

# Believe

JOHN

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## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: John 20:24-31*

But Thomas (called 'Twin'), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples were telling him, 'We've seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.' <sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even 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 and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe.' [or "*Don't be unfaithful, be faithful!*"] <sup>28</sup> Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen & yet believe.' <sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:24-31 CSB)

### SUMMARY:

Thomas gets a bad rap. Unfairly dubbed 'doubting Thomas,' he's a victim of caricature and mistranslation. The term 'doubt' never appears in this episode. As a devoted disciple, Thomas was poised to be an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection. For unknown reasons, he missed Jesus' Easter Sunday appearance, where his followers were commissioned. Confronted by his peers regarding Jesus' resurrection, Thomas rejected their testimony, seeking his own firsthand experience. He wasn't unique; all the disciples struggled during the transition from Jesus' earthly ministry to the era of the risen Christ and the Spirit. Jesus, mercifully granting second chances, appeared to Thomas, meeting his conditions and affirming his role as an eyewitness. Jesus' charge, "Don't be unfaithful; but be faithful," prompted Thomas's declaration, "My Lord & My God," the climax of John's Gospel. This

narrative isn't about doubts, but about faithfulness. Thomas was faithful in his era; let's emulate that in ours. Our moments of disconnect from God don't disqualify us from grace. Jesus deals patiently with our shortcomings, restoring us to fulfill our God-assigned roles in his plan. Let's heed His call to remain faithful.

## 1. 'Doubting Thomas'? "*Thomas gets a bum rap.*" –Paul Metzger

### a. Thomas: Negative Caricatures

- "A Doubting Thomas" –someone who's a skeptic—Jesus' disciple, Thomas, who in John 20...does not believe
- Jesus has been resurrected "til Jesus offers to let Thomas feel his wounds." [S-M Suzie Park, *2 Kings*, p. 91 #33]
- Allegedly, "Thomas is the doubter whose faith needs a sledge-hammer to move it." –Dorothy Lee
- "A particularly obtuse and faithless disciple"—Elaine Pagels
- "Thomas demand[s] what no cultured...person, ancient or modern, would consider acceptable..."—Gregory Riley
- "For 2nd-generation followers...Thomas would be a *counter-example not to be followed.*" — Régis Burnet
- "Every single...[Thomas] reference has a *negative connotation*...The first 2 references...present him as a *skeptical & dim-witted* disciple (11:16; 14:5). This...[gets] even more pronounced in...John 20." –Enno E. Popkes
- John 20 "present[s] ...[a] descending spiral from the highest form of faith to the *lowest...kind of faith*... The Beloved Disciple...comes to faith apart from empirical proof... to *the lowest type –cynical Thomas* who demands physical proof." [Grant Osborne quote K. Quast, *Peter & the Beloved Disciple*, p. 120]
- "Thomas was not a doubter... Doubt (*distás?*) means, 'to waver, hesitate, be uncertain.' Doubt is not rejection of belief, but holding a belief with hesitation & uncertainty. Doubt involves believing something with questions about whether it is really true or not...[So,] *Thomas was not a doubter. He didn't doubt the resurrection of Jesus —he fully rejected it* until he could have physical proof." — Sean McDowell

### b. Thomas' Apologists

- Perhaps we have *approached...Thomas...from the wrong perspective*. We've used Thomas as the poster boy for doubting Jesus. He lacked true faith & had to have proof." –James Puglisi
- "I don't think Thomas was incredulous, if we mean by that cynical... Perhaps more than the other disciples, *Thomas gets a bum rap.*" –Paul L. Metzger
- "The portrayal of Thomas in the 4th Gospel is much more positive than most exegetes...allow." –Moody Smith
- "The traditional picture of Thomas as *the doubter is a caricature* of the role he plays in this scene" –Dorothy Lee

### c. The Danger of 'Doubting Thomas'

- a. "Jn. 20:24-29 is acknowledged almost universally as the story of 'Doubting Thomas.' This epithet for this disciple & his story...*falsely isolates Thomas* from the rest of the disciples, [&] has the unfortunate effect of foreclosing any fresh hearing of this text. *To focus narrowly & negatively on Thomas' doubt* in...interpreting this text *is to miss the point* of this story. The center of this story is Jesus, not Thomas." [Gail O'Day, *John*, p. 731]

### d. No "Doubting Thomas" in John 20

- Jesus told Thomas, "Put your finger here... Put your hand into my side. *Stop doubting & have faith!*" (20:27 CEV)
- "Put your finger here... Reach out your hand & put it into My side. *Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer.*" (HCSB)
- "...Reach out your hand and put it into my side. *Don't be faithless, but believe.*' (20:27 CSB)
- "At the heart of Thomas' plight is an issue of translation. Most English Bibles render Jesus' words to Thomas as 'do not doubt but believe.' The actual [Greek] word is *apistos*... *To translate apistos as 'doubt' brings... connotations that are not present or implied...[by] believing* in the Gospel of John ... The meaning of belief in the 4th Gospel ...*is a category of relationship*. The...term *doubt*, however, *has*

