

# The Show-me Disciple

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Missouri has historically been nicknamed “The Show-me State.” The origins of the title are hard to pin down. The most prominent legend behind the name comes from a famous speech delivered by U.S. Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver—who reportedly said: “I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces me nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, whether this is the genesis of the nickname or not, it speaks of a desire in Missourians to see something in order to believe something. We can be a stubborn or dogged people, even skeptical until we get hard evidence. And, it’s for this reason that I think the main character in today’s sermons was at heart a Missourian.

This morning we will meet “Doubting Thomas”—the “Show-me Disciple.” Having missed the first appearance of the resurrected Christ to the other disciples, Thomas wants proof. He hears the testimony of the others, but he won’t trust them. Unless he meets with Jesus, unless he touches his wounds, Thomas will not believe that Jesus conquered death. Let’s read this passage together.

## **John 20:24-29**

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you’ve seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

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<sup>1</sup> You can read more on the legends behind the nickname’s origin [here](#).

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Here is today's outline. (1<sup>st</sup>) We'll see that **Thomas needs to meet with Jesus**. (2<sup>nd</sup>) We'll see that **Jesus needs to meet with Thomas**. Let's dig in on each.

### 1. **Thomas needs to meet with Jesus.**

We call him doubting Thomas, but what kind of doubting is he doing here? There are all kinds of ways to question Christianity; aren't there?

Some people doubt because it's convenient. Doubt gives them the justification to do whatever they want to do. They can sleep with whomever they want to sleep. They can buy whatever they want to buy. They can justify any behavior they choose. I listened to one of my seminary professors share an example of this two weeks ago.<sup>2</sup> He highlighted this very kind of doubt in twentieth century author Aldous Huxley, who wrote this about his atheism.

*I had motive for not wanting the world to have a meaning; [and] consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption.... For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.<sup>3</sup>*

This was certainly not the type of doubt Thomas had. He was a devout Jew. He believed the Old Testament Scriptures. He had seen Jesus work many miracles. Thomas longed for the promised Messiah. He wasn't doubting the other's testimony about the resurrection so that he could live however he wanted to live.

I could list out many other types of doubt. But, there is one that I know some of you are facing right now. And, it's also the one I think Thomas faces in this text. So, let's get right to it.

Sometimes people doubt because they cannot understand what God is doing. They find themselves disappointed in their circumstances. Things haven't turned out like they hoped they would turn out. Maybe you find yourself doubting in this way. Maybe you have been asking God: *What are you doing? How can this be your plan? What good is this pandemic, economic challenge, or personal conflict accomplishing*

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, "Doubting Thomas": 2005. You can listen to his message [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, 270.

*in my life or in the lives of those whom I love?* Sometimes this is what brings doubt—the disappointments of life, the hard things that come in a fallen world.

Friends, Thomas would have certainly been facing these kinds of questions.

Thomas had spent three years with Jesus. He had witnessed with excitement and anticipation the miraculous, good news powers of Jesus. He had watched Jesus stump the religious authorities, take up the cause of the powerless, and preach gospel to all who would listen. Surely Thomas was looking forward to a triumphant climax. He was looking forward to the day Jesus (as Israel’s promised Messiah) would reign over a renewed Israel—just like in the days of David and Solomon.

Yet, then came the arrest and the trial and the torture and the awful crucifixion of his Master—of the one in whom he’d placed his hope. *How could this be the plan for the Messiah, Lord? How could this be your plan? What are you doing, Lord?* These, I believe, are the types of doubts Thomas is having here.

So, when the others say they’ve seen Jesus, he tells them:

*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe (v. 25).*

Thomas needs to meet with Jesus. He needs to know that the very same Jesus whom he followed and ate with and joked with and grew to revere, love, and adore is truly alive—is truly risen from the grave. If the trauma of seeing his dear Master and Friend crucified is to be eclipsed with joy, Thomas needs to see him resurrected. He needs to see him alive again.

Friends, this is a personal confession. Thomas has lived and worked with Jesus for three years. So he says: *I’m not accepting anything less than a personal meeting with Jesus. If I see and touch my Lord again, then I will believe.*

(You may think it’s rather unfair that Thomas and the disciples got to see Jesus and trust in him through that proof. You may think it’s not fair that we don’t get to—that we have to have a kind of blind faith. However, that’s simply not the case for us or for any other Christian throughout history. Jesus never expects us to trust in him and follow him blindly. God never expects us to have faith separate from any reason or proof or intellectual answer. That’s a misnomer.

When I came to faith, there were a number of important intellectual questions which I needed answers to before I was able to engage the gospel. Is morality real? Can there be right or wrong apart from God? These kinds of questions.

As with many other things in the Christian life, C. S. Lewis sums it up well when he writes this about his reasons for believing in Christ.

*I believe in Christianity [he says] as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else.*<sup>4</sup>

You experience love *thus* you know that there is a God who has created you for it. You meet people with unique personalities and you know that a personal God stands behind that fact. You know you live wrongly—that you’ve committed sins—*therefore* you know a holy God exists who frowns upon such behavior. Or, you long for eternal life *so* you know you weren’t created for death.

