

“Thomas Encounters Jesus: Grace for the Doubting Heart” – John 20:24-29

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in John 20...

It's wonderful to see you all on this Easter morning. We're glad you were able to come celebrate the resurrection of Jesus with us today. And yet, as we celebrate the incredible news of the empty tomb, I cannot help but wonder if many of us might find ourselves relating more to the struggle of one disciple, Thomas, who wasn't there when the celebrations first began. We usually label him as a “doubter,” but today we're going to look closer at a man whose skepticism was actually a shield for a heart that had been deeply hurt by the tragedies of his life. We will explore how our own temperaments and past traumas can cause even the most loyal follower of Jesus to struggle with unbelief. More importantly, we're going to see a Savior who doesn't stay far away while we wrestle with our questions. Instead, He is the One who pursues us, entering into our private places of fear and confusion to offer His peace and His presence.

As we move through this story, we will witness how an honest seeker moves from demanding proof to making what may be the most powerful and personal confession of faith in the entire Bible. Whether you come today with certainty or with heavy questions, this message is for anyone who needs to know that the Risen King is not just a figure of history, but the living Savior, who is far more involved in your life than you can imagine.

I hope you'll be convinced of this by the end of our time together. But I cannot convince you. Only He can. And that's why we need to hear His voice from His Word. So let's do the most important thing and read the text. If you are able, I invite you to stand to your feet in recognition of the authority of God's Word. Follow along as I read from John 20, beginning in verse 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.’ ²⁶ 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.’ ²⁷ 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.’ ²⁸ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”
(John 20:24-29)

This is God's Word. You may be seated...

It's owing to these verses that the common stereotype of “Doubting Thomas” was born. I feel bad for the guy, to be honest, since every time he comes up in conversation, people forever associate him with doubt. Aren't you grateful that your moral lapses are not forever memorialized in the Scriptures? I for one am. But I would like for us to move beyond this superficial caricature of “Doubting Thomas” to try to understand *why* this disciple comes across this way in our text. I want us to try to understand how temperament, trauma, and isolation can cause even a loyal disciple's faith to falter.

The Faith that Falters (24-25)

On the basis of verses 24 and 25, Thomas has been described as an “unbelieving realist”—someone who believes only what can be seen, touched, or personally verified.¹ He’s an empiricist at heart. That’s why he says what he says in verse 25.

However, I would suggest to you that Thomas’ skepticism here was not a sudden lapse but was deeply rooted in his personality. When you examine his appearances in John’s Gospel, although they are few, a fairly consistent character profile emerges. It’s one that Richard Phillips describes as a “dogged, loyal pessimism.”²

For example, in chapter 11, Jesus explains that He will travel back into Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead (11:14-15), but the disciples know that last time they were in Judea the Jews sought to take Jesus into custody because they didn’t like what he was teaching (10:39). There is a real danger in returning to Judea. So when Jesus begins to depart, we’re told that Thomas says to his fellow-disciples, “*Let us also go, that we may die with him*” (11:16). Sheesh. Cheer up, Thomas! Why you got to assume the worst? But that was his personality evidently. “Thomas was loyal to Jesus and even courageous, but [at times] he was also fatalistic and dour.”³ He was a glass half-empty kind of guy, the “Eeyore” among the Twelve.⁴

Given this, it’s not terribly surprising to see him acting the way he does in John 20. When the other disciples kept on insisting, “*We have seen the Lord,*” Thomas responds emphatically, in verse 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, I will never believe.*”⁵ This is a total refusal to believe. But it’s not because Thomas is some “philosophical materialist” who doesn’t believe in the supernatural.⁶ He knew better than that. He was a devout Jew. He saw Jesus do miracle after miracle. He even saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead! His struggle is not with the idea of the supernatural. His struggle is with the cross! As D. A. Carson explains,

“He had placed so much confidence in Jesus, and now Jesus turned out to be, God help him, a disappointment. Not personally, not in what he said. He liked all that, but he thought Jesus was the promised champion who would turn things around. Instead, he’s been butchered [by the Romans], and he’s afraid, now, of being snookered by a certain kind of religious enthusiasm...He wanted some evidence. He wanted a certain kind of evidence. He wanted the kind of evidence that would assure him the same body that went into the grave was the body that came out.”⁷

He doesn’t want to be “duped” again. He’s been wounded by the cross. It’s shattered his expectations and hopes. He’s hurt. So he’s not going to just take them at their word. He wants to see Jesus. He wants to touch the wounds.

