

SEEING AND BELIEVING John 20:24-29

THOMAS is one of the well-known disciples of Jesus, even though very little is known about him. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each mention him only once, listing him as one of the twelve disciples. Everything we know about Thomas is found in the Gospel of John, which focuses the spotlight on him on three occasions. Two of these occasions are unfamiliar to many, even though they are famous events in the ministry of Jesus. For the most part, Thomas' notoriety is connected to his encounter with Jesus in our text. As a result of this episode, Thomas has been labeled with the epithet, "DOUBTING THOMAS." And to this day, Thomas is the unwitting poster-boy for doubt, skepticism, and unbelief.

In spite of this unshakable reputation, Thomas was a true believer. Like the other disciples, Thomas forsook everything to follow Jesus. He was willing to live and die for Jesus. In John 11, when Jesus decided to go to Bethany to help his dying friend Lazarus, the disciples reminded him that the residents tried to kill him the last time he was there. Yet Jesus was determined to go back. John 11:16 says: "So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'" This statement is pessimistic, maybe even sarcastic. But all the disciples thought it was suicidal to return to Bethany. Yet Thomas demonstrated personal courage and spiritual devotion in bidding the disciples to follow Jesus to Bethany, even if it meant a certain death. Thomas was a believer. But he was not gullible. During the LAST SUPPER, Jesus announced he was going away. One of them would betray him. And Peter would deny him three times before the roosters crowed the next morning. But Jesus did not want their hearts to be troubled by this news. He was going away to prepare a place for them in the Father's house. He would come back to get them one day. And they already knew the way there. John 14:5 says: "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'"

This statement and question reveal Thomas to be a man of faith and reason. His was not a blind faith. It was faith seeking understanding. This is evidenced by the fact that Thomas was apparently content with Jesus' astonishing answer to his question in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Thomas believed in Jesus. But our text finds Thomas at a point where his faith was attacked by his doubts. The civil war within Thomas helps us as we struggle with this question of faith in our own lives: How can I believe when I have all these doubts? WILLIAM BARCLAY called Thomas "the man who became certain by doubting." His story teaches us that a dose of doubt may be good for your faith. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith that keeps it awake and alert. So do not let your doubts stop you from trusting Jesus. Trust Jesus with your doubts. Jesus welcomes your doubts and will answer them with evidence that demands a verdict. That is what happened when doubting Thomas met the risen Savior. This encounter shows us what it means to trust Jesus with your doubts.

I. FAITH IN THE RISEN SAVIOR IS A CHOICE.

This passage begins with an attendance report of the first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples. Verse 24 says: "Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called

the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.” John does not tell us why Thomas was absent. And we must be careful not to jump to any dogmatic conclusions. Whatever the reason, Thomas missed out on a great blessing. Verses 19-23 read: “One 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.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” Thomas missed out on all of this. And his absence warns us that the weeds of doubt grow fast and strong in the soil of isolation. Faith is cultivated through fellowship with Christ and other Christians. So don’t miss the meeting. Feed your faith and starve your doubts by being marked present when the believing community meets together.

Verse 25 says: “So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’” In the Greek, this statement is in a grammatical emphasis that means, “They kept telling him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’” They repeatedly and emphatically reported that they had seen the risen Savior. The disciples should be commended for this. They did not hold Thomas’s absence against him and made it their business to share the good news with him that Jesus was alive. We who are believers ought to follow their example and share the good news with every unbelieving man, woman, boy, and girl that Jesus lives today! But note that even though they passionately shared the good news, they could not make Thomas believe. Verse 25 says: “But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Thomas’ response to the disciple’s report teaches us that faith in the risen Savior is a choice.

FAITH IS A PERSONAL DECISION. There is no record that Thomas witnessed the crucifixion or that he saw the dead body of Jesus. But he was aware of the fact and nature of the tortuous execution Jesus suffered. Consequently, he refused to rest his faith on the experience of others, even if it was the credible witness of his close friends. I believe this is commendable. He knew that faith in the risen Savior is a personal decision. There is no such thing as a “faith transplant” in which another believer’s faith can be transferred to you. Your family and friends’ faith can’t save you. You must trust the risen Savior for yourself. In John 3:7, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” This is the word of the Lord to you today: You must be born again!

FAITH IS A DIFFICULT DECISION. We call Thomas a doubter. But the composite picture of Thomas we get from John’s Gospel is of one who truly believed in Jesus. Yet this believer doubted the resurrection. That does not make him unique. All the disciples initially doubted the news of the resurrection. Luke 24:11 says that when the women told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, it “seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” All the disciples initially doubted Jesus was alive. It was just too good to be true, until Jesus appeared to them. Thomas was not present, which is why he doubted. More than doubting, Thomas was disappointed. He had left everything to follow Jesus. But

the crucifixion had dashed his hopes and shattered his dreams. He was so crushed by disappointment that he could get his hopes up just to be hurt again. In this sense Thomas' story may be a word of encouragement for you today. You may find it hard to believe because you have been disappointment by life. Maybe your parents let you down or your family forsook you or your friends betrayed you. Maybe the church has hurt you. Or maybe you feel that God himself has let you down. Thomas told me to tell you, "I know how you feel. But as hard as it may be, trust Jesus with your doubts. Matthew 12:20 says, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench." Jesus is a friend to the disappointed.

