



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Why Thomas Stopped Doubting

Hit Reset, John 20:24-31

David Wood | June 28, 2020

A couple years ago I received a call from Emily, my wife, and it sounded pretty urgent. She told me that we needed to cancel our plan for the following evening and I wondered what the reason for that could be. She then informed me that we had won \$10 tickets to a Broadway show for the following night that's otherwise pretty expensive.

We were excited and it was a great experience. We later talked with some of our friends who had entered the same contest and were surprised to learn they had been entering it for over a year, while we won the tickets in less than two weeks. But we had enjoyed the show so much, we decided to continue entering the same drawing. To our surprise, a couple months later we won the tickets again. We felt a little bad for our friends, but we went anyway and again we had a great time.

Then a few months later, we won the tickets for a third time. At this point, we felt bad enough that we gave the tickets to one of our family members. I can't remember whether it was the first, second or third time we won that felt the most unbelievable. To be honest, it wasn't until I was sitting in my theatre seat that I actually believed it was real.

That's not exactly a life-changing situation I realize, but today we're coming to the story of Thomas and his life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. As one of Jesus' disciples, Thomas had seen His miracles, having walked with Jesus day in and day out. He was as shocked as any of the disciples when Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. When Thomas heard a few days later that Jesus had come back to life, he wasn't quite ready to believe. To him it was unbelievable. To be fair, if I had been in his shoes, I wonder if I would have believed someone actually came back to life. When the Apostle John tells the story of what Thomas experienced, he wrote it in such a way that we as the readers can evaluate our own reaction to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Before we take a look at Thomas' story, I want you to think about God's work in your life. What are some doubts you have faced? Maybe you've doubted God's justice, as you've experience things that aren't fair in your own circumstances. Maybe you've had a season when you doubted whether Jesus really is the only way to heaven. Maybe you've experienced doubt about the existence of God Himself.

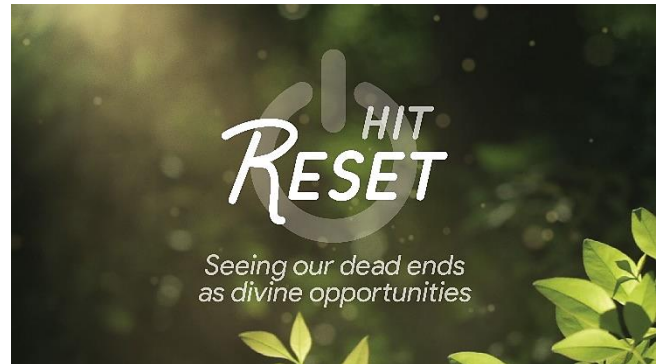
Or maybe you've trusted Christ, but maybe you doubt whether He really cares about you in a close personal way. Maybe you've been a Christian for decades and God has brought you through some of those seasons of doubt, so as a result you've gained a stronger faith in Him. Maybe you now understand more clearly why you believe what you believe. If that's true of you, I hope today encourages you to look back and remember what it was like for you to believe for the first time.

If you have doubts today, you're not alone. I invite you to hear how Thomas dealt with his doubts in his journey from disbelief to belief. Today we'll see why Thomas stopped doubting. I'm going to give you three checkpoints as Thomas moved from unbelief to belief.

1. Thomas wanted proof that he should believe.

Our first point is that Thomas wanted proof for why he should believe. Having proof is important in many different areas of our lives. For example, it's important to have a title for the vehicle you're driving to prove you own it. On the day we get married, we are given a marriage certificate to verify our commitment. Yes, we also commit to marriage verbally before God and others, but that piece of paper also acts as a form of proof that our marriage is legitimate.

Just about every time we walk out of a store, we have a small piece of paper, perhaps crumpled up in our pocket, that proves we paid for what we bought and that it really belongs to us. Sometimes those receipts can be very important. This last week I returned a shirt and I



was able to show them the proof I had bought that shirt from that store. When they asked me if anything was wrong with the shirt, I told them my wife wasn't really fond of the Hawaiian print. There's no question that proof is an important part of our lives.