And, to be honest, the request kind of makes sense coming from a guy like Thomas. What was Thomas called, according to verse 24? “*The Twin.*” That’s his nickname. That’s got to be hard on a person’s ego, to be known as “*the Twin,*” don’t you think? Did they call his brother (or sister) by name? What was his (or her) name? We think it was Daryl. I’m just kidding, it wasn’t Darryl. But what if it was? “Daryl and the twin.” No one wants to be known as “*the Twin*”!⁸ But when you grow up as a twin, you probably have some experience with tricking people about your identity. “It wasn’t me! It was my brother Darryl.” I got to drop this Darryl bit. But you get the point, twins—if they’re identical—can play tricks on people. Maybe Thomas, the twin, is wondering if Jesus had a twin. Maybe these other disciples had just seen a twin or someone that looked like Jesus. How does he know that they weren’t mistaken? People have confused him with his sibling before. So he wants more proof. He’s not a cold intellectual, he’s just guarding against further disappointment. He wants to know it’s Jesus before he gets his hopes up again. And the only way to know it’s Jesus is to see and feel His wounded hands and side. Nothing less will do, he thinks.

But there is something else I want you to notice here about the faith that falters. A critical detail in verse 24 is that Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared. The text does not explain why—and it may just be

circumstantial—but the text may be hinting that “his absence and his attitude are linked.”⁹ It seems reasonable to conclude that his isolation—whatever the reason—compounded his spiritual crisis. Isolation usually does. And in Thomas’ case it meant that he missed the Lord’s appearing. What do you miss, I wonder, when you cut yourself off from the gathering of God’s people? J. C. Ryle points out that this underscores...

“...how much Christians may lose by not regularly attending gatherings of God’s people...The very sermon that we needlessly miss may contain the message our souls need. The very assembly for praise and prayer from which we stayed away may be the very gathering that would have cheered, established, and uplifted our hearts.”¹⁰

It’s something to think about. Along these lines, Richard Philips also notes,

“It is interesting that Jesus appeared to the disciples on Resurrection Sunday and then did not appear to them again until the next Sunday (when John says that Jesus returned ‘eight days later’ [20:26], he is counting inclusively, as was the Jewish pattern). It is possible that Jesus was emphasizing the gathering of his people for worship on the Lord’s Day. Thomas, alone of the remaining eleven disciples, had not been present in the previous week’s gathering when Jesus first appeared. It is not surprising, then, that while the other disciples were strengthened in their faith, Thomas drifted into a hardened state of unbelief. His absence from the fellowship contributed to his unbelief.”¹¹

How much do you prioritize the corporate gathering? “We are always more likely to find [Jesus] in the company of the faithful than in a lonely vigil.”¹² We do this every week, folks. Don’t miss out. It’s good for your soul, and you need it more than you know. It’s a means of God’s grace to you.¹³ Don’t leave it on the table.

Perhaps, you have been guilty of this neglect. Well, there’s good news for you. Jesus pursues us. In fact, I would argue that—perhaps unbeknownst to you—this is exactly why you are here this morning. Let’s consider next...