*to do with uncertainty.* Uncertainty, as a category of belief does not really exist in the 4th Gospel. One is either certain or uncertain ... Preaching this text necessitates admitting...*this Gospel does not deal with doubt.* [Karoline M. Lewis, *John*, 249]

- "The Greek word meaning doubt (*distaz?*) never appears in this story (despite... NRSV & NIV in Jn. 20:27). *Distaz?* is found in Mt. 28:17, but it is completely absent in John 20." [Richard Carlson, *Working Preacher*, 19, Apr. 2009]

## 2. Prior Glimpses of Disciple Thomas (11:16; 14:5)

### a. "Let's go too...to die with him [Jesus]" (11:16)

- "Then Thomas...told his fellow disciples, 'Let's go too so that we may die with him'." (11:16)
- Facing "death he decides to follow Jesus. He is...in 11:16... a courageous & loyal follower of Jesus."—K-H. Wang
- This is Thomas' "resigned bravado...Readers... recognize the courage of the disciples at this point in the story: they are indeed ready to go with Jesus & die...Later...readers recognize [they] aren't ready." [N. Farelly, *Disciples*, 59]

### b. "Lord, we don't know..." (14:5)

- a. Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" (14:5)
- b. The disciples' ...confusion is comprehensive & they voice it through Thomas." [Nicolas Farelly, *Disciples*, 69]
- c. "Thomas... fail[s] to grasp... but all the disciples fail to understand Jesus' words. It's unfair to criticize Thomas & single him out as the only one who's skeptical & doesn't understand." [S. K-H. Wang, *Sense Perception*, p. 191]

## 3. Thomas Rejects his fellow-disciples' Witness (20:24-25)

- "Thomas... was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples were telling him, 'We've seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, & put my hand into his side, I will never believe'." (20:24-25)

### a. Thomas was Absent on Easter Sunday

- Thomas "was absent... when Jesus came (20:24). He apparently was unconcerned & indifferent to the need to be in God's house with God's people doing God's will. When he was confronted about his absence, he sarcastically responded with unbelief. He had missed the greatest blessing of his life & his manner confirmed his 'care-lessness'." [Donald R. Holloway, *No Crown Without the Cross*, p. 42] Note that Jesus doesn't condemn Thomas!
- "John doesn't tell us why Thomas was absent...*Be careful not to jump to...dogmatic conclusions.*" —HB. Charles
- "The mention of Thomas' absence alerts...readers that an important element of the story is at hand'. Thomas' temporary absence increases the significance of his appearance and of his role in the narrative." [Benjamin Schliesser, "*To touch or not to touch?*" *Early Christianity*, Vol. 8(1) (2017) p. 71]

### b. Thomas Rejects the Disciples' Testimony – "We've seen the Lord!"

#### a. Blanket refusal to Believe?

- John "records Thomas' unwillingness to believe as a vigorous denial ('I will certainly not believe'), not simply as a polite refusal ('I shall not believe'). And what Thomas refused to believe for a week were the oft-repeated ('they kept telling him') & detailed reports of Mary Magdalene (20:17-18) & his trusted fellow-disciples (20:25a) concerning the resurrection appearances of Jesus." [Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God*, p. 114]
- Thomas "expresses the strongest resistance of any disciple to believing in Jesus' resurrection." —Dennis Sylva
- "Is it necessary to regard Thomas as a reprehensible character of bad tendencies because he wanted to know for himself that Jesus really is risen? *I think not.*" [Frank D. Rees, *Wrestling with Doubt*, p. 197]

#### b. Thomas' rejection derails the Disciples' newly-launched Mission

- "The very disciples who had just been sent with the Spirit-empowered authority of the Lord to announce his person & work to the world (20:21-23) were *immediately rejected* by one of their own [Thomas— 'one of the Twelve' (20:24)] indeed, one who had *already exhibited belief in Jesus*... *Nothing* in the Gospel suggests that *Thomas is less than a believer.*" [Edward W. Klink, *John*, pp. 876-7]
- "As the *witnessing ministry of the disciples has just begun*, in obedience to Jesus' commissioning (20:21), *it is met with the strong refusal* to receive it, not least *by a member of the Twelve!* Thomas refuses to be dependent on the testimony of others to believe. Instead, he sets his own strict conditions for accepting such claims... Thomas' demand... reveals a deep-rooted mistrust on the part of Thomas towards the disciples' testimony..."