Let's look at what kind of proof Thomas was looking for regarding Jesus' resurrection, starting in John 20:24:

²⁴Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

Thomas had heard the disciples' testimony that Jesus was alive, but he hadn't been there the first time Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples. In that event, the doors had been locked because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. They had seen those leaders capture and kill Jesus, so they thought they might be next.

Honestly, I've never really felt afraid for my life before, but I've talked with others who have experienced that kind of fear. Some of them were in a context of war or violence where someone might be seeking to kill them. It's not hard to understand the disciples' fear during that horrifying time.

Jesus came into that locked room ready to give them the proof they needed that first Easter Sunday. In John 20:19, 21 and 26 we read three times where Jesus specifically spoke peace to them, saying, "*Peace be with you.*" The triumphant Prince of Peace had risen from the dead and had come to impart the peace these fearful disciples needed. He didn't just give them peace; He also gave them the proof that He was actually alive. He showed them His hands and side, so they saw the proof that He had been crucified. The Roman soldiers had nailed Him to the cross and had pierced His side. After being brutally whipped with 39 lashes, He had already sustained a substantial loss of blood and was in hypovolemic shock. This became evident when He collapsed while carrying His cross to Golgotha and was also proven by His extreme thirst while on the cross.

Because of the hypovolemic shock, fluid had gathered in the area around His heart and lungs. After He died, the Roman soldiers, who were experts in making sure people were dead, thrust a spear into His side, piercing both His lungs and heart. That's the reason both blood and water poured out of His body, as John recorded in John 19:34. When Jesus showed them the evidence in His wounds, it says in John 20:20 that the disciples were glad and believed because of this. But Thomas wasn't part of that experience. So what was it that changed him from a doubter to a believer?

Thomas had heard the testimony of the other disciples, but as we'll see, he refused to believe without evidence. The other disciples told him they had been convinced Jesus was alive, but their word wasn't enough for Thomas. He needed more evidence. He told them he would never believe unless he could see and touch Christ's wounds.

Interestingly, earlier when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they assumed He was a ghost. That might be what Thomas was thinking about when they were telling him they had seen Jesus. He had the news, but he didn't have the faith to believe it. We need to know what made Thomas stop doubting.

What about you and me? If you are a Christian, was there a particular proof when you first came to know the Lord? Did God use a certain proof to show you Who Jesus is? Maybe it was a true story told by another believer who had come to know the Lord and had had their life transformed? Maybe it was a historical proof God used or maybe it was your own reading of Scripture that brought you to recognize the truth that Jesus is the Son of God Who died and rose again to show His power over sin and death.

Whatever it was, God was the One Who gave you faith, Who gave you the gift of belief. Thomas wanted proof before he would believe, and to be honest, we should want proof as well. We need to have real reasons for believing Jesus is Who He says He is. Let's look for the proof God has revealed to us. If you're not quite ready to believe Jesus' claim that He is the resurrected Son of God, let's continue journeying with Thomas to see what Jesus did for his unbelief. The first checkpoint on his journey out of disbelief was that Thomas wanted proof to believe and he refused to believe without evidence.

2. Jesus is the proof that each believer needs.

Around my house I have several security cameras. There's one in my backyard that allows me to keep an eye on my kids as they're swinging or going down the slide or playing with friends. It's really helpful. I also have a camera in my kitchen, which helps me know who left those dirty dishes in the sink. Okay, I confess—it was me. Then there's a camera in my living room that I've used a few times to settle disputes within the Wood household. If you grew up with brothers and sisters, you're no stranger to the reality that brothers and sisters sometimes get into disagreements. Sometimes things get heated or even a little physical. So if one of my kids comes to me and says something like, "He pushed me," I can go back and see what really happened and seek to resolve it. Thankfully, that doesn't happen much anymore. My kids are continuing to mature and they seek to be more loving. But having the right proof is really helpful.

It's the same as what we see in our passage today. Here we find the proof we need. It wasn't security camera footage of a sibling spat or a crime scene. The proof was Jesus Himself. Jesus is the proof each believer needs. Let's look at the text again, starting in verse 26:

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."