The Savior Who Seeks (26)

Verse 26 tells us,

“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.’” (John 20:26)

To his credit, Thomas shows up at the gathering this week. He still has his doubts, to be sure, but he’s choosing to “doubt toward God.” Bobby Conway once wrote a book, *Doubling Toward Faith*, in which he argues that doubts are directional. We can doubt away from God, or we can doubt toward God. Thomas chose the latter. He’s back among the believers. If you are struggling with your own doubt, I would encourage you to do the same. You don’t need to be ashamed that you have your doubts while in church. You don’t need to suppress them. This is a perfect place to work through them. Timothy Keller once wrote,

“A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person’s faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection.”¹⁴

In other words, the strongest faith is often the one that has wrestled through doubt. So if you have your doubts, so be it. But what direction are they pointing? Point them at Jesus. He could handle the doubts and questions of Thomas. He can handle yours too.¹⁵

We notice also that the doors were locked, just like they were the previous Sunday when Jesus paid the disciples a visit (20:19), which reminds us that the disciples are still quite fearful of the Jewish authorities even after most of them had encountered the risen Lord. The journey toward courageous faith is often slow and prone to regression. Fortunately, our locked doors—of the physical, psychological, or spiritual variety—are no hindrance to Jesus. If He intends to be with His disciples, He won't be kept at bay.¹⁶ He can pass through any obstacle, as He does here, even in His resurrected body.

But let me tell you why I love verse 26. It highlights the intentionality and patience of Christ as He returns to restore the one disciple who had been left behind. This is vintage Jesus, who leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. He's not indifferent to our absence or our skepticism. He pursues us. And He seeks our peace. "*Peace be with you,*" He says to the disciples. *Shalom*. It's a typical greeting, yes, but this is not a typical context. This is a context pregnant with meaning—in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection—and this is the third time in this chapter alone that Jesus declares peace over His disciples (20:19, 21, 26). Jesus has made peace for them—peace with God—by offering Himself up as a sacrifice for sin on the cross. He has made atonement. He has removed our alienation from God, reconciling us to Him through faith. He has, in other words, made peace, and so He now can grant peace.¹⁷ He's the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6). "*Peace be with you,*" then, is no mere greeting. It's an invitation to enter in the joy of His accomplishment, the fruit of his resurrection.

And He has come this time to share this with Thomas. He did not come to scold him or shame him for making unreasonable demands. He came to offer Himself to Thomas in gentle grace. And this allows us to consider next...

The Grace that Stoops (27)

For those of you who feel that you have "missed out" on God's blessing because of your temperament or isolation, this text reminds us that Christ's grace is greater than you imagine. Thomas was in no position to make demands of Jesus, and yet Jesus, in a profound moment of divine condescension, submits His own body to examination by Thomas.¹⁸ We read in verse 27,

"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.'" (John 20:27)

Imagine the shock this was to Thomas. It's not only that Jesus is alive, but that Jesus knew exactly what Thomas had said in His physical absence. He had been near when Thomas only sensed distance or absence. And His use of the same language that Thomas used in verse 25 demonstrates this. Jesus addresses all of his stipulations, "point for point."¹⁹ And in responding this way, Jesus shows that He is neither threatened by intelligent questions nor distant from the secret struggles of His people.

Jesus doesn't shame Thomas here. He doesn't rebuke. He extends his hands. He exposes His side. He allows Thomas to feel the scars. In so doing, Thomas can see that this Jesus is one and the same. There's no trick at work. Jesus is risen! All doubt is removed. So Thomas is challenged, "*Do not disbelieve, but believe*" (20:25). To persist in unbelief would be a choice of defiance. It's not a matter of evidence. It's time for Thomas to turn back and believe. This is not just an intellectual struggle for Thomas. It's a moral one. He's being called to repent, not of his questions, but of his "disbelief."

By God's grace, he does. This encounter heals him of his "willful skepticism."²⁰ And Thomas is forever changed. As the poet, Edward Shillito, put it: "to our wounds only God's wounds can speak."²¹ And they have spoken. The only thing left for Thomas is to surrender.

The Heart that Surrenders (28)

We've reached the emotional peak of not just this story, but, arguably, the entire Gospel of John. It's Thomas' confession, in verse 28:

"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:28)

Here we see Thomas shifting "from the deepest doubt among the disciples to the highest profession of faith anywhere in the gospel."²² The other disciples have called Jesus "Lord" previously. But Thomas uses the term in the fullest sense, the absolute sense, the divine sense. He sees Jesus for who He is: "*My Lord and my God!*" This is not merely his reaction to the resurrection, but the profound confession that resolves the central tension of the book—Will we see and receive the real Jesus?

