

January 28, 2018

# TO LIVE UPON GOD THAT IS INVISIBLE

John 20:24-29

## Doubting Thomas

This is the account where the well-known phrase “doubting Thomas” came from. Thomas *doubted* the other disciple’s testimony of the risen Christ, refusing to believe unless he himself saw, and touched and handled. However, like all of Scripture, there is so much more going on than simply what is on the surface. Thomas was not just doubting. Thomas was a practical atheist at this point. I don’t mean he wasn’t saved. He was. Jesus had told the disciples (minus Judas) in **John 13:10** and **John 15:3** “you are clean”—meaning “I have already made you mine, I have already taken your sins away.” Thomas was saved, and if you miss that, you’ll miss the grace of this passage. Thomas was saved. Yet at *this* moment, Thomas was a practical atheist. He was an unbelieving believer. It’s not just that he doubted. Don’t think of doubt as an isolated thing. When you doubt God, a billion other things are happening. Doubting God says

God your promises are suspect, I can’t trust them.

God your wisdom doesn’t appear wise, I will think for myself.

God your strength doesn’t look strong enough, I will rely on my own.

God your presence isn’t precious, I will seek other company.

God your holiness isn’t beautiful, I will look for something better.

God your righteousness isn’t satisfying, I will pursue my own interests.

God your goodness doesn’t make me happy, I will invent my own.

God your truth isn’t trustworthy, I’ll find something else to believe.

## No such thing as *mere* doubt

Dear congregation, believers say those things. You say those things. That’s what doubt and unbelief says. Thomas was not *merely* doubting. There is

no such thing as *mere* doubt. I grant you that there are different species of doubt, for instance, you my doubt your ability to run five miles, and there is no sin in that. But this doubt of Thomas is the kind that always carries sin. When he doubted, he withheld his confidence. It's *not* that he had no confidence. He did. He had much confidence—much confidence in his own judgment, in himself, but none in Christ. And this is shocking. He heard the reports, not of one, but of five resurrection appearances—the first to Mary Magdalene (**John 20:11-18**), the second to the larger group of women (**Matthew 28:9-10**), the third to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-31**), the fourth to Peter (**Luke 24:34**), and the fifth to the rest of the disciples (**John 20:19-23**). Thomas had additional advantage of hearing Jesus predict his own resurrection (**Matthew 16:21**). It was Jesus who told the disciples on the road to Emmaus that this is what the entire OT pointed to (**Luke 24:26-27**). Even the enemies of Jesus knew this is what He promised (**Matthew 27:63**).

### **The myths that this passage destroys**

All this, and Thomas didn't believe. What does this tell us?<sup>1</sup> I see three myths<sup>2</sup> that this passage utterly destroys. Three myths that believers often absorb as uncontested truth. Three myths that this passage completely unravels.

#### **Myth #1: There is a special class of super saints**

If there were ever a group of people that could be dubbed super saints—saints that we all wish that we could be, saints that seem to have conquered their sin, saints that seem to rise above the problems of this life, it would have been the disciples themselves. And yet, what do we find among them? Peter the

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<sup>1</sup> Unbelief doesn't come from a lack of evidence. It comes from a hardness of heart. Paul says of unbelievers **Ephesians 4:18** "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, *due to their hardness of heart.*"

<sup>2</sup> I originally had five with the other two being 1) Saving faith depends upon man (which is slightly different than Myth #2 because this focuses on the individual's power to believe vs the church's power to engender belief) 2) The faith of contemporary believers is inferior to the faith of the disciples (which is slightly different than Myth #1 because this places the focus on the blessedness of believing without seeing (v.29) vs the common depravity that we share with all saints)

denier and Thomas the doubter. One gets the idea that Jesus picked as His twelve the biggest group of misfits and then put their failures on display purposefully (1 Timothy 1:12-17). Why? Because all that Jesus has to work with is failures. Why do you feel like a failure? Because you are one. That's why Jesus had to come. There are no such thing as super saints. Not in Jesus' twelve disciples, not in celebrity pastors today, not in the Puritans, not in trailblazing missionaries. The only type of people that Jesus saves are broken, sick, and ruined people. And even after they are saved, there is still much remaining sin. There is no special class of super saints. Thomas was just as fallible and broken as you.