The disciples were gathered in a room and again the doors were locked. They were still living in that fear and uncertainty about what would happen to them next. The text mentions eight days, which is how they counted days. It's like when we're told Jesus died on Friday, was dead on Saturday and rose to life on Sunday—they call that "three days." That means Jesus again chose Sunday to reveal Himself to them. We read that the doors were locked, which may mean Jesus either walked through the walls or perhaps somehow unlocked the doors. A little later in the Bible we read in Acts 12 where doors became unlocked so Peter could escape from prison.

However He got there, Jesus came again to His disciples and said, "Peace be with you." He then turned to Thomas and invited him to examine the evidence. Jesus showed him the evidence, then He commanded Thomas to stop doubting and start believing.

Believing is the main theme of the entire New Testament. We read in John 3:16 that whoever believes in Jesus as the Son of God will not perish but have eternal life. In Acts 10, Peter realized that everyone who believes in Jesus will receive the forgiveness of their sin through His name. In Acts 16:1, Paul and Silas told the jailer, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*" In Romans 1:16, Paul writes that God gives salvation "*to everyone who believes.*"

Jesus showed Thomas the evidence and then commanded him to believe. What was Thomas' response? His response was to believe. He obeyed the Lord's command. He believed and worshiped Jesus. This is one of the clearest proclamations that Jesus is God in the Bible. Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas was convinced not only that Jesus was alive, but also that He was God. We read earlier that Thomas had a self-imposed criterion for believing in Jesus' resurrection, stating, "Unless I see and unless I can touch the evidence, I will never believe" (John 20:25). But here, when Jesus commanded him to believe, we are not told Thomas touched Him and that was what put him over the edge of his unbelief. Sometimes we put stipulations on things: "I will only believe if..." But Jesus can turn that on its head for us as well, giving us the evidence and faith we actually need. Jesus showed Thomas the evidence, commanded him to believe, then Thomas did believe. Jesus saw the transformation in Thomas after he placed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. What a great day for Thomas!

Any day someone comes to saving faith is a great day. But Jesus wanted to make it clear that those who would come after Thomas—even those born 2,000 years later—would not be at a disadvantage to those first disciples. We have the same ability to have faith in Jesus Christ as those first men who saw and touched the risen Savior.

Why exactly did Thomas stop doubting? Jesus. Jesus is the reason Thomas stopped doubting. Nothing greater could have been given to Thomas as proof than Jesus Himself. So what about us? As we seek to know God more, Jesus is the answer to our doubts. As you seek to grow in your faith and understanding of God, I encourage you to examine the evidence.

Let's look at three main historical evidences for the resurrection to which we can turn:

- First, the existence of the Christian church is strong proof of the resurrection. Those disciples believed and then went out to preach the resurrected Christ which is why the Christian church was established and grew.
- Second, Jesus' disciples had a real experience with One Whom they believed to be the risen Christ. Those disciples couldn't have been lying or have made it up among themselves. They had no reason to say, "Let's go out and start this story." Ten of the disciples were martyred. To the end, they said, "This reality is what I will live and die for." No one dies for a lie they made up. Also, the disciples weren't hallucinating. How would they all have hallucinated the exact same thing? That doesn't even make sense. They claimed to have touched Jesus and watched Him eat food. Hallucinations can't be touched, nor do they eat food. There's really only one possible explanation left. The disciples believed they had seen the resurrected Christ because they actually had seen Him.
- The third evidence I want to remind you of is that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered to be empty by a group of women the Sunday following His crucifixion. This is important for several reasons:
 - First, the resurrection was preached in the very city where Jesus had been killed and buried shortly before. If they were making this up, no one in that area would have believed it. They could have gone to the tomb themselves.
 - Second, even the earliest Jewish arguments against Christianity admit to the empty tomb.
 - Third, evidence shows us that the empty tomb account in Mark's Gospel originated within seven years—very early on after the event it narrates.

- Fourth, the empty tomb is supported by both Christian and non-Christian historical New Testament scholars. They agree that the burial story is one of the best-established facts about Jesus.
- Fifth, Jesus' tomb was never venerated as a shrine. It was a first-century custom for people to come to the place where a holy man's bones were stored or buried, and they would create a shrine there. There are 50 other such shrines in existence, but this never happened with Jesus' bones. That's because Jesus' bones weren't there.
- Sixth, Mark's account of the empty tomb is simple. It shows no signs of the legendary development other religions have experienced.
- Seventh, the tomb was discovered to be empty by women. Sadly, the testimony of women in the first century was considered to be worthless. If the empty tomb story was a legend that people made up, they wouldn't have chosen women to be the first ones to discover the empty tomb. So in fact it was written down as it actually happened.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just the best explanation for the empty tomb—it's the only explanation. There's so much historical evidence, not only for Jesus' existence and His miracles, but also for His resurrection. So let's continue to obey His command when He says, "*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*" Jesus is the proof that each believer needs. He's the reason Thomas stopped doubting.

