other thing - you are not asked to believe in some kind of abstract idea, or try to guess what it is you are supposed to believe, we've been given the handbook, the manual on what to believe!
  - a) John says in verse 31, "I have written this **so that you may believe** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."
2. So in a very real way - you can see Jesus! This book is not just words on a page, it is a revelation of God himself, given to you. It is living, alive, powerful and mighty. It was written so that you might come to faith in Christ - that you might believe.

E. What else do you want?

1. This means that we have everything we need for salvation and abundant life in Christ - there is nothing else.
  - a) John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. **11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
  - b) 2 Peter 1:3 "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious

and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

2. The testimony of Scripture, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is sufficient for you both to come to faith and continue in faith. You don't need anything else - because there is nothing else.

**a) Any significant spiritual experience you may have, any miracle you may observe, is only legitimate in that it points you back to belief in the truth of God's Word - to *belief* in Jesus the Son of God.**

## **Conclusion**

When you're struggling with doubt, one of the last things you want to hear is “stop doubting, just believe.” It seems callous, out of touch, and dismissive. And, at times, that's exactly how it's meant. There are people who will say something like that in order to dismiss you, to get you in line, to silence you.

But that is not how Jesus means it when he gives Thomas the command to “stop doubting, and believe.” Jesus does not just command Thomas to stop doubting and believe - he *reveals* himself to Thomas. He says, “look, touch my hands and my side, and stop doubting and believe.”

You might say, that isn't fair. Thomas got to see Jesus, so of *course* he believed. Yes, you won't see Jesus in the flesh until he returns or you are called home to be with him. **But you don't need to!** That is why Jesus says that you are blessed, you who have not seen him in the flesh and yet believe in him. Jesus is saying that you can be free from doubt and have a relationship with God without seeing him in bodily form.

Because - and here is the good part - Jesus has revealed himself to you, not in the exact same way he revealed himself to Thomas, but he *has* revealed himself to you! We call that revelation - the Bible.

These are not just words on a page. This is not just some other book. This is not a description of God or a description of a bunch of things that God likes or doesn't like. This book is God revealing himself to you, and to me. The story contained in this book reveal God's character as he works among humanity - culminating in what we have just celebrated - Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

This is why in John 20:31 we can read - "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name." The Gospel of John, and beyond that the Bible itself - is God revealing himself to you so that you might know him and have a relationship with him.

Whether your relationship with God is riddled with doubt, or doubt is keeping you from having a relationship with God at all: God has revealed himself to you. He is not far off from you. He is not at arms length from you he has come to you in the midst of your doubt and he wants you to believe in him, and through that belief to have life.

One of the most famous statements in Scripture regarding belief is found in Mark 9:24. In this story, there is a father that is begging Jesus to heal his son who is possessed by a demon. Jesus critiques the father's lack of belief and in response the father says "I believe, help my unbelief." Often this is interpreted in a way that holds belief and unbelief in balance with each other - like you believe but also you kind of don't believe.

But that is not how this is meant. What the father in this story is saying is, "I believe, help me believe even more." And maybe that is your prayer today, if you are a Christian struggling with doubt. I believe, help me believe even more. You may say "okay well I just don't really *feel* like I believe all the way." But belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is kind of a yes or no answer. I'm not asking if you have some doubts - you probably do. But ultimately, declaring belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is something that happens apart from how you "feel" in a particular moment. You believe, then move forward in your belief for the rest of your life.

If you are not a Christian and you are struggling with doubt - it's all right here. This is the revelation of God to you. This is how to be saved. This is everything you need to know to begin and grow in your relationship with God. Let the Holy Spirit today use this revelation to draw you into relationship with this God that loves you so very much.

**Practical step: read the Gospel of John. Pause and ask yourself - what if this all really happened? If you are a Christian: remind yourself, this really happened.**

The call of Jesus is not one that is harsh, callous, or dismissive of your fears and doubts. It is instead the gentle call of someone who loves you deeply, and wants you to finally come home. Stop doubting, and believe.