

# Seeing is Believing 2: the Doubting Disciple

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I wonder if you were to put yourself on a scale from zero to 10, with zero being extremely gullible and 10 being extremely cynical, where would you put yourself on that scale?

Okay, zero, you believe everything that you're told without question, and 10, you don't trust anything that you hear. Okay, so those are extremes.

If you are a zero or a 10, I'd love to meet you. I imagine most of us are somewhere in between. I can think of times when I've done both, times when I've been too easily taken in, and times when I've been too slow to accept what I've been told.

I think on the whole, probably as I've gotten older, I've gone up the scale towards the more cynical end. Maybe say I was a seven today, but what about you? How easy do you find it to believe what you hear?

Well, today, John wants to introduce us to somebody in history who was a 10 on the scale, a full-on skeptic if ever there was one.

[ 1 : 15 ] So much so, in fact, he's been given a nickname that has stuck for the last 2,000 years, Doubting Thomas. Now, like most nicknames, it doesn't tell the whole story, but it does get to the heart of what sticks out to us, his defining characteristic, that he was slow to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead.

That's where we are in John's Gospel this week. If you're just dropping in, Jesus was crucified. He died. He was buried. But on the third day after he died, his tomb was found empty, and his body wasn't there.

And then he began to be seen outside his tomb. Mary turned around and laid eyes on Jesus and heard his voice.

And Jesus sent her to tell the others what she'd seen and heard. So she ran back and said, I have seen the Lord. Now, if you had been in that room and Mary had burst in and said those words, well, what would you have thought that she had seen Jesus?

You knew you'd seen him die and be buried. Here is Mary saying he's back, he's breathing, he's speaking, he's living. I suspect many of us would have struggled to believe that.

[ 2 : 41 ] No one did at first. But like I said last Sunday, if you are not yet convinced of that, well, this Sunday is to help you.

Okay, so if that's you today, you've come with doubts. We're so glad that you are here. And come and meet this man then who refused to believe what he heard at first, but he was convinced.

He then had his doubts settled and came to believe by what then he saw and touched for himself.

Because Jesus left Thomas and he leaves us in no doubt that he is indeed risen from the dead.

Seeing is believing. It is what these guys saw that changed their lives and has continued to change lives and change the world to this very day.

So what changed then when they laid eyes on him? Well, firstly, we're going to think about how seeing Jesus back from the dead turned their fear into joy. That's where we find the first disciples that day, isn't it?

[ 3 : 53 ] In verse 19, huddled together in the room with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. They are hiding in fear. Now, that fear is understandable in a way, isn't it?

The Jewish leaders were the ones who had had Jesus put to death. And so, in a way, it's logical. If Jesus is dead, then they would probably be next.

So that's where they are hiding in fear. But, what do you notice about when this is? Okay, just glance down at verse 19.

When are they hiding in fear? On the evening of that first day of the week. Okay, interesting.

Because what had happened that very morning on that day?

Well, Mary had come with the news from Jesus' tomb. I have seen the Lord. So, isn't that strange? Does that seem strange to you? That morning, they'd heard the wonderful news that Jesus is back from the dead.

[ 4 : 54 ] But by the evening, they are still hiding out of fear of his enemies. Something does not add up, does it? See, if Jesus was dead, their fear would be irrational.

But if Jesus is alive, well, then their fear is irrational. Because if Jesus was no longer dead, then the ones that they feared clearly had no power over their Lord.

So, what is missing in this equation? Well, they have not put two and two together, have they? They have received the news, but they haven't believed the news.

Now, we're not told what they said to Mary when she got back. We're not told how Mary responded. But I imagine that their fear was pretty underwhelming and pretty disappointing for somebody who had just seen and spoken with the risen Jesus.

Because they were slow to believe what Mary told them. And remember, if we've forgotten who this is, the 12 guys who've been with Jesus the whole time.

[ 6 : 02 ] These are the 12 apostles. And they found the news of the resurrection hard to believe. Okay, so if that's you today, you are in good company.

But here is the game changer. As they sat there with the doors locked, pacing back and forth, sweating, worrying, who should come into the room?

But Jesus himself. Jesus came, stood among them and said, peace be with ye. Peace be with ye. Now, we'll come back to those words.

But if you've had your coffee this morning and you're feeling perky, you may be wondering, well, how did Jesus get in if the doors are locked?

