

### **John 20:19-31 Be Not Faithless, But Believing**

About this time every year, various media outlets publish articles bringing the resurrection of Christ into question. The headline often says something like, “Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” And then the writer attempts to de-bunk the central teaching of Christianity—the resurrection of Christ.

Perhaps such reporting causes doubts to arise in the minds of some. If only there were empirical, physical, undeniable evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, people would believe. We live in a world that demands indisputable proof and scientific evidence. “I’ll believe it when I see it,” is what many say.

The Bible contains the story of someone who doubted the resurrection of Jesus. Even though many of his colleagues claimed that they had seen Jesus alive after the crucifixion, this man did not believe. He said he would not believe until he saw Jesus for himself. He needed empirical, physical, undeniable proof. He needed to test the claim for himself.

And of course I’m speaking about the disciple named Thomas, often called Doubting Thomas because he doubted the resurrection. But Doubting Thomas became believing Thomas after Jesus appeared to him.

We might wish that Jesus would appear to everyone who doubts his claims. That would certainly result in more believers. But Jesus told Thomas that it was not necessary to see him in order to believe in him. Jesus confers a blessing on those who believe without seeing. Thomas found out that there was no reason to doubt the resurrection of Jesus, and there is no reason for us to doubt it today.

The account we’re looking at shows us several things about Jesus’ resurrection. We can and must believe these things even though we did not experience them for ourselves. In fact, our eternal destiny depends on believing what the Bible reveals about the resurrection of Christ.

This text tells us a good deal about Thomas, and it also tells us several things about Jesus’ resurrection.

- I. Jesus' resurrection body was real and physical. .19-20
- A. Skeptics and critics of the Bible simply *deny* that Jesus rose from the dead. They claim that the whole story is false—it's a fabrication, a myth, a religious legend.
- B. Some suggest that Jesus rose from the dead in a spiritual sense. That is, the disciples kept his teachings alive; the resurrection was the continuation of Jesus' teachings, not a physical resurrection of Jesus' body.
- C. But what does the text tell us? Is the resurrection a myth? Was it merely the continuation of Jesus' teaching? No.
- D. .19 Jesus appeared physically and personally after his death. In our text, we find that Jesus appeared to a crowd of people.
1. .19 He appeared to them—he “came and stood in the midst” of them. The disciples were assembled together and Jesus showed up.

Acts 1:3 ... *he showed himself alive after his [death] by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:*

Jesus “showed himself alive.” He proved that he had risen from the dead by his physical, bodily presence among them.

We see here that Jesus' body had unusual supernatural capabilities. He entered a room where the doors are shut. He could apparently appear and disappear at will. That's because his body had supernatural properties after the resurrection.

In 1 Cor 15:20, Paul describes Jesus as the “firstfruits of them that slept.” That is, he's the first one to experience a true glorified resurrection body. But it was still a physical, real body, but it had supernatural properties.

Not only did the disciples see Jesus, but also they heard him speak....

2. .19 He spoke to them. He said several things that they heard:

a) .19end He conferred peace upon them.

This was a standard Hebrew greeting—probably the Hebrew “shalom.” In fact, he said it twice, probably because the disciples were severely shaken by Jesus’ appearance.

Luke 24:37f tells us that the disciples were “terrified and frightened,” supposing that they were seeing a ghost. So they calmed down a bit when Jesus said “Peace be with you.”

b) .21b He sent them out. He commanded them to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel.

c) .22 He told them to receive the HSp. This enabled them for ministry.

d) .23 He empowered them for other spiritual duties.

I understand this verse in the context of Gospel proclamation. This remitting and retaining of sin seems to be directly associated with proclaiming the Gospel. When people repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, their sins are forgiven/remitted. We can authoritatively declare to repentant believers that God has forgiven their sins. If people fail to repent and believe, their sins are *not* forgiven—they are retained—and we can declare that authoritatively as well.

3. .20 He showed them his hands and his side.

