

John 20:24-29

- Doubting Thomas makes the discovery of his life -

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Introduction

- ❖ Modern writers of textbooks write an introductory chapter about the purpose and the goals of their book. The apostle John concludes his gospel:
 - “Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God,
and that by believing you may have life in his name**” (Jn 20:30-31).
 - Life means: to live in communion with God and Jesus Christ.¹
- ❖ Just before he wrote these words, the reader meets one of the disciples of Jesus, “doubting Thomas”, for the third time in the gospel.
 - This Thomas professed his faith with the most profound and compact declaration of Jesus’ deity in the New Testament.² As such, he is a role model to all Christians.
- ❖ In preaching on this text, the preacher should identify with “doubters” and retell the story of Thomas and try to evoke the surprise of Thomas and his exclamation.
 - He made the discovery of his LIFE!

¹This is elaborated upon in a sermon outline of John 17:3 found at: <http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/word>

² Wilkins, M. *Disciples: Thomas*. In Green, J. (1992), p. 180

Context

- ❖ John 20:28 is part of the resurrection narrative of John and the appearances of the resurrected Lord Jesus (Jn 20-21) to his disciples. It is also part of the story of Thomas, which is interwoven in the second part of the gospel and found in John 11:1-16 (-45), John 14:5-6 and John 20:24-29. In all these sections, the same theme is found: LIFE, DEATH, and BELIEF. These themes are highlighted:

John 11:1-16 (-45)	<p><i>The raising of Lazarus from the death</i></p> <p>Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then <i>Thomas</i> (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (him = Jesus)</p> <p><i>(...) Jesus meets Martha, the beloved sister of Lazarus</i></p>
John 11:25-26	<p>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"</p> <p><i>(...) Jesus raises Lazarus from the death by calling his name.</i></p>

John 14:1-6	<p><i>Jesus prepares his disciples for the time to come</i></p> <p>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>(...) <i>Within 24 hours after Jesus has spoken these words, he died on the cross.</i></p>
John 20:20-29	<p><i>The resurrected Jesus appears to Thomas</i></p> <p>“Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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 it.”</p> <p>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!” 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.”</p> <p>Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”</p> <p>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”</p>

❖ In this gospel, another thread is found, the theme of **KNOWING** and **SEEING**. In John 20:29 both lines come together: doubting Thomas sees Jesus, his God and he believes.

At that time, he made the discovery of his life.

John 1:18

John 14:6-11

John 20:26-29

John 1:18 (Jn 6:46)	“No one has ever seen God , but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. ”
John 14:6-11	“Jesus answered (Thomas), “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would

	<p>know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”</p> <p>Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”</p>
John 20:26-29	<p>(...)</p> <p>Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”</p> <p>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”</p>

Technical information

- ❖ The Gospel of John is a piece of literary art. All kinds of story lines or narrative threads are interwoven:
 - The story of Nicodemus:
 - John 3:1-15 – John 7:50-52 – John 19:38-42
 - The story of Thomas:
 - John 11:1-16 (-45) – John 14:5-6 – John 20:24-29
 - The story of Peter:
 - John 1:40-42 – John 6:67-69 – John 13:6-11 – John 13:36-38 / 18:15-27 – John 20:1-9 and John 21; there are also some minor passages.
 - The theme of “I am”:
 - John 14:6 and other texts.
 - The theme “knowing” and “seeing”:
 - John 1:18 – John 14:6-11 – John 20:26-29

These stories and themes as part of the gospel narrative need careful attention.

Exposition

Verse 28

❖ The doubting Thomas:

- When Jesus got the message about Lazarus' sickness the disciples and Thomas were troubled and afraid (Jn 11:1-16). They were afraid because of the risk of stoning. When Jesus decides to go to Judea, Thomas said: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." This will be the end of all of us. But, Jesus raised Lazarus from the death. Only God can!
- After the Last Supper, Jesus prepares his disciples for the coming events. They are very much troubled. What will happen? What does Jesus mean? Thomas is again disturbed when he asks: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" At that time Jesus is speaking in veiled language about his death, resurrection and glorification (Jn 4:1-6).
- Although Thomas had witnessed Lazarus' raising from death by Jesus, an impressive moment vividly described by John ("by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days"; Jn 11:39), he didn't expect any resurrection of the dead. He was just like the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-49). He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time (Jn 20:24-25). His reaction was one of pure unbelief: "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 it.**'"
 - Jesus.
 - "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!"
 - Try to imagine the reaction of Thomas and the other disciples. They were probably shocked.
 - "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.**"
 - Jesus allowed Thomas to do what he had asked in unbelief! At the same time, Jesus showed to all that he knew everything that Thomas had said one week earlier before Thomas has uttered one single word.
 - Why?

- **That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name**” (Jn 20:30-31). And “you” is the reader!