John spells out the purpose of the book at the end of this chapter. Look at verses 30 and 31:

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but 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." (John 20:30-31)

That's why John has written his Gospel—that we would see, savor, and surrender to Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. That we would confess, with Thomas, "*My Lord and my God!*" John introduced us to Jesus, emphasizing the same exalted nature of Jesus. He said in the very first verse,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

We've come full circle with Thomas' confession. Who Jesus is has been fully disclosed. And what John anticipated in the first chapter is being fulfilled:

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

Thomas has received him as we all must. He receives him not by the will of the flesh (that kept him in disbelief) or by the will of man (their words were rejected). "When Thomas finally believed, it was not ultimately because of the testimony of his friends, valuable as that was, but because Jesus had revealed himself personally in such a way that Thomas could no longer disbelieve."²³ This is how Jesus operates. In every conversion, Jesus personally confronts the unbelief of the sinner and sovereignly calls the individual, "*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*" When that call comes to you, the right response is to listen, believe, and confess Him as Lord and God. Have you?

Maybe you're like the Thomas a week prior, insisting that you will only believe if certain conditions are met. But did you notice that at Thomas' conversion his conditions were not exactly met. As Richard Phillips explains,

"The first thing we notice about Thomas's conversion is that he does not seem actually to have placed his fingers into the wounds of Jesus' hands and side. Once Jesus had revealed himself to Thomas, the disciple no longer placed any demands before his faith; instead, his faith compelled him to drop all his

objections and immediately profess Jesus as Savior and Lord. It was not because his demands had been met that Thomas decided that he was willing to believe. Instead, Christ's personal self-disclosure overwhelmed the unbelief and drew Thomas to Christ as a servant and worshiper."²⁴

In other words, when Jesus revealed Himself, Thomas couldn't but believe (cf. Acts 4:20). And you will find consistently in John's Gospel that "believing is a divine miracle [ultimately], not a mental calculation."²⁵ When Jesus revealed Himself, Thomas' eyes were opened. The same is true with Christians today.

And this regenerative work is always personal. You know this. Thomas' confession is no mere theological observation. It's personal. It's "*My Lord and my God!*" (20:28). It's not enough for us to recognize Jesus as *the* Lord and *the* God. He has to be that for us personally. This is a personal confession of Thomas' faith. And the same is required of us.

There's one illustration I've heard that communicates this point well. I used to think the illustration was fake, but it's actually true. There was a guy named Charles Blondin, who was a French tightrope walker in the 19th century. And Blondin, I guess because tightrope walking is not that hard, would sometimes push a wheelbarrow across the tightrope suspended high above the ground. And just to rub in how much more coordination he has than the rest of us, he eventually decided to take his act to Niagara Falls. So they set up the wire across the waterfall and he would push the wheelbarrow to one side and then return to the other side. People would gather and cheer him on when he did it. But that got old after a while, so he asked the crowd if they thought he could carry heavy objects across. And they all cheered, "Yeah! Do it!" And so he did. They loaded that wheelbarrow up with bricks and he crossed to the other side and then back again. And everyone would lose it! So he asks, "How many of you think I can take a heavier object across?" And everyone erupted, "You can do it! We know you can!" Then he asked, "How many of you believe I can carry a human across?" And they all shouted, "Yeah, you can do that! Do it!" So he asked, "And who will volunteer?" Silence. Ain't nobody signing up for that!