Why would he do that? He wanted to show them physical proof that it was the same body that suffered crucifixion. He showed them undeniable proof of his resurrection. He was not a ghost or a hallucination, a mere figment of imagination. He was really there in person, and they could see him, talk to him, and touch him. All of these senses are involved.

- E. .24-25 The disciples reported to Thomas that they had seen the Lord.
1. .24 He was not present when Jesus appeared the first time.
    - a) Bible scholars discuss the potential reasons that Thomas was not there the first time Jesus appeared. The text does not tell us why Thomas was not there, so we should not speculate about it. The text does not show any spiritual weaknesses or failures in Thomas up to this point, so we should not attribute his absence to any spiritual problems.
    - b) But we can say that Thomas missed something important because he was absent from this meeting. His dismay over Jesus' death and his doubt about the resurrection continued for another whole week. The other disciples were glad and rejoicing, while Thomas was still depressed—all because he was absent from this gathering.  
**App:** You never know what you might miss when you are absent from the assembly on the Lord's Day. When you are absent, you miss the blessing you might have had.<sup>1</sup>
  2. .25 The grammar here ("said" is imperfect—"were saying," implying continual activity in the past) suggests that they told him this repeatedly. Everyone was trying to convince him, but Thomas refused to believe.
  3. .25end The grammar here also shows that Thomas was rather strong in his unbelief. His expression "I will not believe" is a strong, emphatic statement of unbelief (οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω)—"I absolutely will not believe."  
**App:** Skeptics commonly assert that extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence. That's essentially what Thomas is demanding here—undeniable, indisputable proof of Jesus' resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea from Warren Wiersbe.

4. This strong denial shows us that at least one of the disciples was skeptical of this claim. Thomas was not going to believe something without proof. Even though the other disciples claimed that they had seen the Lord, eyewitness testimony of multiple reliable people was not good enough. He was not easily convinced. You might say that he was an independent, critical thinker.
  - a) Today, skeptics suggest that the disciples were so strongly expecting—they were so yearning and hoping—that Jesus would rise from the dead that they fabricated this story. Skeptics claim that the resurrection story is the result of a grand conspiracy among the disciples in which they all agreed to lie about Jesus' resurrection.
  - b) But the truth is that they were *not* expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. They were very shocked when it happened, and at least one of them—Thomas—did not believe it at all until the evidence absolutely overwhelmed his doubt.
  - c) Further, we should also keep in mind that nearly all of the disciples died for the belief that Jesus rose from the dead. If they knew that the story was false, they would not have sacrificed their lives to defend and proclaim the Gospel.

**Trans:** Our culture/society demands that we be independent thinkers who are not easily influenced or intimidated. We are told not to be gullible and easily led by others. We are supposed to exercise our powers of discernment and critical, independent thought. That's exactly what Thomas did; he was skeptical, critical, and independent. He was not gullible or easily convinced.

But something happened to change Thomas' mind.

- II. Jesus' resurrection is believable/convincing. .26ff
- A. .26 Jesus appeared to his disciples again about a week later, and this time Thomas was present.
  - B. .27 After greeting everyone, Jesus spoke directly to Thomas. He knew that Thomas had expressed his doubts about Jesus' resurrection. He invited Thomas to touch his scars and to look at his hands. Thomas was able to see both Jesus' physical presence, hear his voice and touch the scars on his body. Jesus told him, "Be not faithless, but believing."
  - C. .28 This evidence was overwhelming, and Thomas uttered his famous confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." Thomas was convinced of both Jesus' resurrection and of his divine status. Thomas affirms that Jesus is God in the flesh; he affirms the deity of Christ.
  - D. Something convinced Thomas' skeptical, critical, disbelieving mind that Jesus really did rise from the dead. In the span of just a few moments, he was transformed from doubter to believer.

Some scholars see this as the highpoint of John's Gospel; everything in the book is moving toward Thomas' great confession of faith. Here is a skeptical man who doubted the primary claim of Christianity, yet he is convinced by the overwhelming evidence that the claim is true. He's transformed from doubt to faith.