*Thomas' failure* is... in demanding a special, individual assurance ... he wants a proof other than the testimony of the group of believers... [The] author wishes to communicate that it is essentially through the apostolic witness that one comes to believe in the risen Jesus." [Nicolas Farelly, *Disciples in the 4th Gospel*, pp. 122-3]

c. Criticisms of Thomas –a negative example: “*he came up short*”

- “Thomas is the *first person who was asked to believe based solely on apostolic testimony* without seeing the physically-risen Lord. The other disciples saw the resurrected Jesus & rejoiced, but Thomas was asked to believe without seeing, and *he came up short*. The future church would also be asked to believe based on the testimony provided by the apostles, rather than on the physical presence of Jesus. So, *Thomas... becomes a representative of those to whom the newly commissioned & Spirit-filled disciples are called to witness.*” [Edward W. Watson, “*Hearing & Believing*,” *Spiritus*, Vol. 7.1 (2022) p. 11]
- “He was later graciously provided the proof that his faith required. Yet, Thomas can be [*unfavorably*] *contrasted* ... with the Samaritan city who listened to the [Samaritan] woman & believed based on her testimony (4:39). He can also be contrasted with the royal official, who believed [Jesus’] word... without seeing his son’s tangible healing (4:50). He can also be contrasted with the Beloved Disciple who, without seeing the risen Jesus, believed (20:8). Finally, Thomas can be contrasted with future disciples of Jesus who are asked to... [believe] based on the testimony of those who... witnessed the risen Christ (20:31).” [Edward W. Watson, *cit.*, p. 13]

d. Thomas’ miracle-based faith vs. faith based on Jesus’ Word

- “Thomas reveals, this kind of faith [based on Jesus’ word] is often a difficult thing to achieve: ‘If I do not put my fingers in the nail holes, I will not believe.’ Those whose ‘faith’ rests on miracles, rather than on the Word of God, can easily fall away when they do not experience the miracle that they require in life... Thomas may represent those who have trouble believing that God is actively engaged in their daily lives... One could even say that ‘the character of Thomas may represent the *‘unbelief of believers.’*” [E. Watson, *Op. cit.*, p. 14]

e. A Refusal to believe the disciples’ report (not Jesus) (Luke 24:11)

- “Returning from the tomb, [the women] reported all these things to the Eleven & to all the rest... telling the apostles these things. <sup>11</sup> But these words seemed like nonsense to them, & *they did not believe the women.*” (Luke 24:9-11)
- Mary M. “went & reported to those who had been with [Jesus]... Yet, when they heard that he was alive & had been seen by her, *they did not believe it.* <sup>12</sup> After this, [Jesus] appeared in a different form to two of them walking [to Emmaus] <sup>13</sup> And they went & reported it to the rest, *who did not believe them either.* <sup>14</sup> Later he appeared to the Eleven themselves... He *rebuked their unbelief* & hardness of heart, because *they did not believe* those who saw him after he had risen.” (Mark 16:10-14 Later Additions)
- “Thomas’ failure ... is indeed a failure to believe, albeit *a failure to believe the report of the other disciples, rather than a direct failure to believe Jesus.* Heretofore [Up to this point] the Gospel has given *no indication that the words of the disciples must be believed*... with Thomas there’s *no indication that he rejects either Jesus or Jesus’ words.*” [Christopher Seglenieks, “*Thomas the (Un)Faithful: ??????? in John 20:27,*” pp. ]
- “By rejecting the report of his fellow disciples, [Thomas] has rejected Jesus’ commission as witnesses... [It is] *a failure to accept the important new role* that the disciples are given as [eye-]witnesses to Jesus.” – Seglenieks

c. Thomas gathers with the disciples a week later (20:26a)

- “A week later [Jesus’] disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them.” (20:26a)
- “It’s remarkable that although Thomas [rejects] his fellow-disciples’ testimony, and although he was absent from the previous gathering, he’s now present among them... It shows that... *he still counts himself as one of Jesus’ disciples*... a follower of the Crucified One.” [Deolito V. Vistar Jr., *Cross-and-Resurrection*, p. 249]

d. Thomas demands Tangible Physical Proof

- “It’s important to recognize that Jesus does not disdain Thomas’ need for empirical verification.” –Lidija Novakovic
- “It is understandable for Thomas to ask for tangible & solid evidence before he believes something contrary to knowledge & experience. Moreover, the disciples believe in Jesus not because of Mary’s account but because, they too, see the risen Jesus. In John, most of these characters who believe in Jesus have a physical encounter with Jesus. Thus, *it is unfair*, as some scholars suggest, *to see Thomas... negatively because he should have believed the words of the disciples* rather than demanded further proof. His request to touch Jesus is understandable... ‘Thomas’ stress on the incarnate presence of the Lord, & his conviction that the wounds are intrinsic to that reality, are signs of

awareness and insight. This makes his desire to see & touch... comprehensible.' (D. Lee)." [Sunny K-H. Wang, *Sense Perception & Testimony in... John*, p. 194]