How does that work? Are we kind of supposed to imagine him as some sort of ghost or spirit who can walk through walls? You know, is his body not somehow real?

[ 7 : 02 ] Well, C.S. Lewis, of all people, really helps us with this. To us, he said, a brick wall is just about as solid as it gets. So instinctively, we assume that Jesus' resurrection body must be kind of lighter or less real than the walls of the room.

A bit like a ghost. But really, said C.S. Lewis, it's the other way around. It's really that Christ's resurrection body is denser and heavier and more real than the wall.

And so he puts it like this. It's less like Jesus walking through the wall as if he were a ghost and more like if you or I were to walk through mist or fog.

That is how the risen Christ walks through walls, says C.S. Lewis, because the old creation, the world as it is, has less weight and less substance than his resurrected new creation body.

His is the real body, which still, notice, carries the wounds and the scars of his death on the cross. He showed them his hands and his side.

[ 8 : 16 ] His hands, where the physical nails had pierced through the bone and flesh and muscle, his side. Where the spear had punctured his skin and the water and blood had flown out.

This is no ghost. It is the body of a man who once was dead on a cross and now has been raised. It is the same body, now gloriously transformed.

And it was seeing him, his body, his wounds, that changed everything for these disciples. If you just have a look there at the end of verse 20, doesn't this warm your heart?

The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Moments ago, remember, they were huddling in fear of the threats of the outside world.

But now Jesus had come and stood with them. And they know it is him. And they have heard his voice and seen his scars. Now they believe. And their fear has drained away.

[ 9 : 26 ] And it has been replaced with sheer overwhelming joy. Normally, we would read something there like they rejoiced. But it doesn't say that.

It's the same verb. But literally, in Greek, it says that they were rejoiced. They are the passive recipients of the joy. It's not like they kind of dredge up some joy out of their hearts to come and show Jesus.

It is joy that floods out of Jesus and crashes over their hearts like a tsunami. They were overjoyed when he stood with them.

And they saw him and believed in him. And this is actually one of the most convincing signs that Jesus really was back from the dead.

This change that happened in the people who claimed to have seen him. Of all things, this is surely the hardest thing to believe.

[10:26] That 12 men who watched the one on whom all their hopes hung for this life and the life to come. They had seen him die. They hid in fear.

And then after a few days in which nothing happened, they burst back out into the world full of joy and telling people that Jesus was alive. Nobody denies that that change did happen.

That the 12 finished Friday in fear and ended Sunday with joy. That's how Christianity, how the church was born. So what changed in between?

Well, surely the least convincing answer is nothing. Surely the most credible answer is the one that they give. In verse 25, we have seen the Lord.

If that's not the answer, I'd love to hear if you think you have a better one. Friends, that is the change Jesus still makes in us when he comes to us with peace.

[11:29] When we have confidence in him personally as our risen and living Lord. We are overjoyed. He sets our hearts at rest.

He comes to us speaking peace. And he can do that because he is back from the dead and died to bring peace with God.

He died to take away our sin, our punishment. He turned away God's wrath from us on the cross. So that in his risen life, he can come and hold out that peace with God to us.

Through his saving death. And is it any surprise if Jesus came to them in that room, speaking peace to them? That that is what those guys gave the rest of their lives to from that day onwards. That is what verse 23 tells us. That Jesus then sent them out in the power of the Spirit to proclaim forgiveness of sins to the world.

[12:31] Just as, he says, the Father had sent him into the world in the power of the Spirit to secure the forgiveness of their sins. And so in the final equation, as one writer puts it, that kind of difficult word in verse, he says, Well, our forgiveness or unforgiveness is simply the result of preaching the gospel.

We have peace with God when we believe the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And so if you today no longer want to be in fear of the world, but instead be one who goes out into the world announcing forgiveness of sins, well, see what those guys saw and believe what they believe, that Jesus is back, that he had died for sin, and that he is risen again.

He turns our fear into joy. And secondly, he turns doubt to belief. Notice that. Because in God's providence, there was one disciple who wasn't in the room that day.

Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. And so, as it turns out, the very first person to hear the apostles' testimony to the resurrection of Jesus is another apostle, Thomas.

The other disciples said to him, We've seen the Lord. Now, here comes this great wave of joy, okay, flooding towards Thomas, the announcement that Jesus is back.

[14:07] But instead of filling Thomas, it crashes against his heart as if it were a flood barrier. This man is not overjoyed. No, in fact, we see he doesn't even believe that it's true.