That's exactly John's purpose/intent with his book; to show people that it is reasonable to believe in Jesus, just like Thomas did. Even skeptics and critics have good reason to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Many others besides Thomas believed in Jesus because they saw him physically after the resurrection. Let's look at the list of the people who saw Jesus after the resurrection:

1. Mary Magdalene was the very first one to see Jesus after his resurrection (Jn 20:11-18).
2. The women who came early to the tomb saw him (Mt 28:9-10).
3. Peter saw Jesus shortly thereafter (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5)
4. The 11 disciples saw him on multiple occasions (Jn 20:19-25)

5. Other disciples saw him—the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:34).
6. James, Jesus' brother, saw him at some point.
7. Over 500 people saw Jesus on one occasion.
8. Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus and several times after that.

And some today no doubt would say, "I'd believe in Jesus if he appeared to me. If I had overwhelming proof like Thomas and the others, I'd believe. But I have not had that experience, so I do not believe."

Is it absolutely required that people see Jesus before they are able to believe in him? No, as we'll see in the next verse.

E. Jesus responded to Thomas' confession of faith. .29

1. Thomas saw and believed. His belief was directly based on his own personal experience. He could not doubt his own senses—he saw, heard, and touched the resurrected Jesus. It was not a dream or a hallucination; it was reality. The evidence convinced him.
2. .29b Others are blessed if they believe without seeing.
  - a) Jesus affirms here that it is *not* necessary to see Jesus personally or physically in order to believe the Gospel.

In reality, many would *not* believe even if they did see Jesus. Remember that many people saw Jesus do amazing miracles during his life but still did not believe in him. Even if Jesus appeared to some people, they might dismiss it as a hallucination, a dream, a trick of the mind. It would be easy to dismiss such an experience, especially if you were already skeptical and unbelieving.

Sometimes we have unusual experiences and we think to ourselves, "Did that really happen?"

- b) .31 John tells us that he wrote the book in order to persuade people that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” and that if they believe that, they will have “life in his name.”
- c) So the implication is that people can and should believe the message about Jesus based on the written reports from John and from the other Gospel accounts. This record is true, it was verified by multiple eye-witnesses, and it’s believable. Cf. 21:24

**App:** People today, nearly 2000 years after these events, can still believe in Jesus based on the reports given to us in the NT. It is entirely reasonable to believe what John is telling us here. We don’t need to see in order to believe; we can believe without seeing.

- d) Salvation is not merely believing the teachings of Jesus or obeying his commands. Salvation comes to those who believe in a person—they believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again. You cannot be saved apart from that belief.

John 1:12—receive him; accept the person and work of Christ. Believe that he died on the cross for your sins and believe that he rose again.



Thomas had good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection even before he personally saw Jesus. He had heard Jesus promise that he'd rise from the dead. He'd heard the claims from the women and from the other disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. But that was not enough for him; he demanded undeniable proof.

Eventually Thomas received that proof; he saw and experienced for himself the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. The evidence became overwhelming and absolutely convincing, to the point where he went from doubting to confessing his belief that Jesus was both Lord and God. The truth of Jesus' resurrection transformed Thomas' life.

John wrote his book to convince us that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. Thomas had the privilege of verifying that claim personally and experientially. Jesus extends a blessing to those who do *not* see him and yet believe. So the basis of belief is not seeing Jesus but by believing what was written about him. The basis of belief is the Scripture, the NT, the Gospel accounts. Instead of *seeing* and believing, we can *read* and believe; it's perfectly reasonable to *hear* the story and believe it. As John says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." If you believe that message, you have eternal life. If you don't believe it, you don't have eternal life. We can proclaim that truth authoritatively and absolutely.

On Resurrection Sunday, we gladly affirm with Thomas that Jesus is both our Lord and our God. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that he gives eternal life to those who trust in him. We can experience resurrection from spiritual death because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of every believer.

As Jesus said to Thomas, "Do not be faithless, but believing." (vs. 27). If you have not yet believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, follow Thomas' example and believe. You can believe without seeing. Confess personally your belief that Jesus is both your Lord and your God. Like Thomas, you can experience profound transformation through belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

Romans 10:9 *if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*