- "Thomas' request for physical or tangible evidence is often regarded unfavorably. The other disciples were only granted sight of Jesus' wounds & they believed, yet Thomas wants both to see & touch them. [Some say]...Thomas is 'interested in probing the miraculous as such.' [But,] other scholars... argue that John is presenting Thomas' response as sincere & frank, for anyone in that situation would hope to see *Jesus with his own eyes*, &... might want to *touch his wound* ... as the surest means of *ascertaining the reality*... but also because that *was the only way to verify that Jesus indeed had been resurrected in his physical body*." [Sunny K-H. Wang, *cit.*, p. 194]
- "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples..." (20:30a) "What about these 'many other signs'? First, *the eyewitness testimony of the disciples is stressed*... ('in the presence of his disciples'). In context, the immediate connection... is with the *appearances of the risen Lord to the disciples recounted in Jn. 20* ... Now the Evangelist talks about many other [signs, which] as well as the... post-resurrection appearances, were all performed in the presence of the disciples... Jesus' summative comment in 15:27 ... [tells the disciples] 'You are... to testify because *you have been with me from the beginning*'." [Deolito V. Vistar Jr., *Cross-&-Resurrection*, p. 44]
- "Just as the [signs written' (20:31)] have the purpose of helping the readers to believe, so also the *establishing of Jesus' vicarious death through the veracious [trustworthy] eyewitness testimony of the beloved disciple [(19:35) & other disciples] has the same purpose*." [D. V. Vistar Jr., *cit.*, p. 217]

#### e. Thomas wants the same experience as his peers

a. Accepting (believing) his fellow-disciples' testimony would get Thomas saved; it doesn't qualify him as eyewitness

b. The Eyewitness' Sensory Experiences:

- "At a basic level the risen Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene as a [sign] demonstrates the reality that *the Crucified One is now the Risen One*. It took no less than this [sign] for Mary Magdalene to realize that her dead master is now alive again." [D. V. Vistar Jr., *cit.*, p. 241]
- That evening "Jesus shows to his disciples... the wounds (or scars) on his hands & side [20:20a]. These wounds (or scars) serve as 'identity tokens' that enable the disciples to realize that the One... in their midst is not a ghost, but the Lord himself. Now... therest of the disciples (except Thomas) have seen the Lord." [Vistar, *cit.*, p. 244]
- "Jesus showing his wounds undoubtedly serves as evidence... that *he is in fact the same Jesus* who was crucified & that he has therefore been raised bodily." [Craig Keener, *John*, 1202]
- "Mary's recognition comes by a combination of seeing, hearing, & touching... A few verses later... Jesus appears to the disciples in hiding (20:19–21). He speaks to them, then shows them his wounds. Only when they have both heard & seen do the disciples get it: 'Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.' Interestingly, Thomas, who is not there with them, demands to see & touch Jesus: 'unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, & put my finger in the mark of the nails & my hand in his side, I will not believe' (20:25) ..." [Claudia Setzer, *"This Voice has Come for Your Sake,"* JRFM (2016) p. 41]

c. Thomas wants the same Experience

- "*Thomas simply demands what the others got* – a first-hand experience of the risen Jesus, but he does so with striking bluntness & drastic clarity." [Benjamin Schliesser, *Op. cit.*, p. 72]
- "*Thomas' words cannot be taken negatively* as a doubt of Jesus' resurrection, as many interpret today... The [other] disciples could believe only after seeing Jesus alive (20:20). *Thomas... wanted to experience the truth personally* by seeing the risen Jesus & touching his wounds before he would believe." [Jey J. Kanagaraj, *Jn.*, p. 201]

d. Thomas is not an Outlier

- "Thomas is not an outlier from the rest of the disciples; anything of which he's guilty, so too are the others. They misunderstand just as much as he does &, most critically of all, do not believe in the resurrection until they are reassured by the very same physical proof that [Thomas] requested. The qualities that besmirch Thomas' reputation are also reflected in the rest of the disciples." [J. David Woodington, *Dubious Disciples*, p. 148]

e. Thomas becomes an eyewitness

- "It took the [sign] of the risen Lord's actual appearance & the display of the marks of the crucifixion before Thomas reached the height of Christological faith. In the end, *Thomas joins the ranks of the rest of the disciples who witnessed the risen Lord face to face, & as such became [eye-]witnesses to others concerning him who was crucified but now is alive*." [Deolito V. Vistar Jr., *Op. cit.*, p. 251]

#### 4. Thomas at the Turning Point

## a. The Turning Point

- The timing of Jesus' appearance is significant: "The temporal scene [is] one week later [after the resurrection day](20:26). It places the scene in a *time following the giving of the Spirit*, which occurred during the meeting between Jesus and the other disciples (20:22-23). The presence of the Spirit marks a clear turning point in theological history. The Spirit will usher in a new era of Christian life, teaching Jesus' disciples in his absence & enabling them to understand things that they could not previously (14:15-20, [etc.]). Even though only a few days passed, the spiritual situation in which Thomas encounters Jesus is distinct." [J. David Woodington, *Dubious Disciples*, p. 167]