### **Myth #2: The church has power to win people to the Lord**

The church preached to Thomas and he didn't believe. That was the testimony that he heard—the apostolic Word, and yet he didn't believe. The church cannot win people to Christ. The church is only an instrument of salvation, not the ultimate cause.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the thinking that says if we just simply adapt our message to the times, or if we adopt the right programs, or if we can just be relevant to the right sub-culture, then more people will feel comfortable with what we are saying—that thinking is all wrong. If the church's message makes unbelievers feel at home, we have ceased to be the church. Thomas had every conceivable advantage. He had walked with Christ, He walked with the apostles, prophecy was unfolding around him, and yet all these were ineffectual. It was only when Christ commanded his soul to believe that unbelief melted away. The church has no power to win people to the Lord. Believer, you were won because you were born of the Spirit of God. **John 1:12-13** “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

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<sup>3</sup> I do not deny that the church is an instrument in the Lord's hands—Paul said “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22) Notice he says means here. His acting, preaching, adapting, traveling, teaching, contending, loving, etc, were means, and not the effectual cause in the salvation of anyone.

### **Myth #3: The believer's sin will chase away Christ**

Thomas' stubborn heart is on display here. Why? Because, dear believer, you have a stubborn heart. You often set conditions upon Christ in order for you to believe Him, to obey Him, to love Him. That's what Thomas was doing. But what does Christ do in this passage? Does He abandon Thomas? Does He throw up His hands and walk away from Him? No He enters Thomas' unbelief and sin, and restores him. Thomas was faithless, Jesus was faithful. **2 Timothy 2:13** "if we are faithless, he remains faithful" Dear believer, your sin, and shame, and brokenness will never chase Jesus away. He did not just save you from your past sins, He has delivered you from all your future sins as well. Not because you show yourself faithful. No, you like Thomas, will fail. You will sin. You will blow it again. You will un-believe, you will doubt, you will be filled with pride again. Your heart will be hardened again. But because He is faithful who promised—because Jesus will not treat you as your sins deserve—because He bore all your sins on that tree, and was raised again for your righteousness, you will never chase Him away. He's with you to the end. To the very end. Believer, your sin, can never chase Christ away.

☆The Failing Believer (v.24-25)

☆The Faithful Christ (v.26-27)

☆The Belief That Is Blessed (v.28-29)

### *The Big Idea...*

Though you often put conditions on Christ demonstrating your faithlessness,  
Jesus never puts conditions on showing Himself faithful

**Two qualifiers:** 1) The "you" here is a believer. 2) This is not to say that Jesus doesn't want our obedience, nor is it to say that he doesn't discipline us when we

disobey. It's to say that the only reason why any believer perseveres in this life is because Jesus is faithful.

## I. The Failing Believer (v.24-25)

### Who is Thomas?

Let's look at v. 24 "Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came." So what do we know about Thomas other than he was one of the twelve disciples? First we know that he had a twin (that's what Didymus means), although the Scripture records nothing about him or her. Secondly, he wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus came the first time.<sup>4</sup> The Scripture doesn't record where he was, but his absence sets up this encounter.

