

Unit III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News

I'll Believe It when I See It

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 91:1-6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2

PRINT PASSAGES: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2

KEY VERSE

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. (John 20:27, KJV)

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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." (John 20:27, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Assess Thomas's role in the pattern of Christian discipleship that passes from one faithful witness to the next.
- Consider the role of doubting and questioning for one's own faith.
- Practice telling your testimony to others.

*Key Terms

Believe (11:15)—Greek: *pisteuó* (pist-yoo'-o): to have faith in; to entrust.

Called (11:16)—Greek: *legó* (leg'-o): said; named (applied to foreign words translated into Greek); "known as" (NIV).

Dead (11:14)—Greek: *apothnέskó* (ap-othnace'-ko): to be withered, decayed, passed away.

Life (14:6)—Greek: *zów* (dzo-ay'): life active and vigorous, devoted to God, and restored and enriched through fellowship with Christ.

Show (14:8)—Greek: *deiknyo* (dike-noo'-o): to teach, demonstrate, make known.

Truth (14:6)—Greek: *alétheia* (al-ay'-thi-a): divine factuality and ultimate reality revealed to humankind.

Way (14:5)—Greek: *hodos* (hod-os'): road; journey; path.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Traditionally, the authorship of the Gospel of John is attributed to the apostle John, Zebedee's son and one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, confirmed his authorship. According to early church tradition, John wrote his gospel sometime between AD 85 and 95, making it the last of the recognized Gospels to be written. John's gospel is unique because he is the only gospel writer to state his book's purpose: to reveal Jesus as God's eternal Son and the promised Messiah, and to lead readers to saving faith in Jesus by believing in His name (John 20:31). Theologically, John emphasizes Jesus' divinity and explores themes such as light versus darkness, truth, eternal life, belief, glory, and Jesus' "I Am" statements. Most of the content John includes is unique to his gospel, and he highlights Jesus' identity and personal encounters with Him more than just public miracles. Structurally, John begins his gospel with a prologue declaring Jesus as the eternal Word and highlights seven signs or miracles designed to verify Jesus' identity as God's Son. The immediate contexts of this lesson's selected passages are John's seventh sign, Jesus' raising Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:1-44), His teaching on His departure in the Upper Room (John 13:31-14:31), and His appearances to His disciples without and with Thomas (John 20:19-29; 21:1-23).

Introduction

Doubt is the feeling of uncertainty or a lack of confidence about something, which can stem from limited evidence, insecurity, or conflicting information. Although often viewed as negative, philosophy acknowledges that doubt also plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and self-reflection, ultimately leading to questioning that yields a deeper understanding. In the context of Christian faith, doubt refers to feelings of uncertainty about God's character, promises, or involvement in believers' lives. A key question is what causes doubt, especially among Christians. Doubt can arise when prayers go unanswered, during prolonged periods of suffering, or in the face of unchecked injustice. It can also occur from unexpected life crises such as physical or financial losses, the death of loved ones, or other significant life changes. Hypocrisy and "church" hurt caused by spiritual leaders or fellow Christians, along with seasons of "spiritual dryness" that diminish joy in one's faith, also generate doubt. However, experiencing doubt on one's Christian journey can serve as a gateway to developing a deeper and more meaningful faith. It encourages the believer to reexamine long-held assumptions or traditional beliefs, often leading to spiritual growth. There are several biblical examples of believers who experienced doubt, questioned God, but ultimately developed a more solid faith. Notably, the disciple Thomas, often called "Doubting Thomas," shows us that doubt isn't necessarily harmful to faith, but an essential part of its development.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

From Loyalty to Uncertainty

(John 11:14-16; 14:5-8)

KJV

14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

16 Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

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5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?
6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

NIV

14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

15 "and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

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5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7 "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Thomas is mentioned only in passing in the Synoptic Gospels, but John's gospel uniquely provides specific details about him, referencing him in four different passages. The first appears in John 11, just before Jesus performs His final public miracle—the resurrection of Lazarus (verses 7-16). Here, we get a glimpse of Thomas's character that challenges his usual label as "Doubting Thomas." In this scene, Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus has died, not just fallen asleep as they thought. This demonstrates His omniscience and signals that He would use this crisis to strengthen their faith and deepen their understanding of His identity by raising His friend from the dead (verses 14-15). At this point, amid the concern of the other disciples that Jesus' life and theirs could be in danger if He returned to Judea, Thomas, also known as Didymus (meaning "twin"), reveals another side of himself. He urges the other disciples to accompany Jesus back to Judea, even if it means dying with Him (verse 17). Thomas' challenge was an act of heroic loyalty, likely driven by his deep love for Christ, although neither he nor the other disciples fully grasped Christ's mission, as revealed by John's second mention of Thomas in his gospel (John 14).

