Thomas, the Hesitant Believer

John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2
SS Lesson for 08/02/2026

Devotional Scripture: Heb 11:35-40

OUTLINE

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COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Skepticism, doubt, and questions characterize some journeys toward faith. Today's lesson highlights one disciple's willingness to ask questions and seek evidence toward sincere belief. Tradition has labeled Thomas as a pessimist and skeptic. The Gospel of John refers to Thomas as "Didymus" three times (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). All these texts are under consideration in today's lesson. Scholars have commented on this designation, which literally means "twin," as meaning "double," like "double-minded." This interpretation has led to the conceptualization of Thomas as a doubter. The reputation is not entirely fair, however, as it presupposes that Thomas's questions and requests for evidence were extreme or his disbelief was unwarranted. The disciples had no idea that Jesus would return to life. Thomas's desire for proof did not make him a "typical skeptic" because he alone, among the other disciples, had yet to see Jesus.

Key Verse: John 20:27

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Thomas Believed Enough to Die (John 11:14-16)

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.
15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."
16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Death of Lazarus (14)

Death sometimes can be overcome by prayer (1 Kings 17:17-22)

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. 18 She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" 19 "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. 20 Then he cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" 21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" 22 The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

Death sometimes can be overcome by God's protecting His promises (2 Kings 4:29-35)

> 29 Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face." 30 But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her. 31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened." 32 When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. 33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. 34 Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. 35 Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

Declaration of wiliness to die (15-16)

Willing to die to prove faithfulness (Matt 26:35)

> 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Willing to die thinking we are prepared (Luke 22:31-33)

> 31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Willing to die knowing that there is life after death (John 11:11)

> 11 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."

Thomas was Hesitant because of the Unknown (John 14:5-8)

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"
6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."
8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

Unknown way of salvation (5)

Unknown because of hearts being hardened (Mark 8:17-18)

> 17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

Unknown because of unbelief (Mark 9:19)

> 19 "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

Unknown because of not understanding God's Word (Luke 24:25)

> 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Unknown because of being immature (Heb 5:11-14)

> 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Jesus is the Way (6)

Way of holiness (Isa 35:8)

> 8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

Way that God reveals through Jesus (Matt 11:27)

> 27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Way of the Good Shepherd's gate (John 10:9)

> 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

Way of access to God (Eph 2:18)

> 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Seeking God (7-8)

Seeking God by seeing Jesus (John 12:45)

> 45 When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.

Seeking God knowing that God is in Jesus (John 14:20)

> 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Seeking God knowing that Jesus is the exact image of God (Col 1:15)

> 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Seeking God through Jesus who is the radiance of God's glory (Heb 1:3)

> 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Thomas was Hesitant because of Needing Proof (John 20:24-29)

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."
26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"
27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."
28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"
29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Proof versus hearing (24-25)

Seeking proof through signs (Matt 16:1)

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

Seeking proof through actions (Matt 27:42)

42 "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

Seeking proof because of unbelief (Heb 3:19)

19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Seeking through hearing the gospel (Rom 10:14)

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Seeking through hearing about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2)

2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Seeking through hearing the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13)

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Proof by seeing Jesus (26)

Seeing Jesus' body (John 20:20)

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Seeing Jesus face to face (Job 19:27)

27 I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Seeing Jesus is seeing the Father (John 14:9)

9 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'?

Seeing because Jesus is the exact representation of God (Heb 1:3)

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Proof by touching Jesus (27-28)

Touch of faith (Matt 9:20-22)

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.

Touch to confirm Jesus' deity (1 John 1:1)

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

Touch of healing (Acts 19:12)

> 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Proof by faith (29)

Faith in the word of God (John 20:30-31)

> 30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 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.

Faith in God's indwelling presence (Exod 4:4-5)

> 4 Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 5 "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you."

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 19:34-35)

> 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Thomas Believed Through a Gathering (John 21:1-2)

1 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself:
2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

A gathering that accepted Jesus (1-2)

A gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31)

> 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

A gathering that will brings together the children of God (John 11:51-52)

> 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

A gathering of God's kingdom (Matt 12:30)

> 30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

A gathering of that gives thanks, praise and worship to God (Ps 106:47)

> 47 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Jesus' Third Appearance: The Disciples, Including Thomas (20:24-31)

The disciples seem to have been convinced of our Lord's resurrection, except for Thomas who was not there. He did not see the resurrected Lord, nor did he behold the Savior's wounded hands and side. And so it was that when Thomas was told that Jesus had appeared to them, he refused to believe. He insisted that in order for him to believe, he would have to see Jesus with his own eyes. He would have to personally inspect the Lord's nail-pierced hands and His pierced side. Only then would he believe. Before we become too harsh with Thomas, let me remind you that the other disciples did not believe until they saw, either. Thomas is really demanding to see the same things that convinced the others. He is not asking for anything more than what the others saw.

