

## **Easter: God Cares (John 20:24-29)**

### **Seven Rhythms • March 31, 2024 • [www.isonrise.com](http://www.isonrise.com)**

If you could ask God one question, what would it be? At first, I often respond to this question in a more humorous way. I think of questions like: Why did you make mosquitoes? Or, Did Adam have a belly button? My mind will quickly move to more serious questions like: Why did you let my parents get divorced? Why didn't you stop my dad's overdose? Why did you not preserve the life of our first child? Or, Why didn't you save us from being hurt by church leadership? These questions are expressions of doubt. Doubting God's goodness, his plan, and his love for me.

Doubt may be the reason you are here today, but weren't here last week and will not be here next week. God and the church may have disappointed you in some way. This disappointment has maybe led you to doubt God's existence, his care for you, or the importance of being a part of a church. I'm so thankful that these doubts didn't keep you from being here today. We are honored by your attendance. And, I want to explore with you, if you will permit me, why you may not be here next week. Do you have doubts that keep you from following Jesus and attending church? Maybe you were here last week and you will be here next week, but you still have doubts that have delayed your spiritual growth. What should you do with your doubts? Should you bury them and never bring them up?

In my life, I have had long and difficult seasons of doubt. I have come to realize that those seasons haven't resulted in my faith being weakened but rather my faith being strengthened. I think doubt gets a bad rap. Doubt is not the place where faith dies, but is rather good soil for faith to grow. If doubt has caused you to step away from God and the church or it has slowed your spiritual growth, I want to encourage you to change your perspective on doubt. In our passage today, we will see the resurrected Christ welcome doubt.

**Big Idea: Doubt is a doorway, not a dead end.** Doubt is not the opposite of faith, it is the opportunity for faith. Christianity makes some pretty radical claims. At the center of Christianity is the belief that a dead guy came back to life, claimed to be God, and promised to rescue from death those who believe in him. That is a bold claim! You should doubt it. You should also examine it. It sounds too good to be true, but it's too good not to look into. Doubt should lead you to investigate. Doubt should lead you to explore Christianity not ignore it. Let me show you how Jesus welcomed doubt and let me reassure you that this is a place that welcomes doubt as a doorway to belief.

*John 20:24-25, "24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*

At this point in the gospel of John, Jesus had already been crucified, resurrected, and had appeared to his closest followers, the disciples. Unfortunately, Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, missed out on seeing the resurrected Christ. The other disciples shared with him the experience they had of seeing Jesus alive again. Thomas doesn't believe their testimony and gives a strong expression of his doubt. He said, "I will never believe." This is a great translation of the Greek. John records Thomas using two negative grammatical particles in his statement. John is showing his readers that Thomas was expressing adamant skepticism. I am not surprised by his reaction. Thomas was rightly devastated by the death of Jesus, his beloved teacher. I'm sure that he wanted to believe that he was alive again, but he also did not want to believe in a lie.

Thomas' doubt was not unlike the skepticism of the other disciples, he just happened to be the one highlighted by John. Both Luke and Mark recorded, in their gospels, that the other disciples doubted the reports of others experiencing Jesus' resurrection. Luke noted two separate occasions where the other disciples doubted the news of Jesus being alive again. In verse 20, we see that the disciples were filled with joy after seeing Jesus resurrected themselves. *John 20:20*, <sup>20</sup> *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*" I don't think it is fair to blame Thomas for wanting to have the same experience his fellow disciples had.

We need to view this statement of doubt from Thomas in light of what else we know about him. One moment should not define a person. When we consider the rest of what we know about Thomas, we see that he was a committed disciple with a habit of being honest. In John 11, when Jesus and the disciples were considering the potential dangers that lay ahead of them on their journey, Thomas expressed his commitment to face death in following Jesus' plan. *John 11:16*, <sup>16</sup> *So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" He was loyal to Jesus and willing to suffer the consequences of following him. Thomas wasn't afraid to suffer or afraid to admit his ignorance. He responded with humility and honesty when he was confused by Jesus' teaching in John 14. In that chapter, Jesus was teaching his disciples about the future they would enjoy together in the next life. *John 14:3-6*, <sup>3</sup> *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* <sup>4</sup> *And you know the way to where I am going.* <sup>5</sup> *Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* <sup>6</sup> *Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Thomas wasn't embarrassed to admit he didn't understand what Jesus was saying. When we read about Thomas' statement of doubt in John 20, we need to remember that he was an honest and committed follower. His loyalty to Jesus explains the level of deep sadness he felt after seeing him die. His honesty explains why he was unashamed to express his emotions with the other disciples.