During the upper room discourse, Jesus' announcement of His return to the Father overwhelms the disciples, making it impossible for them to understand anything He says. Thomas reveals their confusion when Jesus tells them they know the way to the place He is going to prepare for them (John 14:5). Jesus' response, recognized as one of the most profound of His seven "I Am" statements, identifies Himself as the only path to eternal life (verse 6). In verse 7, Jesus continues His reply to Thomas's question by emphasizing that He and the other disciples already know enough to trust in Him, an essential step toward believing without seeing, and that those who have a deep personal relationship with Him are also intimately connected to the Father,

reinforcing His claim to be God and the only means of salvation. However, Philip's question in verse 8, like Thomas's in the previous verse, reveals their desire for certainty in their relationship with God through visible evidence. Yet, they have not grasped His divine nature.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does Jesus challenge Thomas and the other disciples to shift from relying on visible evidence to having faith in Him?

From Doubt to Belief (*John 20:24-29; 21:1-2*)

KJV

- 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.
25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.
26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.
27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.
28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.
29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

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AFTER THESE things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

NIV

- 24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.
25 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."
26 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!"
27 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."
28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

AFTERWARD JESUS appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:

2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

John's third mention of Thomas occurs before Jesus' second post-resurrection appearance to His disciples. The reason Thomas missed His first appearance isn't recorded. However, when they told Thomas they had seen the Lord, he demanded to see physical evidence of Jesus' crucifixion before he would believe Jesus was alive (John 20:24-25). Thomas needed to see to believe, even though he and the other disciples had heard Jesus say He would be crucified and rise again three days later. Eight days after Jesus' first appearance, Thomas was present with the disciples when He miraculously appeared a second time, greeted them, and offered Thomas the opportunity to examine His scars as the physical proof he needed to satisfy his condition for belief. Jesus also commanded him to stop doubting and believe (verses 26-27). However, Thomas must not be condemned for expressing his need for physical proof because honest doubt can be the catalyst that opens the door to a deeper, more profound level of faith in God. Jesus challenged Thomas to shift to the essential requirement for salvation and a relationship with Him—faith alone—and he did (verse 28). This testimony did not come from examining Jesus' scars, but from being in His presence. Thomas' declaration in this verse not only confirmed this transformation but also affirmed Christ's deity, supporting John's overarching purpose for his gospel. Jesus' response in verse 29 underscores His desire to include Thomas and every believer in the blessings that come from believing in Him without having to "see" Him physically. John's acknowledgment of Thomas' presence during Jesus' fourth appearance (John 21:1-2) further indicates his growth from loyal pessimism and honest doubt to confident faith in Christ. Thomas's faith journey highlights that faith and doubt can coexist in believers' lives, but more importantly, that when doubt is honestly expressed to God, He can use it to revitalize and strengthen our faith in Him.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How did Thomas' faith change after seeing Jesus, and why? How does this change highlight the importance of knowing Jesus personally?

A Closing Thought

Thomas's life, often called "Doubting Thomas," as one of Christ's disciples, serves as a meaningful example of the difference between seeing and believing. Instead of criticizing him and condemning his skepticism, John shows us that honest doubt is not necessarily wrong but part of the journey to be sure of what one believes about God and their relationship with Him. When Thomas learned that Jesus had been resurrected, he was not denying his love for Him by asking for visible proof. Still, he was instead seeking solid evidence or confirmation that his faith in Him was justified. Notably, Jesus did not condemn or shame Thomas for his skepticism but graciously engaged him, reminding believers that He will meet them in their doubts and help

them move from seeing to believing, to believing without seeing. Finally, Thomas's personal encounter with the living Christ highlights that visible or oral proofs do not obtain salvation; rather, salvation comes through knowing Him experientially and spiritually by faith alone.

Your Life

Generally, some believers admit they have struggled with doubt in their relationship with God and His promises—seeing to believe. There are people in Scripture who believed only after seeing signs or miracles. But physical evidence does not always equal saving faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus cautions us through Thomas not to rely solely on seeing to believe, but to seek an intimate and obedient relationship with Him by faith, trusting His character and promises even when they are not visible.

Your World!

According to the most recent survey by The Barna Group (barna.com/research/doubt-faith, March 1, 2023), approximately fifty percent of Christians or those with a Christian background report experiencing prolonged doubt regarding their faith at some point in their lives. During these chaotic and uncertain times, these results challenge the collective faith community to let its lifestyle reflect God's character, assisting those experiencing doubt in seeking spiritual encounters with the resurrected. Encourage others around you to meet Christ and make the transition from doubt to declarations of faith in Him without needing to see to believe.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, help us live in a way that encourages those facing struggles with honest doubt to keep trusting the unseen living Savior through faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson challenges believers to assess their preparedness and willingness to speak out in defense of their faith amid opposition and rejection (Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60).

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, August 3	"Witness around the Throne"	(Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17)
TUESDAY, August 4	"Overcoming Witness"	(Revelation 12:7-11)
WEDNESDAY, August 5	"Spirit-filled Witness?"	(Acts 6:7-14)
THURSDAY, August 6	"Grateful Witness"	(Psalm 116:1-9)
FRIDAY, August 7	"Steadfast Witness"	(Psalm 116:10-19)
SATURDAY, August 8	"Courageous Witness"	(Acts 7:1, 44-53)
SUNDAY, August 9	"The Witness of Martyrdom"	(Acts 7:54-60)