He is so cynical, isn't he? He sets out the precise criteria that it would take him to be convinced. I wonder, what would it take for you to be convinced?

If you are not, do you have a criteria? What are you waiting for Jesus to show you before you will believe? Well, Thomas' list is a very tall order.

Look with me at the second half of verse 25, where he says famously, If I don't have my finger in the actual holes of Jesus' actual hands, I'm not buying it, he says.

Now, that is so specific. You could almost wonder, couldn't you, if he was completely serious? Does he really think he's going to get the chance to do that?

[15:25] People do that, don't they, sometimes? If God doesn't give me this specific sign, if he doesn't show himself to me in these certain ways, then I am not going to believe.

And you have to wonder how committed that person really is to finding out really whether God is there and who he is, if they insist that he has to pass such a specific test that they have set for him. It's not a good way to come to God saying, Unless you do X, Y, and Z things for me. You just kind of put our terms and conditions on him.

Surely, if we want to know God as he is, we will let him set the conditions. But that is what Thomas is not doing, is he? He's saying, if Jesus doesn't pass the Thomas test, well, Thomas won't believe.

And to be fair, a lot of people would say that the Thomas test is a pretty good test. If I don't touch Jesus' body, well, how do I know it's real?

[16:33] Well, surely that would put to rest the whole question of whether the resurrection has happened. If we could test it with our hands, it would leave no room for doubt. Well, in fact, we are told that somebody has tested.

Because Jesus is called Thomas' bluff. Just have a read for me from verse 26. A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came, 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. I'll sit your test, says Jesus. Touch me and see. Now, if we just pause for a minute. Did Jesus have to do that? Did Jesus have to come?

[17:36] The rest of the apostles were convinced. They had seen, hadn't they? They'd spread the word. They'd told Thomas. Well, wouldn't that have been enough? Did Jesus need Thomas on board?

He could have said, couldn't he? Well, Thomas, if that's how you feel, fine. You have set me the Thomas test, but you failed the Jesus test of who really follows Jesus.

And so that has settled then. But Jesus does not say that. Jesus did not have to come to Thomas. But he has chosen Thomas.

And he knows Thomas. And he has loved Thomas. And he went to the cross for Thomas. And he fully intended to send Thomas out with the others to hold out peace and forgiveness in his name.

And so he chooses gently and graciously and tenderly to come again to the twelve. Notice purely for one man's personal benefit.

[18:41] He does the same thing he did the week before. Except he singles out Thomas. Here's my hand. Here's my side.

Touch. Put your finger. Place your hand. Stop doubting. And believe. Friends, does Jesus care about those who doubt him?

Well, if he didn't, then none of us would be here. He cared for doubting Thomas and came to him.

And in fact, he commands Thomas to do what he had requested. Those are commands. Put. See. Reach. Place. Even the last sentence, to put it really woodenly, he says, do not be unbelieving, but believing.

Jesus is ever so gentle, patient, and gracious with us. But friends, when he comes to present himself to us, he doesn't come begging. And he doesn't invite us.

[19:43] He commands us to see and stop doubting and instead to believe. Because in the face of the risen Lord, there is only one right response.

And it is Thomas' response in verse 28. Thomas said, my Lord and my God. Not even Thomas can doubt anymore what he saw and what he touched.

His doubts are turned to belief. And friends, what more can we today ask of Jesus? What further proof could we possibly want from him?

What further test could we set him than this? We thought last week that if we think that we each need to see and touch Jesus personally before we're convinced, well, if we're consistent with that, then we'd also need to personally phone up our politicians to check that what the news report had said was true.

We'd need to personally test the ingredients in our painkillers before we took them. We'd need to personally build the engine of our car before we drove it. Do we do those things?

[20:57] I don't. I hope you don't. If we insisted on doing all that, people would rightly call us paranoid. We don't do those things because we have trusted those who have interviewed our leaders or tested drugs or built engines.

We trust what others have seen and heard and touched every time we do anything in life. And so when John and the other gospel writers write for us that Jesus showed himself to them after he had risen from the dead, that they saw him, spoke to him, that he allowed his body to be touched by them.

We don't need to demand that experience for ourselves. We only need to trust that their report is true, that because they saw and heard and touched Jesus firsthand, we believe that he is risen from the dead and lives.