## b. 40-day Transition between Jesus' Resurrection &amp; His Ascension

- Jesus "was taken up, after he'd given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles... After he had suffered, he...presented himself alive...by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a *period of 40 days*" (Acts 1:2-3)
- "In Luke's view the resurrection & the ascension don't coincide temporally. *There's a transition period... 40 days in In this transition period Jesus shows himself*." [S Van Tilborg, *Jesus' Appearances & Disappearances*, p. 195]
- Jesus told Mary Magdalene "Don't cling to me, since *I have not yet ascended* to the Father. But... tell [my brothers] that *I'm ascending* to my Father & your Father..." (Jn. 20:17)
- "On the surface, there's a contradiction between 'I haven't yet ascended' (20:17a) & 'I am ascending' (20:17b). The best solution is to take Jesus' ascension in 2 parts. He ascended to his Father at his resurrection, but the Ascension wouldn't culminate until his physical ascension [after] his 40 days of appearances... This was a *time of transition*... The disciples now find themselves in a *transition period*... They cannot revert to their familiar pattern of relating to their master during his earthly ministry; yet... they cannot fully grasp...the new spiritual relationship with their Lord...mediated to them by the Holy Spirit... *This was a crucial transition time*." [Philip Comfort, *John*, p. 288]

## c. The Spirit-Paraclete replacing Jesus' Physical Presence

- The scenario: "In a time when the events of Easter are in the past and the *Lord's presence on the earth has been replaced by the Spirit*... a devotee of Christ [Thomas] receives testimony about the resurrection from the historical disciples of Jesus. This situation is strikingly reminiscent of the one faced by the readers of John. Having not [yet] seen the risen Lord himself, Thomas hears the resurrection proclaimed [by eyewitnesses]." [Woodington, p. 167]

## d. From Believing based on Jesus' Appearances to Believing Eyewitness Testimony

- Jn.20:27 "For the [first] apostolic generation, access to Jesus through a historical, physical encounter was still possible: they could see him, hear him, & touch him. The following generation had to accept the proclamation of the gospel of the resurrection. Thomas represents the transition from the faith of the apostles to the faith of the post-apostolic community." [Johannes Beutler, *John*, p. 515]
- "In Jn. 20:24-29, the principal point of the dramatic scene is undoubtedly the *reality of the Resurrection of Jesus*. The Jesus who was crucified is the risen Lord. Thomas who is invited...to be [Gk.] pistos, faithful, represents the disciples who... believe in the risen Jesus. He represents the believing disciple who believes because of the appearances of the risen Jesus... What is central to the narrative is that Jesus is truly risen & that Thomas truly believes: his faith is resurrection faith." [Raymond F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written*, p. 37]

## e. From the Commissioning of Eyewitnesses to Responding to Witnesses' Proclamation

- "Thomas' failure...[is] a failure to believe the report of the other disciples, rather than a direct failure to believe Jesus. Heretofore [i.e., up to this point] the Gospel has given no indication that the words of the disciples must be believed... However, the post-resurrection context gives a new place to the witness of the disciples which renders Thomas' rejection a serious problem." [Christopher Seglenieks, "Thomas the (Un)Faithful: ??????? in John 20:27," JSNT, Vol. 45.2 (2022) p.]

## f. Thomas at the Turning Point

- "Jesus said 'Because you've seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who haven't seen & yet believe' (20:29)
- "With the [Blessing] 'Blessed are those who have not seen & yet believe' (Jn. 20:29), John... differentiates pre-Easter & post-Easter 'seeing': the blessing is pronounced on later generations that no longer can come to faith through the direct seeing of the Risen One. The reality that already existed in the time of the gospel writer [~90 AD] is exemplified in the story of Thomas: [20:29b] one believes on

the basis of the eyewitness *tradition handed on in the church [community]*, without seeing the Risen One miraculously and [20:29a] directly as Thomas saw him. *The different temporal [time] perspectives are decisive* for interpreting the Thomas [episode]. While 20:24-29a report an event...only possible at the time of the [appearances] of the Risen One in the first generation of [eyewitness] disciples, 20:29b directs the gaze into the future. 20:29b...formulates what was already the case for the following generations, in contrast to the eyewitnesses. But this [original] seeing provided the foundation for the Johannine tradition; it's important for the [proclamation] of the Johannine church." [U. Schnelle, *Theology of the NT*, 720]

g. From Believing 1st-Person Eyewitness testimony to believing their Written Testimony (20:31)

- a. "These [signs] are written [in this book] so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, &...by believing you may have life in his name. (20:24-31)
- b. "Decades after these [events]...the last [original] disciple died [Jn. 21:22-23]. Never again on earth would physical eyes [& hands] certify Jesus' [physical Risen] presence...[Thereafter,] 'Faith comes by hearing' (Rom. 10:17) ... Verification after the time of Thomas [& Co.] depends upon hearing (or seeing on scrolls or books)." [DL. Bartlett, *Feasting on the Word*, Vol. 6, p. 398]

## 5. The Role as an Eyewitness

a. Two kinds of Believers — those who've seen & those who haven't (Jn. 17:9, 20; 20:29)