Jesus showed Thomas that he was compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. He showed him his hands, his crucified hands. He even invited Thomas to feel and to touch him! Amazing grace. A doubting disciple, after he had expressed his utter unbelief in the resurrection, is allowed to approach the living God and Saviour.

❖ The believing Thomas.

- He is overwhelmed by this sudden appearance of Jesus Christ. This Thomas professed his faith with the most profound and compact declaration of Jesus’ deity in the New Testament!
 - He is calling upon the NAME of the LORD:
 - **“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”** (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32);
 - **“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36).
- It is important to remember that Thomas didn’t have knowledge of the New Testament; he knew the Old Testament, probably far better than most Christians nowadays who are being bombarded by all kinds of social media and information. When he exclaims the words “my Lord and my God,” they should be understood against the background of the Old Testament.
 - **“Lord” = κύριος.** 2. one who is in a position of authority, *lord, master*; α. as a designation of God.³
 - In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the term κύριος is used more than 6000 times in place of the proper name of God, Yahweh.⁴ Thomas is identifying the Lord God of Israel with Jesus, which is a proper identification, because Jesus himself said: **“I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”** (Jn 14:10). He is the God who proclaimed to Moses:

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 578)

⁴ Witherington, B. III. *Lord*. In: Green, J. (1992, p. 484-492)

unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Ex 34:6-7).

- He is our Lord and God. He is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6)⁵ and “the resurrection and the life. He who believes in him will live, even though he dies” (Jn 11:25).
- “Then Jesus told him,
“Because you have seen me, you have believed;
blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

This is not a rebuke of Thomas, but a strong invitation and call to all who have not seen Jesus as Thomas did, to believe Jesus Christ as our Saviour, our Lord, and God.

Application

- ❖ The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the KEY to the gospel and to the Christian faith, to the identity and person of Jesus Christ being the son of God, and finally to know the only true God (Jn 17:3).
 - “My Lord and my God!” is a call to:
 - WORSHIP the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent (Jn 9:38; Mt 28:18-20).
 - RECEIVE him and BELIEVE in his name (Jn 1:12)
 - KNOW the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. He is
 - **compassionate and gracious**, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithful towards this doubting Thomas.
 - REMAIN in his LOVE (Jn 15:9).
 - OBEY his commands, the commands of forgiveness, mercy, and righteousness (Jn 15:10).
 - KEEP his words (Jn 17:6).
 - TRUST in God and in Jesus (Jn 14:1).
 - LIVE in communion with God and Jesus Christ; this is the eternal life, of which Jesus gave us evidence by his resurrection.⁶
 - FOLLOW our Lord (Jn 10:12).
 - WALK in the light (Jn 8:12).
 - LISTEN to his voice (Jn 10:12).
 - EXPECT him as the coming one (Rev 22).

⁵These words: “way”, “truth” and “life” refer to the same person. They can be seen as synonyms. The “way” refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, to Moses. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). These two statements are not opposites, but supplementary.

⁶ See also my sermon outline of John 17:3: <http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/word>

- ❖ In preaching on this text, the preacher should identify with “doubters” and retell the story of Thomas.
- ❖ Why do people have their doubts concerning the Christian faith?
 - People can have all kinds of questions concerning the validity and trustworthiness of the Christian Faith because we can’t see God.
 - These doubts can have their origin in a scientific or religious worldview.
 - People can have their questions because they are confronted by all the suffering in this world. And Jesus bore this suffering in his own body, as the rejected man (Jn 19:6)⁷ Jesus showed his hands to Thomas, the hands and body that suffered through crucifixion, exhaustion and death.
 - Others can have their doubt because of disappointments in life or in the church.
 - Doubt is often regarded as an impediment, an obstacle to seeing and knowing God and doing his work. Doubt in these verses is an opposite to faith. But doubt is not always sinful.⁸
 - There are three different reactions to doubt:
 - Doubt which prompts the believer to ask God for knowledge and faith, wisdom and hope, and what’s most important: love. Doubt has a positive effect.
 - Doubt which prompts the (un)believer to deny the truths of the gospel, because they don’t match with his worldview. In this case, doubt has a negative effect, but as soon the (un)believer is confronted with the reality of the truth, he will be able to believe.
 - Doubt which prompts the unbeliever to be neutral. I don’t care whether the truths of the gospel are real. This is a kind of lukewarm stance.
 - Doubt is resolved into belief or disbelief in any of four ways: through conversion (Thomas), through liberalization, through renewal (Thomas) or through emotional growth.⁹

⁷ See also my sermon outline of John 19:6: <http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/word>

⁸Frame, J. *Certainty*. In: Campbell-Jack, W. (2006, p. 143)

⁹Beck, J. *Doubt*. In: Benner, D. (1999, p. 368)

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