

## So That You May Believe

*Tyler Velin | August 19, 2012 | John 20:24-31*

Today we are going to look at one of the most infamous stories in the gospel of John, and that is the story of Thomas.

Now personally I feel bad for Thomas, because whenever we think of the disciple Thomas he is always referred to as “Doubting Thomas.” I think this is a tough break for a few reasons. First, the other disciples were not perfect. Yet we don’t call Peter “Poor Aim Peter,” or “Peter the Denier,” we don’t refer to James and John as “Mommas Boys,” or “The Prideful Brothers.”

Secondly, let’s not forget what Thomas is doubting. He is not doubting the score of a football game, he is not doubting that the earth orbits around the sun, he is not doubting that the margarine doesn’t taste like butter. What he is doubting is that his best friend, who was just murdered days before, has come back from the dead and is running around like nothing ever happened.

In fact, we believe, that Thomas ended up going and being one of the first to share the gospel in India where he was martyred for his faith. Yet “Doubting Thomas” will go down in history as one of the greatest Debbie Downers.

But we will see in today’s passage, the story of Thomas gives us hope. The story of Thomas shows us the power and purpose of the gospel of Jesus.

Let’s **Pray**.

So to catch everyone up to speed here, a lot has happened in the last week. Jesus was crucified on a Friday, then on Sunday morning Mary found an empty tomb and showed it to Peter and John. Then after Peter and John left, Jesus appeared to Mary. Later that night, all the disciples were assembled, and Jesus appeared to them. So now a week passes from Jesus showing himself to the disciples, and we pick up with the story of the disciple Thomas.

### **John 20:24-25**

Couple things I want to point out in these verses. First Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. I like what J.C. Ryle has to say about this fact. He says, “Go to church.” Do not forsake meeting together. All of the other disciples were gathered, but for some unknown reason Thomas did not join them. We don’t know why he wasn’t with the rest of the disciples we just know he wasn’t. Moral of the story, go to church, because you never know what you will miss.

Secondly we see Thomas expressing the only way in which he will believe. He says that he will not believe Jesus really rose from the dead unless he sees Jesus and he places his fingers into the nail marks on Jesus’ hands and the wound on his side.

This is another thing that people always throw in Thomas' face. "You had to see Jesus' wounds to believe he existed." They say these things like proof of Jesus' resurrection is a bad thing. "You don't need proof, you just need to believe." Yet this is an unbiblical idea. The Bible never says anything about blindly believing something. Throughout scripture God is proving himself to us. Hebrews says faith is being sure, certainty comes from proof.

In fact look back at when Jesus appeared to the disciples in last week's text. **John 20:20**. Thomas didn't want anything more than the other disciples got. The disciples got the proof they needed to know Jesus physically rose from the dead.

So it's not the desire for proof that poses the problem for us, but it is what we qualify as proof that often times ruins our faith. We will talk about that more in a minute.

### **John 20:26-29**

So here Thomas finally gets his proof. When all the disciples, with Thomas present, were sitting in a locked room, Jesus appeared. Now it is interesting to note that back in verse 20, we never see if the other disciples touched Jesus' wounds, the same is true in Thomas' case. John never tells us if Thomas' physically touched Jesus' wounds.

I think that neither the disciples nor Thomas needed to actually touch the wounds of Jesus, because the presence of Jesus was proof enough of his validity. In fact Thomas doesn't resort to in depth scientific reason here. He is not scrutinizing the wounds, but rather his is so overwhelmed at the presence of Jesus that he cries out "My Lord and my God." Thomas didn't need physical wounds to prove Jesus lived, he need Jesus to have grace on him. Grace was the proof Thomas needed

Now look back at what Jesus says to Thomas in closing: **John 20:29**.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Now this is an important thing for us to understand, because this is where we become inserted into this story.

You see throughout the Bible, God spoke and proved himself to his people. In the Old Testament God spoke through his judges, kings and prophets. The nation of Israel knew that when one of these men spoke, and opened their message with "Thus says the Lord," or some other intro like that, they knew that it was God speaking directly to them.

That was the proof of God in the OT.

In the New Testament things changed. Paul says this in **Hebrews 1:1-2**. So Paul indicates a paradigm shift here. In the OT God spoke through prophets, but in the NT God spoke through Jesus. Jesus was God incarnate. How many times as we worked through the book of John do we see Jesus say, "The words I speak I do not speak on my own authority, but on the father's authority." Jesus wasn't speaking simply as Jesus of Nazareth, he was speaking as Jesus, Son of God, God incarnate.

Just as Thomas just declared, Jesus was God. Therefore he spoke and acted in human history as God. Now here is the problem, we live in Missoula, Montana in the year 2012.

We have absolutely zero access to Jesus of Nazareth, we have never heard him, we have never seen him, we have never consulted eye witnesses, most of us have never even been to the place where he lived. We are as removed from the person of Jesus as you can possibly be.

So where are we supposed to get proof of Jesus and find belief in him? Jesus said “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.”

We all know the Hebrews verse which defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain things of which we have not seen.” But what separates our faith from other faith.