- "I pray for...those you've given me... I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word." (Jn. 17:9, 20) Note: After prayer for himself, Jesus prays for [1.] his own disciples, & [2.] for later believers.
- "Jesus said 'Because you've seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who haven't seen & yet believe' (20:29)
- "The 4th Gospel knows *two kinds of believers*: [1.] those who have seen and believe (eyewitnesses) and [2.] those who have not seen and yet believe (non-eyewitnesses) (20:29-31). It also knows of the latter coming to faith by means of the former [eyewitnesses] (Jn. 17:20-21, 23)." [Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John*, p. 16]
- "The blessing...[in] 20:29 is predicated upon the fact that *Jesus' own disciples*, including Mary Magdalene, *have seen* the risen Jesus & *believed* in him. In every case their seeing results in belief." [D. Moody Smith, *John*, 384]

b. Thomas' Second Chance

- "On the first Easter Sunday when Jesus appeared to his disciples behind locked doors. Thomas was absent... Jesus gives Thomas *a second chance a week later* & Thomas responds, 'My Lord & my God!'" —James F. Korthals
- "*Through the 'second chance' (20:24-29) offered to him [by Jesus], Thomas is also authorized for mission* [as were the other disciples] (see 20:19-23). *He thus belongs to the same category* as Peter & Nathaniel [etc.] —*eyewitnesses* and messengers of the Risen One... Because of the experiences which Thomas has...he is being changed." [Thomas Popp, *Thomas*, in D. Hunt (ed.) *Character Studies in the 4th Gospel*, pp. 523-4]

c. Thomas as an Eyewitness

- a. Eyewitness Verification: "Thomas... not only sees the wounds, but is invited to touch them in order to experience the identity of the Crucified & Risen One by means of physical verification (20:24-9)." [B. Schliesser, *Op. cit.*, p. 88] In John, "the [beloved] disciple, &... *finally Thomas, can confirm with their own eyes that the body of the risen Jesus is identical with that of the earthly & crucified Jesus*... In John 20 *kurios* ['Lord'] serves to designate the Risen One, climaxing in the confession of Thomas, 'My Lord & my God' (20:28)...*Kurios* ['Lord'] was...used in...the Johannine community as a specific designation for the risen Lord." [U. Schnelle, *Theology of the NT*, pp. 678, 691]

d. John's Eyewitness Testimony—we've 'heard' & 'seen' & 'touched' (1 Jn. 1:1-2)

- a. "What was from the beginning, what *we've heard, what we've seen*...what we've *observed & touched* with our hands, concerning the word of life...we've *seen it & we testify & declare* to you the eternal life" (1 Jn. 1:1-2 CSB)
- b. "Christ is the Word of Life. He was from the beginning. *We've heard Him &...seen Him with our own eyes. We've looked at Him & put our hands on Him.*" (1 John 1:1 NLV: New Life Version)
- c. "The author of 1 John is claiming that his own hands have touched Jesus of Nazareth & his own eyes & ears have seen & heard what Jesus said & did...a claim to eyewitness testimony." [TJ. Anderson, *Why Believe*, ]
- d. "That which was from the beginning was '*heard*' & '*seen*' & '*touched*' (1 Jn. 1:1a). There's an emphasis here on the eyewitness testimony of John & those he represents ( ... 'we'). This is consistent with John's Gospel [references] to

the firsthand nature of the testimony recounted (e.g. 19:35; 20:30; 21:24). Eyewitness testimony – *hearing, seeing, touching* – underscores the historical & physical realities ...that John will impress on his readers [of 1 John].” [Constantine R. Campbell, 1, 2, & 3 *John*, p. 24]

- e. “What exactly does John refer to ...? Jn. 19:35 [is] the appeal to eyewitness testimony [of] Jesus’ crucifixion. Jn. 20:30 refers to the disciples’ witness of ‘many other signs’ that Jesus performed – ‘other’ (*alla*) [of the same kind vs *hetero*] is clearly used in distinction from the great sign just recorded – the appearance of the resurrected Jesus before Thomas (20:24-29). Note the physical nature of that incident, as Jesus invites Thomas to touch him (20:27). This correlates with the physical aspect of the testimony of 1 Jn. 1:1-3. The explicit references to eyewitness testimony in John’s Gospel refer directly to Jesus’ death &, more commonly, resurrection... These events may constitute part of the scope of 1 John. 1:1-” [CR. Campbell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 24-25]
- f. “Jensen ...demonstrat[es] several *links to the resurrection accounts of John 20-21*...He makes a compelling case that ‘the resurrected incarnate Christ’ is in view here [1 Jn. 1:1-3]; thus, John is affirming *both* the incarnate humanity of Christ as *well as* his bodily resurrection from the dead.” [CR. Campbell, *Op. cit.*, p. 25]