### His personality profile

Now prior to moment we have two other glimpses into Thomas' heart. The first glimpse is in **John 11** [please turn there]. John 11 is where we see Lazarus, one of Jesus' disciples die. Jesus is going travel back near Jerusalem in order to raise him from the dead. The problem was that Jesus was already gaining many enemies in Jerusalem. So when He told the disciples his plan, Thomas speaks up. Look at v.16 So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow

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<sup>4</sup> "Whatever hath been the cause of his absence, we may perceive that he was deprived of that grace and presence of the Lord which the rest, who were met together, found. Whereof we learn this lesson, that whosoever absent themselves from the assembly of the Lord's saints, from these holy meetings, whereinto the Lord hath promised his own blessed presence (Matthew 18:20), they procure no small skaith and damage to themselves, they deprive themselves of some grace and comfort that the Lord ministers to them that meet together... Therefore, if we would be partakers of the grace and blessing that the Lord hath promised to these holy assemblies, we should postpone our private adoes and the cares of the world unto these holy exercises, and we should embrace that counsel of our Savior, "Seek first kingdom of heaven and his righteousness; and all other things shall be ministered unto you," (Matt. 6:33). The man that makes this his first and his chief care, to seek the kingdom of God, when he had gotten it, he will find by experience that there is nothing necessary for the sustaining of this present life that shall be [lacking] to him. It is a foolish thing to be too careful for these worldly things: for if thou seekest first the kingdom of heaven, all these things will be [given] to thee." Source: <http://digitalpuritan.net/robert-rollock/> accessed January 27, 2018 (46th Lecture)

disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” So even here, Thomas, though he was a loyal follower of Jesus (he was willing to go and die with Him), struggled to believe. He didn’t believe Jesus was going to perform a miracle, he believed they would all be killed by the Jewish leaders. So in this account, Thomas was loyal but did not trust that Jesus was in control.<sup>5</sup>

The second glimpse of Thomas is in **John 14** [please turn there]. Here Jesus is with His disciples in the upper room, prior to His death, and He begins to comfort them by telling them that He is going to prepare a place for them, and that He will return and bring them to Himself. Picking up in **v.4**, Jesus says “And you know the way to where I am going.” [5] Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Here Thomas is confused. He thinks that when Jesus mentions “the way” He’s talking about directions to a specific location. Like his answer in John 11, here Thomas is fixing his sight on worldly solutions. He doesn’t understand that Jesus is offering Himself as “the way” —that is the solution to everything.

### **“I will never believe”**

So that is what we know about Thomas before we even reach chapter twenty. His eyes are on the world. What he can see, and touch and feel. So it’s not surprising that he responds to the disciples the way that he does. Lets look back at **v. 25** in our text. 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.”

There was a problem that struck me as I was going through these verses. When Jesus first revealed himself to the disciples, He said “Peace be with you”—**v.19**, and then He immediately showed them his hands and side—**v.20**. So why would Thomas’ request for this same thing be problematic? If Jesus was willing to show the other disciples His hands and side, then why was it a

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<sup>5</sup> On this point Calvin says that "Thomas does not refuse to die with Christ. But this...proceeds from inconsiderate zeal; for he ought rather to have taken courage from faith in the promise."

problem for Thomas to ask for the same thing? *Because Thomas was erecting conditions that had to be met in order for him to believe Christ.*<sup>6</sup> When Jesus showed the other disciples His hands and side, He did so to prove that they had peace with God, because He finished His work on the cross and rose from the dead. Thomas' request is outside of that. Thomas is not asking for a display of Christ's glorious finished work, he is demanding that a condition be met in order to believe.

Look our clues in v.25 “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...” In other words, Thomas is saying ‘my confidence is not in the apostolic Word (preached to him by the other disciples) my confidence is not in the prophetic promises (that the OT and Jesus Himself promised), my confidence is only in my experience—what I can see, and touch, and handle<sup>7</sup>...if that condition is not met, I will never believe.”

That is why this is not *mere* doubting. Thomas ignored everything that Christ has said and done in his life. He ignored the very apostles who Jesus said would be guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth (**John 8:13**). At best he is saying that the other apostles were delusional, at worst he is calling them all liars. He is so full of pride here, so addicted to his own judgment of reality, so filled with self-importance, so confident in his own flesh. He is the perfect profile of a failing believer.