You see what's happening? In their minds—after seeing all that Blondin could do—they knew intellectually that he could carry a person across the tightrope in the wheelbarrow. They believed he could do it in their mind, cognitively. But they didn't have a biblical faith. In other words, they knew intellectually that he was able, but they wouldn't trust him to do it for them.²⁶

Biblical faith, saving faith, is *not* merely believing that Jesus is real, or that He's God's Son, or that He rose from the dead, or any number of other true things about Him up here [points to head]. It's about trusting in Him. It doesn't just say, "I believe you are able," it gets in the wheelbarrow. It's saying, "You're going to have to carry me across, Jesus, because I can't do it." Believing facts doesn't save you. Demons believe those same facts (James 2:19). Biblical faith is trusting in Jesus to save you because He alone can. And that's what Thomas' confession hints at. Thomas doesn't just confess that Jesus is Lord and God. He confesses Him as his Lord and his God. It's personal—"My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

And it can be personal for you as well. And this brings us to one final point I would like to highlight from this story, which is related to...

The Blessing that Extends (29)

Look at the final thing the Jesus said to Thomas, in verse 29...

"Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:29)

This is the second of only two beatitudes—"Blessed are you/those" statements—in John's Gospel (cf. 13:17). The word for "*blessed*" can mean "happy," but I think the sense in context is more congratulatory.²⁷ The idea is

that something amazing has been accrued to a person or made possible for a person because of meeting a certain condition. In this case, the condition is belief—faith in Jesus—and the accrual is being accepted by God because of all that Christ has accomplished for the believer. They are “blessed” in that sense. Richly blessed!

But don’t take my word for it. Listen to what John’s Gospel teaches about why the one who believes is blessed.²⁸ I’ll give you ten examples. Together they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how the Gospel transforms the believer’s standing, internal state, and external impact. What do they include?

1. You Are Adopted into the Family of God

By faith, we transition from being isolated individuals to becoming “children of God”. John notes that *“to all who did receive him [i.e., Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (1:12).

2. You Possess Imperishable Life

Faith connects the believer to Christ, ensuring that physical death is not a finality but a transition. Jesus promises that *“whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (3:16).

3. You Are Exempt from Condemnation

The believer moves from being guilty before God to a state of complete acquittal. Christ declares, *“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”* (5:24).

4. You Are Offered Enduring Satisfaction (Now)

Christianity offers a profound fulfillment that satisfies the soul’s deepest longings. As the Bread of Life, Jesus promises, *“whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst”* (6:35). There is spiritual satisfaction available to you in Christ, even today.

5. You Can Now Be a Blessing to Others

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, faith transforms the believer into a channel of life to others. Jesus assures us, *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”* (7:38-39).

6. You Have a New Perception into God’s Activity

Faith provides the spiritual insight necessary to recognize God’s presence in a world that often ignores Him. Jesus asks, *“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* (11:40). Without faith, we are like the lost, who are surrounded by the glory of God in creation, but either don’t recognize it or else attribute it to something other than God. Only when we look to God in faith do our eyes begin to open and we start to see Him and His activity all around us.

7. You Now Have Power to Live a Holy Life

Believing in Jesus allows one to navigate the moral complexities of life without being overcome by the darkness of this sinful world. Jesus explains, *“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness”* (12:46). We can walk in the light now, which is to say walk in holiness, through the powerful grace of God at work in us.

8. You Now Can Make a Meaningful Impact

A life of faith leads to meaningful impact on others through Christian service (and even suffering). Jesus promises, *“whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do”* (14:12). This doesn’t mean you are going to perform miracles necessarily, but it does refer to everyday tasks that God can use to make an eternal impact. Things like sharing the Gospel, teaching the Word of God to others, and serving as Christ Himself modeled for us. These are done by people like you

and me, who trust God's Word and step out boldly in faith to follow Jesus. And God uses even these seemingly small efforts to make a difference that will be felt in eternity.

9. You Have an Advocate before the Father

Believers are upheld by the ongoing, personal prayers of Jesus Himself. In His famous high priestly prayer, He said, *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word"* (17:20). How wonderful it is to know that He continues to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34). And if, as James teaches us, the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective (James 5:16), then how much more will the prayers of the Righteous One, Jesus Christ Himself, avail for those who believe!