It is also important to note that Thomas wasn't making a statement of adamant and decided unbelief. He didn't say, "I will never believe, no matter what." His doubt had

conditions. He said that he would believe if he had the experience the others had. If he could see and touch the wounds, he would believe. His statement was an expression of strong doubt, but not unwavering unbelief. His doubt was **a doorway, not a dead end**. We need to keep in mind the three conditions that Thomas gave in verse 25 because these conditions will appear again in our passage. He wanted to: 1. See the wounds in his hands, 2. Touch the wounds in his hands, and 3. Touch the wound in his side.

*John 20:26, “<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.”*

Before we get to Jesus’ interaction with Thomas, it is interesting to see how John sets up the next scene in his gospel. He mentioned that the disciples were in a locked room and that Jesus entered that room with a greeting of “peace.” These two elements were highlighted by John when he told the story of when Jesus first met with his disciples. I believe John is trying to remind us of the first encounter and show us that Thomas is about to experience what the others had several days ago.

*John 20:27, “<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”*

Notice how Jesus was not repulsed or offended by Thomas’ doubts. Somehow Jesus knew what Thomas requested even though he was not present when Thomas made his list of conditions known to his fellow disciples. I find it remarkable that Jesus gave Thomas exactly what he asked for point by point. Jesus reversed the order of Thomas’ first two conditions, but he met all three. If doubt is a bad thing, then why does Jesus meet its conditions here? We shouldn’t draw from this passage that Jesus will speak to all of our doubts or answer all of our questions, but we should see that he will meet us in our doubts and answer some of our questions. Jesus saw Thomas’ doubt as **a doorway, not a dead end**. In fact, as strong as Thomas’ statement of doubt was, his declaration of belief is even stronger. John portrays it as the climax of his gospel.

*John 20:28-29, “<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

According to verse 29, seeing was enough for Thomas. He didn’t need to touch the wounds of Jesus. After experiencing what he had longed for, he made a scandalous confession, “My Lord and My God!” This is a shocking statement for a devoted Jew to make. The Greek makes it clear that this address is not directed at God the Father in heaven. It was made to Jesus himself. Thomas was addressing Jesus as Lord and God. He was staring at the face of Jesus and calling him God! This confession reminds John’s readers of the beginning of his gospel where he spoke of Jesus as the “Word,” who was God and with God.

I don’t believe that we should read Jesus’ final statement to Thomas as a harsh rebuke for doubting. I think Jesus is referring to the sequence of how belief will be

grounded after this point. All of the apostles, along with many other first-century followers, believed because they saw. This eye-witness experience was not a bad thing and was used by the apostles as proof for others believing in the resurrection. Jesus spoke of those who believed because of experience and those who believed based on the witness of those who experienced. Jesus didn't say that those who believed without seeing were "more blessed." He didn't set up a negative contrast but rather spoke of the sequence of how belief would arise.

Thomas' doubt was **a doorway, not a dead end**. Jesus wasn't hostile to his doubts, but hospitable. We are committed to being a safe place for your doubts, questions, and hurts. Whether you are following Jesus or not yet following Jesus we welcome your doubts. We don't see doubt as an offense, but an opportunity. Your doubts may be wrapped up in trauma and pain. We would be honored if you allowed us to speak to those doubts. You won't offend us or disappoint us with your doubt.

As a pastoral staff, we want to show you that we are committed to creating a space for Thomas' like followers. We would like the opportunity to hear about some of the questions you have that hinder your belief. We have created a list of several questions that we believe you may resonate with. We would like you to take out the card in the seat back in front of you that has a list of questions on it. As you read through those questions, I would like you to check the ones that you identify with the most. You can also use the QR code to fill out the form on your phone. There is also a blank space to write in a question you have that we didn't think of as a team. Please place these cards in the offering bags when they go by. We will use this information for our summer teaching series. We want to show you that this is a safe place to express your doubts and that we will take our time to thoughtfully speak to those doubts.

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### ----- Life Level Application -----

- 1) **Head:** Read John 3:1-14, 7:45-52, and 19:38-40. How would you describe the faith journey of Nicodemus? Why do you think John would highlight the story of Nicodemus in his gospel? How do you think Nicodemus' story can be helpful to our understanding of our own faith journey and the journey of others?
- 2) **Heart:** Read Luke 24:10-12. How do you think you would have responded to the report of the three women? What emotions do you think Peter was feeling as he ran to the tomb?
- 3) **Hand:** Read 1 John 1:1-4. How does John refer to his eyewitness experience with Jesus? What was John's goal in sharing what he experienced with his readers?
- 4) **Habit:** Are you afraid of expressing your doubts about Christianity? What unanswered questions have caused you to doubt God? What painful experiences have caused you to doubt God? Would you be willing to explore those questions and share those experiences with someone? How can you take the next step in doing that?