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<sup>6</sup> “It is not unlawful for a man to desire to see the Lord, even with his bodily eyes. No, that desire is lawful and acceptable to God: for all the saints that ever have been since the beginning of the world desired to see our Lord face to face. Many kings and prophets have desired to see him, and yet saw him not (Luke 10:23-24). Abraham, the father of the faithful, desired to see him (John 8:56); and old Simeon, who got a revelation that he should not depart [until] he saw the Lord, earnestly waited and thirsted to see him (Luke 2:25). So that it is a lawful and acceptable thing to desire to see the Lord.” Source: <http://digitalpuritan.net/robert-rollock/> accessed January 27, 2018 (46th Lecture)

<sup>7</sup> Or as R.C. Sproul said “The only thing that will satisfy me is irrefutable, empirical evidence. Unless I see Him, hear Him, and touch Him, I will not believe.” R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 392

## You are Thomas

Dear congregation, how often do you do this very same thing? “Jesus when You meet \_\_\_\_\_ conditions I trust you.” And this can be so subtle. My son Josiah is in bad shape right now. He has a herniated disc in his back, which has left him completely unable to do even the simplest tasks. So Monica and I have been playing nurse for him this past week. It only took a couple days for the hidden conditions I was placing on Jesus to reveal themselves. Josiah asked something of me, and I very impatiently snapped at Monica because she wouldn’t move fast enough so I could “serve Josiah.” And there lie the condition that Jesus wasn’t meeting. “Jesus why can’t everybody in my house be healthy? Since they are not healthy, I’m don’t need trust your word about how to handle trials and treat each other with love. Since you are not providing for my desires at the speed that I wish, then I don’t need to trust You.’

Perhaps your conditions are different. “Jesus, my relationships are not fulfilling right now, so I will not find fulfillment in my relationship with you.” Or “Jesus I’m miserable in my job right now, so I’m going to ignore your commands to love my boss and co-workers as myself.” Or “Jesus my health is failing right now, so I don’t need to admire or worship you with my heart.” Or “Jesus my finances are a mess right now, so I’m not going to spend time or resources to advance your kingdom.”<sup>8</sup>

The real tragedy in all this thinking is that even if Jesus were to meet your conditions, it wouldn’t be Jesus you worship, it would be your conditions. This was the whole wager that Satan made with God at the beginning of the book of Job: ‘Job only worships You because You bless him. If You stretch out Your

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<sup>8</sup> Some experimental questions: Why do you want to be wealthy in life? Is it so you can use your wealth to make the name of Jesus known greater, or so that you can increase your comfort? Why do you want a different job? Is it so that you can use your talents so that you can better love your neighbor as yourself so that men will see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven, or is it because you are chasing some private dream of self-fulfillment and self-importance? Why do you want a better marriage? Is it so that others can see a living picture of Christ and the church and be drawn to Jesus, or is it because you are just tired of fighting? Why do you want your children to grow up in the faith? Is it because you know King Jesus deserves their praise and admiration, or is it because you don't want others to think you are a poor parent?

hand and remove Your hedge of protection, then he will curse You to Your face.<sup>9</sup> Satan is content with anyone believing Christ so long as the reason why you believe is because He gives you stuff. This is not the kind of belief that Jesus is aiming for. Jesus is not honored by your faith, when He is not the treasure of your faith.

This is where Thomas was. Yes He was a believer. But he was a failing believer. And at this moment a faithless believer.

## II. The Faithful Christ (v.26-27)

### The Christ who passes by our imperfections

Please look at v.26-27 “Eight days later,<sup>10</sup> his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and

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<sup>9</sup> Paraphrase of Job 1:9-11

<sup>10</sup> On the Lord’s day...

In v.26 we read “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.” John says that this was “eight days later.” Scripture doesn’t include things in the text needlessly. There’s a point here. “Eight days later” works out to be the first day of the week. John, like the rest of his culture(1), used what’s called inclusive reckoning(2) to calculate—meaning they counted the first and last day. So Sunday to Sunday was eight days. So Jesus appeared on the first day of the week, and then eight days later He does the same. John, like the other NT writers, developed the theme of the Lord’s day their writings.(3) Why this pattern? Because in both cases we have seen so far, Jesus Christ comes and visits His church in a special way on this day, because this is the day He rose from the dead.

