

Text: John 20:24-31

Title: Jesus Overcomes Doubt

Truth: John recounted these things so *you* would know that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, and so believing, you would have eternal life.

Date/Location: April 12, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

Do you sometimes have doubts that the Christian faith is true? Or that Jesus really rose from the dead? Christians are unsure at times, have hidden doubts and are afraid to say anything lest they be thought less of. They may really not want to have those doubts. Non-Christians doubt too, often with a mindset that is skeptical (doubting, questioning, open but demanding evidence to avoid being deceived) or cynical (closed, pessimistic, assuming the worst motivation). The rejection is either more on the rational side or more on the emotional side.

I. Background: John 20:1-18

A. Tomb empty (20:1-10). Mary Magdalene (along with some other women) found Jesus's tomb empty on that Sunday morning, so she told some of the other disciples. Peter and John then also verified that the tomb was empty. They now believed that the tomb was empty, and that Mary and the others were not telling tall tales. What they did not yet believe was that Jesus was actually alive. That would be solidified later.

John comments that "they" (meaning himself and Peter!) did not yet know the Scripture, that Jesus must rise again from the dead." Passages like Psalm 16, Psalm 110, and Isaiah 53 are key cross-references about this point.

B. Jesus alive (20:11-18). Mary stayed around the tomb with her raw emotions from Friday re-triggered now that her Lord was not only dead but—she thought—missing as well. She did not recognize Jesus when He appeared because she was so distraught and Jesus looked quite different than he did on Friday, and likely even different from his appearance when he was in perfect health prior to Thursday evening.

After realizing Who it was, Mary addressed Him as “Teacher” and tried to hang on to him. Perhaps her idea is that she lost Him once, but she is not going to let that happen again. Jesus tells her that she cannot be “clingy” because He is going away to the Father, to Heaven to return from where He came (John 1:1-3, 14; 3:13).

So now Mary reports her new finding to the disciples.

- C. This represents several eyewitnesses to both the empty tomb as well as to the fact that Jesus came back to life. There are quite a few other encounters with Jesus that constitute evidence for His resurrection. The 10+ disciples saw Him (see the next verses), then Thomas as well, then six of them (21:7), Peter, the 12 disciples, over 500 people on one occasion, James, by all the apostles, and then by the apostle Paul. You can search the gospels, Acts and 1 Corinthians, and find these and a few more for a total of around 12 eyewitness sightings.

II. Jesus’s First Meeting with the Apostles, 20:19-23

- A. That Sunday evening, the disciples were gathered but in fear of the Jews. Their lives were, as far as they knew, in danger too. But Jesus appeared and gave them a greeting of peace, which they needed. Their emotions turned to joy when they saw him. Now not only had Mary seen Him, but they themselves could verify that the tomb was empty for a good reason!
- B. Jesus teaches three important but debated ideas.
 - 1. As the Father has sent me, I also send you. Some have taken this to teach “incarnational ministry” whereby we incarnate Jesus to the world and do the things that Jesus did—signs, miracles, or lesser activities involving healing the sick and helping the poor. But those things were not the focus of Christian ministry in the book of Acts, which was preaching the gospel, evangelizing, and starting churches. Jesus distinguishes between His work and our work in two ways: with the comparative adverb “as” and with two different verbs “to send.” Our being sent is markedly different than His. He became flesh, we are flesh. He did miracles, we cannot do miracles. But He did teach the gospel, and we can too. He commands us to carry out the Great

Commission to the entire world, which He did not do personally—He focused on Israel. And He commands us to love our neighbors, using the resources He has given us to help others. Our being sent is *like* His but far short of His.

2. “Receive the Holy Spirit.” When Jesus breathed on them, He was symbolizing the coming of the Holy Spirit. But they did not receive the Spirit in the new way until some days later as recorded in Acts 2. This was a promise of the Spirit’s coming soon to empower them for ministry.
3. “If you forgive...they are forgiven...” Jesus announces to the apostles that they have a declaratory authority regarding the forgiveness of sin. This authority is not the origination of the forgiveness, for that authority and action started in Heaven and with Jesus. This is the authority mentioned in Matt. 16:19 and 18:18, and it means that a body of believers rightly interpreting and practicing the Scriptures, when they declare a person’s sins forgiven, that is declaring truth that is already settled in Heaven. When they tell a person that their sins are *not* forgiven, that also represents a declaration that Heaven agrees with because the truth came from God. How can we do this? On the authority of Scripture and the gospel. Again, this authority is not determinative, but declaratory. What the church says, God has said about that person already. If you are living in a life pattern of unrepentant sin and come and ask me if you are forgiven and fine with God, then on the authority of God’s word, I can say with certainty that you are not forgiven. Heaven already said so. But if you repent and believe in Christ, I can with derivative, declaratory authority tell you that you are forgiven!