Friends, so much proof is unseen. Even in the scientific world, this is the case. Scientists assert that there is a substance in the universe, which they call dark matter. Yet, no one has seen it. The way they know it exists is by the effect it has on objects in space which they can see—the movement of stars and galaxies.

Friends, this is the proof all around us that witnesses every day to the veracity of Christian belief—the truth of Christianity. And, moreover, we have the testimony of Scripture. Even just a few verses beyond today’s passage, John tells us his purpose for writing his gospel account. He recorded these things—about Jesus and Thomas and the disciples and the resurrection—so that we might read them and believe them. The Bible is a witness to history. Christianity is a faith that grounds itself in history. It makes claims we are invited to investigate. *So, investigate!*

You know, I have a good many, non-Christian friends who dismiss the Bible as a collection of fairytales. Yet, they have never given it an honest look or reading. They often repeat with incredulity what they’ve heard on the lips of other skeptics. Yet, this strikes me as ironic. In a way, they aren’t doing exactly what they champion and encourage others to do—investigate the facts. They don’t probe all the evidence. They don’t bother to examine Jesus, as Thomas asks to here—to consider his wounds in order to verify the testimony of many witnesses.

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<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, “They Asked for a Paper” in *Is Theology Poetry*, 165.

Well, if this is you, I would invite you to examine the proofs with openness. Don't dismiss the claims of Jesus. Consider the history of the resurrection. Ask God to meet with you. And, don't be surprised when he does just that.)

Well, this brings us to our second meeting in this passage.

## **2. Jesus needs to meet with Thomas.**

You know, whenever I visit other churches (on a vacation or on a sabbatical), I'm always amazed at how rarely I hear Jesus spoken about. I hear things about God. I hear practical advice about being a good parent or a spouse or a better employee. Jesus, however, isn't mentioned all that much. Yet, Christianity isn't simply a belief in God. It isn't simply knowing God exists and lots of things about why that matters. Christianity isn't merely intellectual belief. It is a personal belief and relationship—a personal belief in and relationship with Jesus. Christianity is about intimate trust in Jesus and submission to his lordship.

But, we don't get to initiate that relationship. Jesus is the one who initiates it. If you don't believe me, simply consider how Jesus conducted his earthly ministry in contrast to normal rabbinic practice. Jesus went around the ancient Near East calling disciples to follow him. Typically, if a student wanted to study with a rabbi, they would seek the rabbi out and in a sense apply. They'd initiate the relationship, not the rabbi. But not this Jesus! He chooses. He initiates.

Or, consider our Christian salvation. Consider that you did nothing to earn it. While we were lost in sin and under the judgment of God, Christ Jesus put on flesh and broke into history to work our redemption. In sin, we were dead (Ephesians 2:1). We were helpless to save ourselves. Friends, dead people don't initiate anything. Christ Jesus chose to come. Christ Jesus initiated our salvation.

I remember once being in a seminary advisee group and having a conversation about friendship. One of my classmates made the assertion that Jesus is our friend. Then, one of our professors quickly pointed out that, biblically speaking, this is only because Jesus *first* called us *his* friends (John 15:15).

Beloved, Jesus always initiates. He always chooses. He's always in control. And, this is in today's text too. Thomas lays-out his ultimatum then John writes this.

*A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (vv. 26-27).*

Jesus has come for Thomas. Jesus wants to meet with him and encourage him. Jesus has come to transform this man's life. And, that's precisely what he does here. He will meet with Thomas both intellectually and personally. Transformational faith in Christ always engages the mind and the heart—the whole of us. We can see this when Thomas responds: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28).

Consider this confession. **First**, notice that it is the most complete confession in John's gospel. This is the climactic witness to Jesus' true character and identity—he is both Lord and God. *What a statement!* Friends, don't look-down upon Thomas for having doubts; don't scoff at him for wrestling with the reality of the resurrection. His honesty in the midst of doubt is rewarded. His wrestling brings him deeper faith in Christ—as Savior and Lord. The church should always welcome honest questions about the nature of our faith and our God.

(Francis Schaeffer wrestled with doubts and then founded the Swiss L'Abri—a place for honest questions about God. All churches should be such places.)

**Second**, notice that his confession is very personal. "My Lord and my God!" Jesus is *his* Master and *his* God. Jesus has authority over *his* life because he is God—*his* rabbi is *his* Creator. The repetition of *my* in Thomas's confession is so important. It's the picture of true Christian faith—of submission to the Creator of the universe who has come to know and love us personally.

Friends, I don't know where you are today. Perhaps you are at home for Easter and your parents are making you watch the service with them online. Maybe you're in a dark place in life—a place of doubts and uncertainties and questions about God. No matter where you're at, just know that we're glad you're here. You are welcome with all your doubts and questions and concerns.

And, more importantly, Jesus is glad you're here. I believe he's brought you. I believe he's meeting with you even as he is meeting with Thomas in this passage. I think he's inviting you to know him—to ask your questions, to confess your doubts.

He is bigger than any question or doubt which you might have. Bring them to him. Wrestle with him. Ask him for answers. Read the Bible and get to know Jesus there. Friends, the Scriptures were recorded for you.

It's God speaking to you so that you may "believe that Jesus is the Messiah... and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Amen.