10. You Are Guaranteed Bodily Resurrection

Our ultimate hope is anchored in the One who has already conquered the grave. Jesus identifies Himself as the means of this victory: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die"* (John 11:25-26).

Jesus asks, immediately after this, *"Do you believe this?"* Well, do you? Then all these blessings—and indeed *"every spiritual blessing"* (Eph 1:3)—are yours in Christ. They are granted to you through faith. You are blessed!

And so was Thomas. It's critical for us to understand that Jesus was not disparaging Thomas. He's not saying, "Well, dear old Thomas, you finally did believe. Of course, it took quite a lot of evidence. It would have been a lot better if you hadn't had to have all of that evidence. It's much better to have the kind of faith where you don't need evidence. Blessed are those, rather, who don't see and yet believe. You're in, Thomas, but it's second-class faith."²⁹ No, that's not the sense. That's the way a lot of people read verse 29, but I don't think it's right.

Thomas' faith was real. He was blessed. And, as one of Christ's chosen Apostles, it was necessary for him to be an eyewitness of the resurrection. By God's design, his physical sight was necessary to establish the foundation of the Church. That was the plan. That was the calling placed on Him by Jesus. So, in this sense, Thomas *does* get "special treatment" since "what Jesus is doing here is ensuring [Thomas'] qualifications as an apostle."³⁰ He doesn't have to do that for us.

And yet that doesn't mean that our faith is a "second-class faith" either.³¹ We share, with Thomas, the same blessings I just itemized, and we too will see Jesus' face to face in time. Yes, we may not have the same eyewitness experience as Thomas—and we need not that experience to believe—but "we need to make the same discovery that Thomas made," namely, the discovery that "Jesus [*is*] patiently at work in our lives to bring us to Himself."³²

Maybe you've heard of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of children's books written by C. S. Lewis. The fifth book published in the series was called, *The Horse and His Boy*. And the "boy" from the title is named Shasta, who was trying to find his way back to Narnia from a foreign land. But his journey home is fleeced with adversity. Everything seems to keep going wrong. And he keeps running into these lions who seem to threaten him at various points. At some point in the story, he finds himself in a deep fog that he cannot escape, but then he senses someone guiding him through it. As this is happening, he hears a voice, and he and the voice begin to have a conversation. Shasta tells the person speaking to him about his complicated journey and eventually asks, "Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" And here's how Lewis writes the dialogue from this point:

"There was only one lion," said the Voice.

"What on earth do you mean?"...

“I was the lion.” And as Shasta gaped...the Voice continued. “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.”³³

What you may not realize, whether you have read the book or not, is that this is C. S. Lewis reflecting on his own journey from atheism to faith. When you begin to see that this Jesus stuff is real—not a fairy tale, not wishful thinking, not an opiate for the fearful—you start to realize that the God you are coming to believe in has not been passively waiting for you to figure things out. He’s been active. He’s been pursuing you. He’s alive. He’s risen! And He’s been there with you when you did not see Him. He was seeking you, when you were not seeking Him.

As with Thomas, He confronts you. Maybe not in the flesh, but no less real. And “like Thomas, you may come, in amazement, to see that he was walking right beside you all the time.”³⁴ The same Lion has been guiding you in the dark, comforting you in your grief, and pushing you to His destination. You may have felt that He was distant or all together nonexistent, only to realize that your every circumstance—even the ones that are provoking your doubt—was the patient work of Christ bringing you to Himself.

And so, as we return to the pressures and uncertainties of our daily lives, I hope that you will let the journey of this skeptical disciple remind you that we serve a Savior who intentionally seeks out those hiding behind the barricades of their own disappointment. Our Lord is never a passive observer of our private struggles; He is the persistent Seeker who enters our self-imposed rooms of fear to offer the wholeness that only His sacrificial victory could achieve. By presenting His permanent scars, Jesus proves that the same person who was crushed for our iniquities is the one who now reigns in triumph, having once and for all cleared our record of guilt and pioneered the way to eternal life.