## 6. Was Thomas Justified in Demanding Physical Proof?

- o “*Jesus does not censure Thomas...*but instead makes available to him exactly what he needs for faith.” –Gail O’Day
  - o “The risen Jesus *completely accepts Thomas’ demands of proof*, so that his invitation [20:27] repeats exactly the language of finger and nails and hand and side that Thomas himself used [20:25].” –Ian Paul
- a. Jesus promised the disciples they would (physically) see him again (Jn. 16:16-22)
- <sup>16</sup> “*In a little while, you will no longer see me; again in a little while, you will see me.*”
  - <sup>17</sup> Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this he’s telling us: ‘*In a little while, you will not see me; again in a little while, you will see me,*’ & ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” <sup>18</sup> They said, “What is this he is saying, ‘In a little while’? We don’t know what he’s talking about.” <sup>19</sup> “Jesus... said, ‘Are you asking... about what I said, ‘*In a little while, you will not see me; again in a little while, you will see me?*’” <sup>20</sup> Truly I tell you, you will weep & mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy... <sup>22</sup> So you also have sorrow now. But *I will see you again*. Your hearts will rejoice, & no one will take away your joy from you. (16:16-22)
  - “The coming of Jesus in Jn. 16:20-22 refers to Jesus’ physical manifestation to the disciples after his resurrection...Seeing him when he reappears physically at the resurrection (16:16-22) i.e., physically.” [Wang, *Op. cit.*, p. 188]
  - “In the resurrection narrative (Jn. 20), the verbal form of ‘sight’ occurs 13 times. This is remarkable in a short chapter... Mary after seeing the risen Jesus, goes & says to the disciples: ‘*I’ve seen the Lord*’ (20:18) ... Similarly, after the disciples see Jesus, they tell Thomas, ‘*We’ve seen the Lord*’ (20:25). They also testify to Jesus’ resurrection. Thomas seeks to touch the body of Jesus & Jesus allows him to do so... Whether or not Thomas touches, the narrator makes clear that touch was possible.” [Sunny K-H. Wang, *cit.*, p. 31]
- b. Jesus responds to individual needs: e.g. Thomas
- a. In the NT...Jesus ministers to many individuals, responding to each one’s needs...After his resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples with concern for them also as individuals... *g., Thomas.*” [Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom*, p. 146]
  - b. “Jesus “does not... cast off weak believers, but bears with their weakness, proceeds gently...with them, & does not scold them... He demonstrates this in the case of” [Martin Luther in CB. Brown (ed.) *John 13-21*, p. 204]
- c. Confirmed by John’s Eyewitness Testimony (1 Jn. 1:1-4)
- “In these verses [Jn. 16:20-24], Jesus’ death & resurrection are on view –his death will mean that his disciples do not see him for a while & will result in their grief, & his resurrection will lead to the disciples seeing Jesus again & result in their complete joy. Jn. 16:24 is of special interest...because it is the exact same form [*that your joy may be complete/full*] as the variant reading of 1 Jn. 1:4... It may have been made under the influence of Jn. 16:24. If this is the case...1 John 1:4 was explicitly understood ... to be about the resurrection of the incarnate Christ.” [Matthew D. Jensen, *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ*, p. 68]
  - “John talks about diverse means of arriving at... faith. Some come to faith through seeing the signs of Jesus (2:11, 23; 11:45) while others come to faith through hearing his words (4:41, 53; 8:30). *As long as they can lead someone to believe in Jesus*, whether through seeing, hearing, touching or any



combination of these, *all means are considered equal*. Thus, John's imagery of touch should not be read negatively." [Sunny K-H. Wang, *Sense Perception & Testimony in... John*, p. 194]

- 'The referent of... 1 Jn. 1:1 is the resurrected incarnate Christ... This understanding is truer to John's Gospel ... [whose] themes find their culmination in John 20-21... *The theme of Jesus' divinity (Jn. 1:1-3) ... is affirmed... by Thomas (20:28) ... [at] the climax of John's Gospel in chapters 20-21.*" [Matthew D. Jensen, *Op. cit.*, p. 64]

## 7. The Meaning of ??????? [Pistos] in 20:27 – "Don't be unfaithful [Apostos], be faithful [Pistos]"

### a. The Meaning of ??????? [Pistos]

- "God is faithful [Pistos]; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9)
- "His master said, 'Well done, good & faithful [Pistos] servant! You were faithful [Pistos] over a few things; I'll put you in charge of many things...'" (Matt. 25:21, 23)
- "Who... is the faithful [Pistos]... manager... [who] will... give [the servants] their food at the proper time? ... [But, if not, the Master will] assign him a place with the unfaithful [Apostos]." (Luke 12:42, 46)
- Jn. 20:27 "is the only use of the adjective ??????? [pistos] in John's Gospel, & the... [phrase] is used to indicate the idea of *being faithful* along with ... the sense of '*show yourself*'... This is not a call to believe, but for Thomas to demonstrate that he believes." [Christopher Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief...*, p. 98]
- "While Jn. 20:27 has often been read in terms of cognitive belief, *in general use ??????? [pistos] primarily denotes loyalty or faithfulness*. It can highlight either the internal characteristic of loyalty or the actions which constitute such loyalty." [Chris. Seglenieks, *cit.*, p. ]
- "???????? [pistos] ... often focuses on *active faithfulness*. The active emphasis is prominent in... sources closest to the Gospel of John, in the Letters of John, Revelation, & the Synoptic Gospels." [C. Seglenieks, *Op. cit.*, p. ]