(1) “The Greeks followed the same inclusive method. They called the Olympiad, or the four-year period between the Olympic Games, a *pentaeteris* (five-year period), and used other similar numerical terms. The Romans also, in common usage, reckoned inclusively; they had *nundinae* (from *nonus*, ninth), or market days, every ninth day, inclusive, actually every eight days, as indicated on ancient calendars by the letters, A through H.” Source: <http://www.wednesdaycrucifixion.com/inclusive-reckoning.html> accessed January 27, 2018

(2) D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 657

(3) cf. John 20:1, 19, 26, 21:1 (see ESV study note); the “birth” of the church was on Sunday—Acts 2:1—Pentecost is 50 days from Passover which works out to be Sunday. (cf. Lev. 23:15-16); Paul commands the Corinthian church—and all the other churches—to set aside provisions on the first day of the week so that when he arrives, preparations will have been made (1 Cor. 16:1-2); Paul met with the church in Troas on the first day of the week preaching until midnight; Jesus revealed the revelation to John on the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10)

stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 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." Where's Your rebuke Jesus? Thomas didn't believe Your promises. He didn't believe Your disciples. He was arrogant, proud, full of Himself. He was depending more on His own experience than your Eternal Word. He owed you His unquestioned allegiance and all He did was question You. Where's Your rebuke Jesus? Why would you put up with such a poor pitiful man?'

Indeed. Dear believer, why would Jesus ever have patience with someone like you? I'm not talking to the person next to you, I'm talking to you. How many times have you promised to change? How many times have you sinned willfully, promising not to do it again? How many times have you arrogantly ignored God's word, or self-righteously passed judgment on God's people? Have many times have you trusted what you can see, or touch or handle more than God's promises? How many times have you done that this week? Dear believer, why would Jesus ever have patience with someone like you?

Because the Lord Jesus is inexpressibly good. Because Jesus has said "whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (**John 6:37**). Jesus doesn't cast away Thomas. He says to Him "Thomas, stop your doubting, trust Me, believe Me, hope in Me. You don't need evidence, you don't need an experience, or certain conditions that need to be met. You only need Me.'

Dear congregation, this is how Jesus Christ, the Son of God treats His beloved. He doesn't count up all your failings and show them to you. He doesn't furrow His brow at your iniquities and hold you at arm's length. He doesn't look at the weakness of your faith, or the imperfections in your prayers and devotions, and mark them against you. No! As the Psalmist says "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (**Psalms 103:10**) Jesus passes by all your imperfections. Jesus overlooks all your infirmities. Jesus doesn't regard the failings, or the weakness of your faith.

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”

**Psalm 103:11-14**

Believer you are the Lord’s precious child. Jesus didn’t merely save you from the sins that you committed before you were saved. If that is all He did, you would be lost. He continues to save you from the sins that you commit even as a believer. Jesus proved Himself to be faithful to Thomas even when Thomas was faithless. This is why this precious text was put in the Bible. If Jesus is the Savior of failing Thomas, He can be your Savior as well.

### III. The Belief That Is Blessed (v.28-29)

#### **The greatest confession**

After Jesus said “Do not believe, but believe,” we read how Thomas responds in **v.28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas instantaneously believed. And this is one of the greatest confessions of faith in Jesus Christ in the whole New Testament: “My Lord and my God!” This is one of the great passages to point to regarding the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not *merely* the Son of God. Jesus was not *merely* the greatest teacher ever to walk the earth. Jesus was not *merely* the greatest example of love ever displayed. Jesus Christ is God Himself. He’s not a jr. god or one of many gods as the cults would call Him. He is God. Equal with the Father. Deserving of all the same worship and honor as the Father. This confession is so beautiful because it perfectly compliments what Jesus said regarding Himself “that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father” (**John 5:23**).