3. God gives life when you believe Jesus is the Messiah.

That first checkpoint in Thomas' journey from disbelief to belief was that he wanted proof that he should believe. Second, Jesus is the proof that every believer needs. And the third checkpoint is that God gives life when you believe Jesus is the Messiah.

This last week I saw a pretty powerful video of a basketball coach who was being interviewed by a number of reporters. One reporter wanted to know what the coach thought about one of the players on his team missing out on a semi-final game to be present at the birth of his child. The reporter asked, "Is it normal for a player to leave the team during the semi-finals?" I love what the coach said:

Do you have kids? When you have kids, youngster, you'll understand because that's the height of the human experience. That's a good question, really. Do you think basketball is the most important thing in life? When you see your first child, you will understand, because nothing can be more majestic than the birth of a child. Not titles, not anything else. Augusto Lima is now in heaven emotionally. I'm really happy for him.

I could say from my own experience what an incredible and emotional experience the birth of a child is. It's a powerful picture of the new eternal life we enter into at the moment of salvation when we are born again. In our passage today, Thomas was born again. God gave him new spiritual life when he believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

Let's take a look at the final two verses of this series.

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.

Here we arrive at the purpose statement, the conclusion of the Gospel of John. The following chapter, chapter 21, gives us an epilogue describing the interaction between Jesus, Peter and John. But in John 20:30-31, we're given the reason for this book with crystal clarity. John wrote this book so you can believe. He touches on the main themes of his book in these verses. First, he mentions that Jesus was the promised Messiah the Jews had been waiting for. He also says Jesus was God's Son, God in the flesh. He mentions that Jesus did miracles to verify His power and identity. Finally, he emphasizes that believing Jesus is our only appropriate response to all these truths about Him. Further, he reminds us that God gives life when we believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Have you received this gift? Have you trusted Jesus Christ—the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world—to be the One Who can save you? He alone can wipe away the penalty for your sin and bring you near to Himself. He alone can bring you into an eternal relationship with the God Who created you. You can do that right now. You have the evidence you need. You've witnessed the testimony of the perfect life of Jesus Christ. You know about His death, burial and resurrection. You've read how He appeared to His disciples. And you've been told that He wants you to trust Him for a relationship with the eternal Father.

If you've never taken that step, you can take it right now. You can say, "Father, I believe I'm a sinner and am in need of a Savior. I believe that Jesus is God and that He is the only One Who can save me. I turn away from my sin and turn to Jesus in faith alone for the forgiveness of my sin."

If you've prayed that prayer, you have life in Jesus. You have hope in Jesus. You have peace in Jesus. You have eternal life in Jesus. I would encourage you to continue to examine the evidence. Don't stop here. If you'd like to find more evidence to strengthen your faith, there are plenty of books that can help you with this. One book I'd recommend is [The Case For Christ](#) by Lee Strobel. Lee was an award-winning journalist who was an atheist who didn't want to believe Jesus was real. But he started to look for the evidence, and the more he learned, the more he began to build a case for the reality that Jesus Christ is Who He says He is. If you read that book, you'll see for yourself that

the records of Jesus' life in Scripture are trustworthy. The details of his biography were reliably preserved for us. There is also credible evidence for these truths outside the biblical record.

Jesus really did claim to be the Son of God and He proved it. The life and resurrection of Jesus are supported by much evidence, not only through historical records, but also through the impact these have on our lives today. Through His resurrection, we can have a relationship with Him that can never be taken from us.

In our time together this morning, we've looked for the reasons why Doubting Thomas turned into Believing Thomas. Jesus is the reason Thomas stopped doubting, and the resurrected Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Messiah, is the reason we can stop doubting too.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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