I love watching shows on mermaids, sasquatches and aliens because I like to get a good giggle off of supposed eyewitness accounts. Those people claim to have belief, yet I have never been convicted of their same belief. We laugh at those people who believe in such things. So what is it that separates a belief in Christ from a belief in bigfoot?

Now John is about to insert one of the most beautiful statements into this text. He is about to give his mission statement for why he wrote the book of John. This is where everything ties together for the apostle. **John 20:30-31**

John wrote this book so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. John wrote this book to us. John wrote this book so that those who have no access the physical Jesus, may read and believe and have life abundantly.

Now again, we must dive into the distinction between the Bible and other books. There have been other books written by believers in Muhammad, Aliens, Sasquatch and Buddha. And if you were to ask the authors why they wrote their books, they would probably say so that you might believe what they believe, so what makes John’s statement here any different?

Here is the difference. All writers write to accomplish a purpose. They write hoping to communicate something. It could be humor, encouragement, instruction, information or inspiration. But here is the thing, no human author can control how someone responds to their message.

I can write a joke wanting the result to be laughter, but I cannot control whether you laugh or not. If someone fails to find my joke funny, they will not laugh and I have no control over that.

But the Bible was not written merely by human authors. Yes a physical John wrote a physical manuscript to physical people. But Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:21, that no prophecy of scripture was ever produced by the will of man, but rather men spoke from God, as they were carried along by the holy spirit.

This book, is the word of God.

We are incapable of believing in Jesus without help. Our hearts are hostile towards God, they will not please God, nor can they please God. Each of us has rejected the proof of God as revealed through salvation. The moment you are born on this earth you reject Christ. My son

Owen is currently 33 weeks old in Sarah's womb, and already he has rejected Jesus as his savior.

The only hope for my son, the only hope for us is that we receive a revelation. We need someone outside of us to show us the depth of our sin. We need to have the bonds of death loosed from our neck. We need to have life spoken to us in a way that demands a response.

I am here today to tell you that God has given us that revelation in his word. This is the only normative and objective way in which we hear from God. When you open the scriptures you are not merely encountering literature, you are encountering God.

Speaking of Jesus, John says the "word became flesh and dwelt among us." It is through that word, Jesus, dying on a cross that we have freedom from sin. And it is through the word revealed in scripture that we have revelation of Jesus' work on the cross.

This book is no ordinary book, this book is the proof that we need to believe. There is nothing special in the book itself, there is nothing magical about the language. What is special about this book is not the book, but rather the object who inspires this book, Jesus.

**Hebrews 4:12.** This book is alive, this book allows us to see Jesus, this book allows us to hear Jesus, this book allows us to believe in Jesus, this book allows us to treasure Jesus, this book allows us to worship Jesus, this book allows us to proclaim Jesus, this book is the greatest gift to us outside of Jesus.

As we saw earlier, the Holy Spirit's goal is to proclaim to us the things about Christ, this is the primary way in which the Holy Spirit accomplishes its task. When you do your devotions, the Holy Spirit is laboring on you through the text.

The whole scripture is God breathed, the whole scripture is profitable because the whole word of God points to the Jesus as "The Word" of God and it is through his work on the cross that we are saved.

Look at the power the New Testament authors ascribe to the word of God: **Rom 1:16, 1 Cor 1:18, 1 Thess 2:13.** There is power in the word of God.

Now here is where I want to bring this home. When Thomas was presented with Christ, he had to respond. He was forced to reject or accept that truth. Some of you have commented as we worked through the book of John, that John always seems to be stressing the same point, Jesus is God. That is because John is forcing you to respond to that truth.

John wrote these things so that you may believe. John wrote these things to present to you the proof of Christ. Christian or non-Christian, the holy spirit is working on you, proclaiming truth to you, as you process the scriptures. You are either rejecting or accepting those truths. But we know that God will accomplish what he wished to accomplish in you.

Look at **Is 55:10-11.** God is seeking to accomplish something through his word. Through his entire word. Through the genealogies, through the property lists, through the war accounts, through the prophets, through the gospels, through the epistles and through revelation, God is

communicating with us to accomplish a goal.

His word will accomplish that which it was sent out to do. His word will harden the hearts of some, and warm the hearts of others.

I pray today that God warms the hearts of you in here. For the non-Christians I hope he warms your hearts to the revelation of Jesus. I hope the Holy Spirit reveals to you the power and wonder and might of the Cross of Christ. Christ showed grace and love to the doubting Thomas before bringing him to a full faith, he will do the same to you.

For the Christians in here I hope want you to treasure this book in high regard. Guard it, treasure it, cherish it. Read it, encounter it, submit yourself to it. Realize that this book is the revelation of the act through which you were saved. Read it this week knowing that in every word on every page, God is not merely writing information, but he is writing for transformation. He is attempting to accomplish something in you, and it would bode you well to understand, and through the help of the holy spirit, apply that truth to your life.

Everything we do, everything we are must come under the subject of Christ. The best way to do that is to submit yourself to the word of Christ, the Bible.

John wrote this book so that you may believe. I pray that intended result is completed in you by the holy spirit.