“This is what coming to faith looks like.”<sup>11</sup> There is no salvation outside of this confession, because any Jesus that is not God Himself—the supreme Lord of Heaven and earth, the heir of all things, the co-creator of the world, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of the Father’s nature<sup>12</sup>—any Jesus who is not all those things is not the God of the Bible. “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (**John 5:23**). That’s what Thomas was saying to Jesus “You are my God—I believe!”

### What caused Thomas’ belief?

But why did Thomas believe? Part of what we have to understand here, is that this event is a sign. **v.30** says “Now Jesus did many other *signs* in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;” John is saying that, because this drama with Lazarus is both historical, and is a sign. A sign is something that points to something else. So historically, Thomas although a saved follower of Christ didn’t believe that Jesus had risen. But as a sign, Thomas is pointing to how people come to be saved. What caused Thomas to believe? What caused this confession? This passage presses us to ask this question. We know three things for sure. **First**, Thomas’ belief was not immediately caused by bare preaching.<sup>13</sup> “The whole number of the apostles... testified with one voice, that they had seen [Jesus] and had spoken with him. Yet Thomas is [not] moved with all these speeches, their witnessing [doesn’t make] him to believe.”<sup>14</sup> Preaching, even the best preaching on the planet cannot convince anyone to believe. This is not to deny the necessity of

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<sup>11</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 659

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 1:2-3

<sup>13</sup> Although I affirm the necessity of preaching—Romans 10:14-17. Here I am only denying the sufficiency of preaching.

<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://digitalpuritan.net/robert-rollock/> accessed January 27, 2018 (46th Lecture)

preaching, **Romans 10:14-17**<sup>15</sup> makes that clear. But it is to say that preaching is not sufficient.

**Secondly**, Thomas' belief was not caused by his own well prepared heart or intellect, or morality. Nothing could be clearer in this passage. His thoughts were on worldly things, his heart was trusting in it's own ability to reason, and his will was stubbornly resisting belief. He said in **v.25** unless these conditions are met, "I will never believe." So there wasn't something inside of Thomas that made him believe. So today, the reason why people believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be found inside of them.

**Thirdly**, Thomas' belief wasn't caused by the evidence. This is not apparent at first glance, because Thomas asks to see, and touch and feel, and then Jesus presents His body to see and touch and feel. But we can be certain that this evidence is not why Thomas believed. The greatest evidence in the world will never make anyone believe. Even a resurrection. Remember the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man ends up in Hades, and he pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, so they would repent. Abraham said they had the Scriptures. The rich man responds in **Luke 16:30** 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' [31] He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" The evidence of the resurrected Christ Himself will not by itself convince anyone to believe. Nobody believes on Christ properly speaking because of evidence, or apologetics, or logical arguments.

### **Jesus created the belief that He commanded**

No. Thomas believed because Jesus commanded his belief. When Jesus said "Do not disbelieve, but *believe*" Thomas' soul was immediately shocked into

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<sup>15</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?[c] And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

believing. Luke’s gospel makes this clear. Why did the disciples finally believe it that it was the risen Christ in front of them. Because **Luke 24:45** says “he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,” As Puritan Robert Rollock once asked:

“What then will make a man to believe? Nothing but the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It must be he that must witness unto our hearts...it must be he that must take away the veil, and illuminate our dark souls; it must be he that must open our hearts, as he opened the heart of Lydia<sup>16</sup>, and make us to believe. If the Holy Spirit of Christ be not present, a man will not believe his own eyes, his own senses will not persuade him.”<sup>17</sup>

That’s why Thomas believed — Jesus created the belief that He commanded.