III. Jesus Clears Up Thomas’s Doubts, 20:24-31

We now come to the last section which I intend to be the focus of the message and how to answer our initial conundrum about doubts. Here we have an interaction mainly between the apostle Thomas and the Lord Jesus. We begin with an...

- A. Untimely Absence. Verse 24 records that Thomas, the twin, was unfortunately not present. So, the other disciples told him that

they had seen Jesus. I think you can imagine just how disappointing this would be for Thomas. What did he have going on that evening that prevented him from being there?

- B. Stubborn Defiance. But verse 25 shows Thomas being at least a skeptic. He *refuses* to believe what they say. “I will not believe.” In one sense, I am thankful that Thomas was not gullible. He was not going to believe just because someone said something. And that is useful for us. We know even the other disciples were not primed to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. This strengthens the case for the resurrection because we are not talking about a bunch of emotional people given to hallucinations. They were level-headed and said—perhaps like you do today—that dead people do not start to live again!

We also know about Thomas that he was something of a pessimist (John 11:16) and unsure or demanding all the details (14:5).

Maybe you are like him in some way—skeptical, demanding evidence, refusing to believe in the Lord and follow Him.

- C. Gracious Reappearance. In verse 26, John records how after eight days (the next Sunday or Monday), Jesus came back. This time, Thomas was with them. Jesus greeted them the same way as before—with peace.
- D. Loving Rebuke. Jesus told Thomas to “check it out.” Look at the marks in Jesus’s hands and side. Jesus appeals to Thomas’s physical senses—touch and see—and tells him to stop being unbelieving. Instead, believe. Jesus *commands* Him to believe in the empty tomb, in the resurrection, in Him personally.
- Jesus is in effect doing the same thing *today* to *you*.
- E. Powerful Profession. Thomas quickly snaps out of his defiance. In fact, the evidence is so overwhelming that the pendulum swings all the way to the other side. Thomas immediately believes in the resurrection of Jesus, and the deity of Jesus. He is not just saying “OMG” like people do today as they use the name of the Lord in an empty fashion. He is making a declaration that Jesus is His Lord and God. And that is what He is.

F. Invisible Blessing. In verse 29 Jesus states the obvious fact that Thomas has believed because he saw. “Seeing is believing” for Thomas. Unfortunately, that is not possible for any other Christians who came after Jesus ascended. Not counting a few appearances to the apostle Paul, no one else has the “luxury” of demanding Jesus to appear right here and right now or else I will not believe. God is telling us that this kind of stubborn unbelief is inappropriate. God has given us enough evidence to know the Lord and believe in Him.

Jesus pronounces a special blessing on those who believe despite not seeing. Thank you Jesus for that blessing. We will receive that with thanks.

G. Clear Purpose. John ends the main body of his gospel in verses 30-31 with a statement of why he wrote the entire gospel (which, by the way, is why you should read all of it).

1. Jesus did a lot of signs, which are miracle that mean or point out something. These miraculous signs point to Jesus as God’s chosen one or “Messiah.” God appointed Jesus as the human mediator between God and man. He was chosen to represent humanity as a substitutionary sacrifice. He was appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42, 2 Tim 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5 [read 4:1-5], Rev. 20:12-13).
2. John wrote some of them, but Jesus did a whole lot more. John records about 10 of the miracles. The other gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke record 27 more, and there were undoubtedly even others.
3. John wrote them with this purpose: that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by so believing you would have eternal life through His name.
4. What is life? You might wonder because you think you have life right now. You have human, physical, temporary life. But if you are not a Christian, the fact of the matter is that you not only are going to die physically like everyone else, but you are dead right now. You do not have the Holy Spirit enlivening your inner person. You do not have eternal life, which every Christian has

right now with the hope that it brings. You are alive in body but not in spirit. Your spirit may be far away from God and insensitive to your need for God, but still God has graciously granted you to be alive for the time being.

If you have *physical* life, you have a human spirit in your body, and it is all working as normal. If you have *spiritual* life, you have God's Spirit added into the mix, connecting your spirit to God in a personal way, knowing God, giving you a new sense of morality, a new mindset, new goals, new hunger for His word, a desire to pray, a love for God, being united to Jesus and to the other people of Jesus in the church, and the ability to grow in all of those areas.

Conclusion

Are you there? Are you like the Thomas *before* seeing Jesus—stubbornly defiant, saying, “I will not believe”? Or are you like Thomas *after* seeing Jesus, “My Lord and my God”?

Our purpose today is John's purpose from 2,000 years ago: that you might have life, in Christ.

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