FAITH IS A MORAL DECISION. In Verse 25, Thomas says, "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." Notice that Thomas did not say that he did not or could not believe. He says, "I will never believe." It is emphatic in the original: "I will absolutely, positively, never believe." It was a decision of the will. He made a moral choice not to believe. It is a moral choice in that it is a choice with consequences. It is like boarding an airplane. You cannot stand on the ramp all day with one foot on the plane and one foot on the ramp. At some point, the door will be closed, the plane will take off, and either you are on or you are off. This is why you ought to trust Jesus with your doubts today. Hebrews 9:27 says: "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." Every one of us has an appointment with date that we cannot cancel. You will stand before God in the judgment. While you have the opportunity, you should run to the cross and trust the risen Savior. **JOEL GREGORY** writes: "Many blame Christians for being emotional. Nothing is more emotional than unbelief. Who would dare desire to thrust a hand into the side of a crucified friend?" Unbelief doesn't make sense. The only wise thing to do is to trust Jesus with your doubts. Proverbs 3:5-6 say: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

II. FAITH IN THE RISEN SAVIOR IS A GIFT.

Thomas is to be commended for the fact that he did not have blind faith. But the manner in which his faith sought understanding is not commendable. Thomas demanded visual evidence and a physical examination before he would believe that Jesus was alive. He stubbornly declared that he would not believe unless his terms were met. It is foolish, arrogant, and dangerous to put the Lord to the test like this. But here is the tension of the text. Jesus condescended to submit to the examination Thomas demanded. This gracious condescension provided the evidence that Jesus is Lord and God. The lesson here is that faith in the risen Savior is more than just a personal choice. It is a divine gift.

A. FAITH IS A GIFT THAT IS EXTENDED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Verses 26-27 tell us two things about the love of Christ.

JESUS LOVES YOU ENOUGH TO MEET YOU RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE. Verse 26 says, “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.’” On the next Lord’s Day, Jesus again appeared to the disciples – at the same place, in the same way, with the same greeting. But this time Jesus appeared specifically and especially for the benefit of Thomas. Jesus could have let Thomas languish in his doubts. At this point, the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were established well enough that the witness of the disciples was more than sufficient for Thomas to believe. But Jesus loved Thomas so much that he met him in his doubts. And the loving disposition of Jesus toward those who struggle with doubts has not changed. In spite of your sin, pride, and doubts, Jesus loves you enough to meet you right where you are. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.”

JESUS LOVES YOU TOO MUCH TO LET YOU STAY THERE. Verse 27 says, “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.’” Jesus accepted Thomas’ doubt-filled demand for personal examination, challenging him to look him over and touch his wounds to see for himself that he had truly risen from the dead. Moreover, he issued a command: “Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Literally, Jesus said, “Thomas, “Stop becoming an unbeliever and become a believer.” This command demolishes the myth of spiritual neutrality. The uncertainty of agnosticism is not a legitimate category of faith. There is no park or neutral, only drive or reverse. Either you believe or you do not believe in Jesus. If your heart is not growing strong in faith it is inevitably growing hard in doubt that will lead you to the unending and unnecessary torment of a Christless eternity in hell. Jesus says, “Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

In Acts 17:30-31, Paul says: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” You ought to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus, not just because he is the Savior who died on the cross; he is also the Lord and God who rose from the dead. And you will have to answer to this risen Savior for how you lived your life. Mark it down: The resurrection of Jesus is the epicenter of the Christian faith. Everything else depends on this historical event. JOHN IRVING said it well: “Anyone can be sentimental about the Nativity; any fool can feel like a Christian at Christmas. But Easter is the main event; if you don’t believe in the resurrection; you’re not a believer.” But if you believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again from the dead, you have the gift of forgiveness, the hope of eternal life, and the joy of following Christ from earth to glory. Romans 10:8-10 says: “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 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.”

B. FAITH IS A GIFT THAT IS EMBRACED BY THE WORSHIP OF CHRIST.

There is no record that Thomas accepted Jesus' invitation to touch him. But he did obey Jesus' command to believe. Verse 28 says: "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" This great confession declares two essential attributes of Jesus.