### **The beatitude of belief**

Look at **v.29** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” It looks at first like Jesus is speaking against what I just said. I said faith cannot come through seeing evidence, and Jesus essentially says ‘you believed because you saw.’ But what I think Christ is doing here is contrasting what Thomas was desiring in his flesh with what he needed in his spirit. It is impossible for faith to be by the will of man generated by evidence of what he sees.<sup>18</sup> This is the repeated emphasis of John.

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<sup>16</sup> Acts 16:14

<sup>17</sup> Source: <http://digitalpuritan.net/robert-rollock/> accessed January 27, 2018 (46th Lecture)

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John 1:13 says that belief does not come from “the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” People believe only because they are taught by God—John 6:44-45

<sup>18</sup> As Calvin says here “it was not by mere touching or seeing that Thomas was brought to believe that Christ is God, but, being awakened from sleep, he recalled to remembrance the doctrine which formerly he had almost forgotten. Faith cannot flow from a merely experimental knowledge of events, but must draw its origin from the word of God.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 278

**John 1:12-13** “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

**John 6:44** “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

**John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”<sup>19</sup>

So I think what Jesus is saying here is ‘Thomas you think you needed to see to believe, but blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ There are two things we need to see from this last statement. **First**, Jesus is telling us to turn off our thinking, and exercise a blind faith. Thinking and knowing are required have faith in Jesus Christ. **John 17:3** “And this is eternal life, that they *know* you...” **John 6:45** ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.” Any faith that is blind and lacking knowledge cannot please Christ. Because Christ cannot be treasured where Christ is not known. Doctrine and teaching are not the enemies of faith, they are assistants of faith.<sup>20</sup> **Secondly**, Jesus is assuring us that our faith is in no way inferior to the disciple’s faith. Just because we have not seen the Lord face to face, but have only heard His word and believed<sup>21</sup>—we do not have a lesser faith. Jesus said we are blessed. Peter says it like this “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,” (**1 Peter 1:8**). The most precious things about Christ are not things that we can see with our

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<sup>19</sup> More verses could be added the least of which is 2 Cor. 5:7 “for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

<sup>20</sup> For more on this point see A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 1999), pg. 469, 472 & Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 271-272

<sup>21</sup> Source: <http://digitalpuritan.net/robert-rollock/> accessed January 27, 2018 (47th Lecture)

eyes.<sup>22</sup> The invisible things are the most delightful things. “Love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (**Gal. 5:22-23**) This is true in our earthly lives as well. What do you seek after most? Invisible things. Happiness. Peace. Love. What rational man would not trade all his physical possessions for peace with God? What rational man would not scorn all his wealth for true happiness. What would you not trade to be truly loved and accepted by God? Jesus says here all of that comes by belief. That’s why Jesus says this belief is blessed. Because it gives you Jesus Christ who alone can satisfy. This life will never satisfy you without Jesus. This belief alone is blessed because through it you have been brought into union with Jesus Christ.

## Application

Our Doctrine: Our failures set the stage to show Christ’s faithfulness

There is no getting around this. Like Thomas you are a failure. You have not lived up to God’s expectations of you. You have sinned against light that you have received. You have self-righteously looked down your nose at others, and have not obeyed the most basic of all commands. Believe the Word. Love God. Love your neighbor. Forget the more nuanced commands. You are failing at the most basic commands. You are a failing believer. That’s why Thomas was singled out here. Because you share all the same traits with Him. But in the gospel, our sin, our failures set the stage of displaying Christ. **Romans 5:20** says “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” The law — God’s perfect standard — came to increase, or

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<sup>22</sup> Calvin says here “There are many unbelievers who, at that time, beheld Christ with the eyes of the flesh, and yet were not more blessed on that account; but we, who have never beheld Christ with the eyes, enjoy that blessedness of which Christ speaks with commendation. Hence it follows, that he calls those eyes blessed which spiritually behold in him what is heavenly and divine; for, we now behold Christ in the Gospel in the same manner as if he visibly stood before us. In this sense Paul says to the Galatians (3:1) that Christ was crucified before their eyes; and, therefore, if we desire to see in Christ what may render us happy and blessed, let us learn to believe, when we do not see.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 279

magnify all the ways that we fall short—which is infinite. But this was done so that grace would abound or overflow. You see Jesus is shown to be the most magnificent Savior when men are most un-savable. Who could possibly save a wretch like you? Only Jesus. So when you feel your sin, when you feel like a failure, a loser. Embrace it. Because you are. Go to God’s Word and see how Jesus loves failures and losers like you. That’s our **doctrine...**