While we do not have the privilege of His physical embrace today, we do possess the Spirit-breathed record of those who did, providing us with a foundation for faith that is both intellectually robust and spiritually life-giving. This is the heart of the good news: that believing in the Resurrected One is not a desperate leap into the dark, but a miracle of grace that allows us to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not a set of directions for us to find God, but the good news that God has come to find us! May you find the courage to entrust your entire future to His hands, moving beyond a mere acceptance of historical facts to a personal, life-altering commitment to the One who died so that you might truly live.

He will save you today, if you would turn from your sin and self-reliance, and call upon His name. Confess Him today as “*my Lord and my God*” (John 20:28), and you would experience the fulfilment of Jesus’ words in the final verse of our text today: “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (20:29).

And if you need to talk more about Jesus and His salvation today, we’re here for you. Find a pastor at the exit, and let’s have a conversation...

Pray with me...

¹ E.g., Derke Bergsma, “Doubting Thomas: Westminster Seminary California 2008,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/westminster-seminary-california-2008-doubting-thomas/>

² Richard D. Phillips, *John*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 676.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville: W Publishing Group), 157

⁵ The verb tense suggests that the disciples “kept on telling” Thomas the news (imperfect tense) and Thomas’ reply invokes an emphatic double negation, utilizing the Greek *ou mē*, depicting his absolute refusal to believe their testimony.

⁶ D. A. Carson, “My Lord and My God,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/my-lord-and-my-god-john-20-24-31/>.

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Overcoming Doubt: The Resurrection Through the Eyes of Thomas,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/how-can-i-believe-jesus-rose-from-the-dead/>.

⁸ David Felker, “Jesus and Our Doubt,” accessed online at: <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-and-our-doubt/>.

⁹ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 302.

¹⁰ J. C. Ryle, *John* (Marshall Pickering, 1990), 380-381.

¹¹ Richard D. Phillips, *John*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 678,

¹² Milne, 305.

¹³ Many commentators emphasize that these two Sunday appearances establish, what Gerald Borchert calls, a “liturgical emphasis” since Sunday is the day the church customarily assembled to commemorate Jesus’ resurrection (*John 12-21*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002], 313). By choosing this specific interval, Jesus honors the assemble of His people and establishes a pattern where the living Christ is encountered through the communal means of grace.

¹⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Penguin Books, 2008, 2018), xxiii.

¹⁵ Alisa Childers, “I Never Expected to Doubt,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/i-never-expected-doubt/>

¹⁶ John Piper, “How Doubting Thomas Finds Faith,” accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-doubting-thomas-finds-faith>.

¹⁷ David Strain, “The Victorious Christ,” accessed online at: <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-victorious-christ/>.

¹⁸ “It is hard to imagine anything more tiresome and provoking than the conduct of Thomas....But it is impossible to imagine anything more patient and compassionate, than our Lord’s treatment of this weak disciple....He deals with him according to his weakness, like a gentle nurse dealing with a froward child.” J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 3:455–56.

¹⁹ Borchert, 313.

²⁰ Derek Thomas, “Doubting Thomas,” accessed online at: <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/doubting-thomas/>.

²¹ Carson, “Overcoming Doubt.”

²² Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (Viking, 2021), 92.

²³ Phillips, 680.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Piper. “How Doubting Thomas Finds Faith.”

²⁶ Matt Carter, “A Crisis of Faith,” accessed online at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/word-of-the-week/a-crisis-of-faith/>.

²⁷ Borchert, 316; Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 880; Raymond F. Collins, “‘Blessed are Those Who Have not Seen’: John 20:29,” in Chennattu and Coloe, *Transcending Boundaries*, 173–90; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 659.

²⁸ This list was adopted and adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 1614-1616.

²⁹ Carson, “Overcoming Doubt.”

³⁰ Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*, 94.

³¹ As D. A. Carson writes, “This does not (or should not) mean that our faith is diminished or our joy truncated: ‘Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls’ (1 Pet. 1:8–9).” Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 660.

³² Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*, 94.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (1954; illustrated ed., New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 175-176.

³⁴ Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*, 94.