JESUS IS LORD. To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that Jesus has sovereign authority, total control, and unlimited jurisdiction over all creation. Jesus is in charge of everything, everywhere, and everyone. C.S. LEWIS was right when he wrote that there are only three ways to view Christ: Either he is a liar, a lunatic, or he is the Lord of all. The resurrection of Jesus narrows those three options down to one. The fact that Jesus died on the cross and then rose from the dead is the ultimate proof that Jesus is Lord. Philippians 2:9-11 says: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

JESUS IS GOD. Thomas was the last of the eleven disciples to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But he was the first person ever to call Jesus GOD. Judaism is unapologetically monotheistic, refusing to acknowledge that any other God exists besides Yahweh. And it was blasphemous for a Jew to entertain the suggestion that any human could be compared to Jehovah-God. But Thomas boldly declared Jesus to be God. To have the power over life and death is to be omnipotent, which is not a human characteristic. It is a divine attribute. As far as humans are concerned, when you die, you stay dead. Only God has the power to suspend death. So if Jesus really did come back to life after his crucifixion, it confirms that Jesus is God. Only God can die on a cross and live to tell about it. Romans 1:4 says that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." So-called doubting Thomas gave the clearest, simplest, and greatest confession of the deity of Christ recorded in scripture: "My Lord and my God." And that he did not just acknowledge Jesus to be Lord and God. This was not a doctrinal statement; it was a personal testimony: "My Lord and my God."

Thomas was convinced that Jesus had truly risen from the dead. But what moved him from doubt-filled demands to faith-filled worship? Some argue that Thomas was convinced by the fact that Jesus knew about the demands he issued, even though he was not physically present to hear them. I am sure this demonstration of the omniscience moved, shocked, and impressed Thomas. But this is not what convinced Thomas. Thomas was convinced by the marks of the cross. He did not need to touch the wounds. He saw them and believed. JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE says it well: What finally got through to him was the presence of Christ, identified by the wounds in his hands, feet, and side. It was the Christ of the cross who reached Thomas. This the same way Jesus reaches the doubting heart today. Those who would be saved must run to the cross and put their trust in Jesus.

A little girl was lost in London. The police found her and tried to help her get home. But she did not know her address or a phone number. They asked her if she could remember anything that could help them get her home. Remembering the Charing Cross, a landmark in the center of town, she said, "Get me to the cross. And I can find my own way home."

III. FAITH IN THE RISEN SAVIOR IS A BLESSING.

In verse 29, Jesus responds to Thomas' confession of faith with a question: "Have you believed because you have seen me?" This question acknowledged that Thomas was a true believer. But it takes issue with the means by which Thomas came to a place of assurance. Thomas believed because he saw the marks of the cross on the risen Savior. But going forward, Jesus would not deal with doubt by making special appearances, performing miraculous signs, or submitting to personal examinations. No more show and tell. It is now hearing and believe. This question is not a rebuke to Thomas. But it is a rebuke to those today who claim that faith requires a special sign, miracle, or experience. While Jesus did make a special appearance for Thomas, it was just that – a special appearance. Jesus has already done enough to prove that he is who he says he is his Lord and God. John 20:30-31 says: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his 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." This is the basis of saving faith: the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Romans 10:13 declares, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Then Romans 10:14 asks: "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? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" No more show and tell. It's now hear and believe.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. God the Father has created you with eternity in your soul. And he has sent his Son, Jesus Christ into the world to provide to live and die and rise from the dead that you may receive the forgiveness of sin, the removal of guilt, and the gift of eternal life. I plead with you not to miss your opportunity to come to Jesus because of what you cannot see.

In verse 29, Jesus says to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This statement is addressed to Thomas. But it is not about Thomas. It is addressed to an infinitely larger group of people that Thomas would never meet on this side of eternity. And it issues a blessing that Thomas and the other apostles could not experience or enjoy. This the final beatitude is addressed to all those who would believe on Jesus without physically seeing him. As Jesus was talking to Thomas, he was thinking about you and me. And he announces this special blessing on those who are saved and satisfied with Jesus even though they never laid eyes on him. 1 Peter 1:8-9 says: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

It is one thing to believe based upon what you can see. But, ultimately, it is not really faith if you can see it. Hebrews 11:1 say: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not thing." Faith that you can see is not faith. It is knowledge. You don't have to believe what you can see. So faith requires that you trust the Lord beyond what you

can know, see, and understand. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says: “for we walk by faith, not by sight.” And following Jesus requires more than knowledge. Warren Wiersbe said it well: “Christians do not live on explanations. We live on promises.” And you can live a long time on a promise, if you trust the one who made the promise.

**STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF CHRIST MY KING
THROUGH ETERNAL AGES LET HIS PRAISES RING
GLORY IN THE HIGHEST I WILL SHOUT AND SING
STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD**

A fire broke out in a family home. The father led his wife and children down the stairs and out of the house. But his young son, frightened by the flames, turned back and hid in his room. As the flames grew, the father stood outside his son’s window and called for him to jump. But the boy refused, claiming he could not see his father through the smoke. His father called to him, “Trust me, son, and jump. You cannot see me. But I can see you!”