Our Delight:<sup>23</sup> The mystery behind Jesus’ third “Peace be with you”

Starting in v.19 extending through this appearance, Jesus declares three times “Peace be with you.” And this third time he said it really baffled me. I didn’t understand what it’s purpose was in this place with Thomas. The first two “Peace be with you’s” seem clear. The **first time** He says “Peace be with you” (v. 19) it is to signify that the disciples have peace with God and have been reconcile through His cross—that’s why He shows them His hands and side.

The **second time** He says “Peace be with you” (v.21) is because He is sending them on the most dangerous mission imaginable—preaching the gospel to the world. They would be hated, excommunicated and martyred. But they can have peace, because Jesus is sending them like the Father sent Him (v.21), full of the Holy Spirit (v.22), and with all the authority of the gospel (v.23).

But why this **third** “Peace be with you” with Thomas? Previous to this pronouncement, Thomas, although a believer, is a complete faithless failure. Exactly. Jesus is saying “Peace be with You” Thomas because though you fail Me, I will always be faithful to you. And He says the same thing to you dear believer. “Peace be with You” beloved because I will never cast you out. “Peace be with You” beloved because I will labor to strengthen your belief. I will never forsake the work of My hands, but will always finish the work I begun. “Peace

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<sup>23</sup> A contending delight for this passage was that “Re-creation far exceeds creation”

In v.19-20, the first day of re-creation Jesus the light of the world walked into their darkness.

In v.21-23, Jesus breathed the Spirit into the disciples at re-creation just as God breathed the spirit into Adam at creation

In v.24-29, Jesus shows that re-creation is better than creation for when Adam didn't believe God, the whole world fell, but when Thomas didn't believe Jesus condescended and saved him from his unbelief

be with you” beloved because I will continue to discipline you in love, and purge your evil, but you will never out sin my grace. All your darkest secrets and most destructive sins cannot terrorize you any longer, because I have swallowed them up.’ That’s our delight. The first “Peace be with you” dealt with our reconciliation with God. The second, with our mission. And the third with our perseverance, that we will be saved all the way to the end.

### Our Duty: Live upon God that is invisible

All this talk of Christ’s forgiveness and love might give the impression that everyone is ok with God. That the great thing that Jesus did on earth was love all of mankind, and that the great thing that He does now is assure all of mankind that all will be well. That would be wrong. All mankind is not well. All do not share in the love of Jesus alike. Most of the world is an enemy of the one true God. And He cannot simply overlook the world’s imperfections, and sins, and failures. God is holy. There must be a satisfaction for sin, there must be a penalty imposed. And that penalty is death. Death to sinners. And hell afterwards. The message of the gospel isn’t simply “Jesus loves you.” The message of the gospel is this: that sin has come into the world, and death through sin. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God has also come into the world. He put on flesh, and lived a sinless life, and then was crucified on a Roman cross, was buried, and then three days later was raised to life. The reason why Jesus was crucified, was because it pleased the Father to put the sins of His people on Christ, and make Christ be punished for them. The promise that God holds out for sinners is found in **v.31** of our passage “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Jesus paid a debt of sin, and God will count your debt paid if you trust Jesus Christ for it. That is the only way Jesus can overlook your sin, is if He pays for it Himself. And that only comes if you trust Him, repent of your sin, surrender your heart, let Him possess your spirit, and hope in Him. And He will cleanse you from all your sin and clothe you with a perfect righteousness so that God will accept you on that Great Day.