The fact that he is Lord and God, those two words we find at the heart of these men's faith. They also lie at the heart of Israel's worship through the ages.

Remember here, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. It's the supreme confession of faith. And it is because of what Thomas had seen and touched that he now makes that confession of Jesus.

[ 22 : 26 ] He confesses that he is the one Lord, the one God to whom he owes his life, his love and faith and worship. And friends, that is belief.

It is not a leap in the dark. It is a firm conviction based on what has been seen and touched and heard. That this one, Jesus, is Lord, is God.

And so if you can confess of Jesus in your heart and say with your mouth, my Lord and my God, that your love and life and faith and worship belong to him, that you believe in him, then today you are his disciple.

You are a Christian and you are saved for life forever with God. And that is our final point this morning. Seeing is believing, says John.

And believing is living. Now, some of you won't know and lots of you won't remember that it was this Sunday last year that we started in John's gospel.

[ 23 : 33 ] And next week, we will finish in John for now. And so if you're still wondering, you know, what are we meant to get out of this book?

Okay, now is the time to know and find out. Let's not finish without knowing what we need to get. Because John himself tells us, doesn't he, what we are meant to take from this gospel.

Just have a read verses 30 and 31 with me, where he says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

Why is this gospel in our Bibles? Why have we given most sermons in the past year to studying it together? Well, John says he wrote it so that we might believe that Jesus is who he says he is, and that by believing, gain life.

[ 24 : 40 ] He says it's life in his name. That is the life Jesus came to give. He came and said, I have come to give life in all its fullness. He calls it elsewhere eternal life.

Which, friends, is not simply life after death. It is life with the eternal God that begins the moment we believe and extends all the way through death and into eternity to be right.

With our perfect and full and life-giving creator and savior God, that is the life that Jesus came to give us. And so, friends, if you've not yet, having seen, believed in Jesus, will hear his promise.

This is what we receive when we put our trust in him, eternal life. Again, his resurrection tells us that that belief is not a blind stab in the dark.

And it's not a hope beyond hope that we might get to heaven one day. It is placing our trust in what these guys saw, heard, touched, what they have written and recorded for us in this book, and on that basis, to believe in the one that they saw and heard and touched, Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 58 ] And so, if your trust is not in him today, well, what more could he give? The father gave his son. The son gave his life.

They have given the spirit. He has given and given and given that you might see and believe and have life with him forever. So, will you not confess him today to be your Lord and your God?

And those of us who do know Jesus to be our Lord and our God, well, what does this gospel have to say for us? What has it said this past year? Well, John wrote it for us too.

That we might, by seeing Jesus, continue to believe and continue to grow in our belief as we see him unfolded in all of his glory.

In his death and resurrection and his promise to give eternal life to us. See, the gospel is the way that God preserves us.

[ 26 : 59 ] Such that we persevere by seeing Jesus again and again, renewing our trust in him daily, walking with him in eternal life day in and day out.

And so, even though next Sunday is our last Sunday in this gospel for now, well, don't let the freshness and the glory and the power and beauty of the Lord Jesus ever fade from before your eyes.

Don't let it be lost on you as we draw this book to a close. These men have seen the Lord and they have presented him to us so that we would believe and that we today would have eternal life.

For blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed, says the risen Lord. And that is you today, richly and eternally and forever, blessed in him if he is yours and you are his. Let's pray together. Gracious Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, for sending him into the world.

[ 28 : 21 ] We thank you that he died to secure the forgiveness of our sins if our trust is in him. Father, we thank you for the resurrection and all that it promises us of the life to come.

And how we thank you, Lord Jesus, for your patience and your kindness towards those who doubt. How we thank you that you draw near to give peace to our hearts, to fill us with joy, to take away our fear.

Father, we pray that as you once did that for the twelve and for Thomas, that you would do that for each of us today. That we would go from here full of overwhelming joy because Jesus lives.

Lord, for those who doubt, who are not convinced, who struggle, Lord, with what we have seen and what we have heard, we pray, oh Father, by your spirit, that you would grant faith.

Father, we pray that as a church, as we go on from here, that the risen Lord Jesus would be our life. And that him, all that he is, Lord, would never be lost on us.

[ 29 : 34 ] But Lord, that we would keep coming back to see his glory and to put our trust in him again and again as you refresh us in him. We thank you, Father, for this gospel. And pray, Lord, that you continue to bless it to us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.