Eight days passed. Apparently Jesus did not appear to any of His disciples during this period of time. The disciples were all together once again, including Thomas. The doors were locked, but in spite of this Jesus arrived and stood in their midst. Jesus repeats the greeting He gave at His earlier appearance, "**Peace be with you**" (verse 26; see also verses 19, 21). Immediately, Jesus turns His attention to Thomas. He summons Thomas to come and to put his finger where the nails had pierced His hands, and to feel His side where the spear had pierced it. He challenged Thomas to forsake his unbelief and to believe.

We do not know whether Thomas actually pressed his fingers into our Lord's nail-pierced hands or not. Since John does not tell us that Thomas actually felt the wounds of our Lord, it may well be that after seeing Jesus alive he no longer required this proof. It may have taken this sight to convince Thomas, but once convinced,

Thomas got it right. He does not merely profess a belief that Jesus has risen from the dead. Thomas professes to believe in what the resurrection proved—that Jesus was God, and that He was Lord (verse 28). Thomas now has it right.

Bible translations handle our Lord's response differently. Some render the first words of verse 29 as a question, "**Have you believed because you have seen Me?**" (as does the NET Bible). Others render it as a statement: "**Because you have seen me, you have believed**" (NIV, KJV, NKJV). The difference is not important. The contrast Jesus seeks to emphasize is between those who must see in order to believe, and those who will believe without seeing. Peter seems to take up this same thought in his first epistle:

8 You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, 9 because you are attaining the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9).

It is not too hard to see what John is leading up to. John is writing this Gospel for those who have never seen the risen Lord. He has selected just a few of the many miraculous signs Jesus performed to demonstrate that Jesus is who He claimed to be, who John proclaims Him to be.

The Bottom Line: Believing Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God (20:30-31)

If there is one thing I despise, it is deceptive advertising. I hate those phone calls that come from unidentified ("out of the area") sources, which begin with the assurance that the caller is not "selling" anything. John could not be more open and direct about the purpose of this book. I believe John has two conclusions. The first is found in chapter 20. It is aimed at those who have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. The second is aimed at those who have believed, and it is found in chapter 21.

In our text, John informs his unbelieving readers about the "bottom line" of all that he has written. John has one goal for the unbeliever: He wants to demonstrate as clearly and as forcefully as he can that Jesus not only claimed to be the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God, but that by many miraculous signs He proved it! The last and greatest of these signs was His resurrection from the dead:

38 Then some of the experts in the law along with some Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. 41 The people of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; yet something greater than Jonah is here!

42 The Queen of the South will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; yet something greater than Solomon is here! (Matthew 12:38-42).

While the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was prophesied in the Old Testament, and by our Lord Himself, John makes it very clear that the disciples were not predisposed to believe it. Only after the most forceful and compelling evidence would the disciples believe Jesus really was alive. And having become convinced of this great truth, the disciples never ceased to proclaim it. The resurrection of Jesus is the final and compelling proof that He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world:

1 From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God 2 that he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with respect to the flesh, 4 who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:1-4).

Believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is the only way God has provided for the forgiveness of your sins and for the gift of eternal life. By believing in Him, you will be saved:

*9 Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and thus has a right standing and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. 11 For the scripture says, "**Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame**." 12 For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. 13 For **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved** (Romans 10:9-13).*

11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children 13 —children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God (John 1:11-13).

In many ways, the Gospel of John is not a simple book. But its message to the unsaved is incredibly simple, and John sums it up in these last verses of chapter 20. If you have never come to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, then John has written this book to you, and for you, to give you all the evidence you need to believe in Him. Have you believed? This is the most important decision you will ever make. It determines your eternal destiny.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/46-seeing-and-believing-john-2010-31)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Thomas's doubt mirrors a common human experience: the struggle of faith, which asks us to trust evidence that we ourselves cannot see firsthand. Jesus often taught in parables, his words falling on his hearers' ears like riddles. And his resurrection is a fantastic miracle! Thomas's interactions with Jesus show humans' difficulty with stepping outside the physical world and into a more important spiritual reality. The way toward deep comprehension of Jesus as the Son of God, Messiah, and Lord is challenging. Understanding Jesus as fully God, one with the Father, is difficult too. It takes questioning and wrestling to overcome the doubts and puzzles that inevitably emerge along the journey of faith. We must have the eyes of our understanding enlightened to truly comprehend (Ephesians 1:18). Sometimes that requires honest questions. It always requires engagement with Jesus, with whom the text of Scripture is primarily concerned.