

John 20:24-29 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."

John 20:24-29 | Easter Sunday

C.S. Lewis gave us all the wonderful children's series The Chronicles of Narnia. But most of his career was as an academic at Oxford. He had a well crafted academic atheism in line with the modernist thinking of his time, but his walls were torn down, and he found himself a Christian. It's a wonderful story that he recounts in his autobiographical book Surprised by Joy. Lewis recounts this critical moment in his journey.

Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. 'Rum thing,' he went on. 'All that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it had really happened once.'

Two things, first, the phrase "rum thing," instead of strange thing, is cool and we should bring that back. Second, this simple off the cuff thought from a trusted atheist really shook Lewis's world. It is a simple thought. That Jesus thing, it looks like it happened.

Lewis was shook. You know the story of Christianity. Jesus was God, he went to the cross and died, he rose from the dead three days later and ascended to be king of all everything. In his death our sins are atoned for and we are made right with God by faith in him. Lewis was familiar with the story, but he was only familiar with it at the level of myth. He was a Philologist, studying ancient languages and therefore well acquainted with the category of myth, and how it differed from history.

But it is the matter of fact statement of a trusted skeptic, "It looks as if it really happened" that causes this myth of Christ to jump off of the page and into Lewis's very life. If only we all had such a friend, well the Bible gives us one. Thomas is just doubter enough to be convinced of the fact of the resurrection. When the resurrection becomes a matter of fact we see the implications of Christ leap off the page and into our lives.

Let's look at the story of the skeptic, the evidence, the response.

1. The Skeptic

John 20:24-29 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

Our skeptical friend is named Thomas, and on the Sunday when Jesus resurrected from the dead and visited his disciples, Thomas wasn't there. Maybe out getting more ice, or talking with some other friends not associated with Jesus, or back with family. Who knows, but he wasn't in the room. When he gets back together with the rest of Jesus's followers they tell him that they had seen Jesus. And well he responds in skepticism.

John 20:25 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."

You can feel in the specificity of Thomas's response the matter of fact of what he had seen take place on the cross. You can tell that Thomas might have felt that they were playing lightly or making overly spiritual something that 3 days prior was undeniably real. He sets the stakes for his own belief as Jesus's resurrected body being just as real as the one he saw crucified. The wager for belief is to see and touch the wounds by which he saw his friend perish. His intensity is undeniable, as he states that unless his conditions are met, he will never believe.

2. The Evidence

John 20:26 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."

It is the next Sunday. This time all of the disciples are together again behind locked doors and Thomas is with them. Now here is the first strange experience for Thomas. The doors are locked but Jesus came and stood among them, greeting them with his peace.

This is the way that Jesus had appeared the first time to the disciples. He seemed uncontainable by physical constraints. Likewise in the description of the grave clothes earlier in John it seems as though Jesus passed right through them. This is a different type of resurrection then that of Lazarus who came out of the grave needing to be unwrapped from the burial cloth.

Jesus understands Thomas's skeptical heart, and while Thomas is still a skeptic Jesus extends his peace to him. And in his peace, Jesus calls him closer.

John 20:27 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."

After Jesus appears through the walls, he answers the question that he'd never seen Thomas ask. He draws him in precisely the same language to touch and see his very wounds, as he invites Thomas to believe. What does touching mean when Jesus has a body that passes through walls? What does seeing mean when he appears in your midst? Beyond seeing and touching, what does it mean to hear from Jesus as he

answers questions you never got to ask him? Speaking as though he we're always present with you?

Thomas asked for Jesus to prove that he was like us, instead Jesus proves to him that he is like God. You see the skeptics questions weren't answered, they were transformed.

We do this all the time where we set our own human conditions for belief. We'll say, I couldn't believe in a God who sends people to hell, so show me he doesn't do that. I couldn't believe in a God who condemns homosexuality, so show me he doesn't do that. I couldn't believe in a God who allows a church full of such wicked people. I couldn't believe in a God who would allow my mom or dad or child to die or spouse to leave. Well Thomas couldn't believe in Jesus unless he touched him. But look what happened.

It is not that Thomas set the conditions and Christ met them, it is that Christ in his revelation of himself transcends Thomas's conditions. It's as if Jesus is saying, you think something petty like touching me is impressive, what if I appear having read your mind. What if I invite in the doubter. Thomas doesn't reach out to touch, instead he worships. And this is the response to resurrection.

3. The Response

John 20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

This is the first declaration by somebody else of Jesus as God. Thomas's response to Jesus is worship. It is personal, 'My.' It is submissive, 'Lord.' It is transcendent, 'God.' He wanted to be shown that Jesus was like him, instead he met his Lord and God. Leslie Newbigin says this,

"The resurrection cannot be part of any history unless it is the center and turning point."

This is the stakes of discovering the resurrection as a fact of the world. To discover that this actually happened once is to discover the center and turning point of history and therefore of your life. To see Jesus is not just to see Lord and God, but My Lord and My God.

But you haven't seen him. So what do you do. Well Jesus speaks directly to you.

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Why didn't Jesus just wait until Thomas was back on that Sunday of his resurrection? Was it because he didn't know he'd miss Thomas? Don't you see. It was for you. Recorded in his word in scripture we might be given a friend, a skeptical friend, who we might see transformed and think, maybe I could be transformed too. Come to this Jesus, who speaks peace to you while you doubt him. Who reveals himself as God welcoming you in, even while you hold up your litmus test.

Rum thing, the God we betrayed died in our place. Rum thing, he lives and by faith we can live in him.