### b. Jesus Challenges Thomas to be Faithful

- From "the future focus of 20:27, it's evident that *Jesus is not condemning Thomas' refusal to believe* in 20:25, but rather offering a challenge to respond rightly to... the risen Jesus. It is what follows 20:27 that will determine whether Thomas is faithful or not..." [Chris. Seglenieks, *cit.*, p. ]
- "A better rendering of ... [20:27b] would be "*Don't start being unfaithful, be faithful!*" Rather than 'doubting Thomas', we ought to remember 'faithful Thomas,' who took up his commission as a witness." –Chris. Seglenieks
- "By expressing... doubt about the [disciples'] report... *Thomas effectively rejects his part in this commission*. Where previously skepticism with regard to the claims of other disciples was not of central importance, now trust is vital in order to sustain a chain of witnesses that will continue to bear witness. The problem in 20:27 is more than one of simply Thomas' personal belief or lack thereof. *Thomas' failure to believe [the disciples' report] entails an additional [potential] failure to bear witness* to the risen Lord, with the effect that others would not be able to believe. *For Thomas to fail to act as a witness would make him unfaithful.*" [C. Seglenieks, *cit.*, p. ]

### c. Thomas as a Faithful Witness – "My Lord & My God"

- Jesus told Thomas, '*Don't be unfaithful, be faithful.*' Thomas responded to him, "My Lord & my God!" (20:27-28)
- "The narrative immediately presents [Thomas] fulfilling this role [of witness]. In 20:28, Thomas responds to Jesus with the confession 'My Lord & my God'. While this might be understood as a reaffirmation of Thomas' belief in Jesus, that belief has never been explicitly questioned. The significance of Thomas' confession lies in the fact that he is the first & only character to affirm the divinity of Jesus... Only here is [Jesus'] divine identity recognized... The Gospel narrative point[s] to... [Thomas'] confession as a witness to Jesus' divinity." [C. Seglenieks, *Op. cit.*, p. ]

### d. Thomas: from Failure to Faithfulness

- "In Jn. 20:24–29 the primary failure of Thomas is his *failure to accept his role as witness of the risen Jesus*... Thomas' *central role in this scene is as witness* to Jesus as Lord & God... The story of Thomas is to encourage the audience... to not only believe in the risen Lord, but to [faithfully] bear witness to Jesus as does Thomas. Translations of this verse obscure the active focus of ??????? [pistos]... A better rendering of Jesus' words would be "*Don't start being unfaithful, be faithful!*" Rather than 'doubting Thomas,' we ought to remember 'faithful Thomas,' who took up his commission as a witness." [Chris. Seglenieks, *Op. cit.*, p. ]

### e. Q: Did Thomas receive the Holy Spirit?

- ? "The question concerning when Thomas received the Spirit –... that particularly troubled readers in the early church – receives a subtle explanation. Indeed, 'strangely, when Thomas does come to faith, there is no mention of the Spirit'

(DA. Carson, *John*, p. 654 #66), but there is mention of the symbolic abode of the Spirit ['the side of Jesus, from which blood & water – symbols of the spirit –flow out'] & the invitation to Thomas to grasp it. Based on the alleged 'aporia' that 'it is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would have been conferred on all the disciples except Thomas'. [Benjamin Schliesser, *Op. cit.*, p. 87 #78]

f. Jesus' Word for the Future: Seeing & Believing/Not Seeing & Believing (20:29)

- a. Jesus: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen & yet believe.' (20:29)
- b. "After taking away the assumed advantage of those who were eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus, The Gospel of John proceeds to take away the assumed *disadvantage* of those who only hear second hand. The fact that seeing does not always lead to believing [e.g. Mary M. only believes when she hears her name] is in John followed by the tantalizing prospect that believing can happen without seeing first- To Thomas...Jesus gave preference to those who believe based on the testimony of those who did see first-hand. (Jn. 20:29) ...The Gospel of John does not consider the one who has not seen to be at a disadvantage... On the terms of John, seeing first-hand is not a prerequisite for believing." [Sigve K. Tonstad, *God of Sense & Traditions of Non-Sense*, p. 63]

g. John's Word for the Future (20:30-31)

- "Jesus performed many other signs [before] his disciples that aren't written in this book. But these are written so...you may believe...Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, &...by believing you may have life in his name. (20:30-1)
- "One strong possibility for why the author of John's Gospel chose the written medium ['this book'] for his authoritative account of Jesus was precisely that *he was aware of other [Synoptic?] accounts of Jesus that had successfully harnessed the written medium & established themselves...* in early Christianity, *accounts with which he intended to compete ...[&] which he considered inferior to the Gospel of John.*" [Chris Keith, "Competitive Textualization of the Jesus Tradition in John 20:30–31 & 21:24–25," *CBQ*, Vol. 78.2 (2016) pp. 321–37]