

August 2, 2026

“Thomas, the Hesitant Believer”
Lesson 3

Four Passages in John

Intro

Tradition has labeled Thomas as a skeptic and pessimist. He is sometimes called Thomas Didymus, which literally means “twin”. One interpretation of that word is that Thomas was “double-minded”, being both believing and unbelieving. But this reputation is not entirely fair. It presupposes that Thomas’ questions and requests for evidence were extreme, that his disbelief was unwarranted. But none of the disciples believed that Jesus was actually going to rise from the dead. Thomas’ desire for proof is reasonable, as he was the only one of the disciples at the time he makes that request who had not seen the risen Jesus. A short paragraph introducing the ideas of the following passage will be given before each of the four segments we look at today.

Read John 11:14-16

Jesus is on the other side of the Jordan when He gets word that his friend Lazarus is very ill. Instead of leaving immediately as requested by Lazarus’ sisters, he intentionally delays leaving for two days. In the time Lazarus dies, and Jesus discerns this. He tells His disciples that Lazarus has “fallen asleep”, which the disciples think means “natural sleep”. Jesus now corrects that misunderstanding.

1. vs. 14: At times, the disciples don’t understand Jesus when He uses figurative language
Here Jesus speaks very plainly: “Lazarus is dead.”
This show His omniscience and deity
2. vs. 15: Jesus says He is glad that He wasn’t there—Lazarus’ death will serve a divine purpose
Jesus wants His disciples to believe
At this point, a lack of full belief still exists among Jesus’ followers
Jesus wants them to see what He’s going to do, so He tells them it’s time to go
3. vs. 16: Here’s one of the times Thomas is called “Didymus”
He seems like Peter here, boldly ready to go die with/for Jesus
He thinks dying is possible since the Jews tried to stone Jesus in John 10:31-33
Jesus is determined to go to Lazarus, whose home is but a few miles from Jerusalem
Thomas says this to the other disciples, not to Jesus

Read John 14:5-8

This next passage comes during Jesus’ final week. He washed the disciples’ feet in John 13. He also predicted his betrayal and Peter’s coming denial of Him. The disciples are naturally distressed by these announcements, so Jesus begins again to teach them, comforting them by saying He is going to “prepare a place” for them. What He says about a destination and a way to get there prompts a question from Thomas.

4. vs. 5: Thomas’ question reveals a seeker’s heart
He wants to be where Jesus is, but doesn’t feel he has enough info to get there

Jesus is speaking of a spiritual reality, but Thomas is thinking of a physical location on Earth
Thomas here is speaking honestly—he doesn't understand and he says so
The disciples have asked Jesus for clarification before, and will do so again
They want explanation of the sower and the seeds
They don't understand about the Pharisee's bread and literal bread
They need help understand the resurrection, even after Jesus has risen

5. vs. 6: Jesus' answer to Thomas is one of the most quoted and memorized of Scriptures
He tells Thomas that He is the way; He is the guide and the pathway
He is the way because He is the truth
Following Jesus' way is the only way to get to the Father
6. vs. 7: Jesus and God are so close that to know One is to know the Other
To know one is to know the essence of the other as well
Based on verse 5, the only way to know God is to know Jesus first
7. vs. 8: Philip asks the question here, but no doubt all of them were thinking it
Philip says "Show us the Father"
Again, this comes from a seeking heart
They want to know God and be with Him
They aren't sure how to get closer, so they ask for more information
Despite what Jesus has said in vs. 7, they don't understand how to get close to God

Read John 20:24-29

Jesus appeared personally, in the flesh, to several people the day of His resurrection. One of these appearances was to the disciples. But Thomas wasn't with them at the time. So what the disciples told Thomas, and what Thomas wanted and needed, were two different things.

8. vs. 24-25a: Here is the verse that tells us that Thomas wasn't with the others when Jesus came
They give their testimony: "We have seen the Lord!"
This sounds great, but Thomas *wasn't* there with them
9. vs. 25b: Here is the verse that is used to pin the term "doubting" on Thomas
"Unless I see it myself, I won't believe"
Thomas isn't relying on another person's testimony or experience
He wants to have his own encounter with Jesus—then he'll believe
10. vs. 26: It's now a week later, and this time Thomas is with the rest of the disciples
We wonder if Thomas and the others had "heated" discussions
They saw Jesus and now believe, but Thomas didn't see, doesn't believe yet
The doors are locked, yet Jesus comes through the door to be with them
This is another proof of Jesus' divinity, and of His resurrection
11. vs. 27: Jesus addresses Thomas here
His to Thomas mirror exactly what Thomas wanted as proof
He gets to touch Jesus' hand, and put his hand into the wound in Jesus' side
Jesus tells him, "Stop doubting and believe"

12. vs. 28: Thomas' response is similar to and as strong as Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ
Thomas says, "My Lord and my God!"
Thomas' faith has now met the resurrected Jesus
He acknowledges Jesus as his own Lord, and also that Jesus is God

13. vs. 29: Jesus makes two important statements here
First, He acknowledges that Thomas believes in Him as Messiah, as Lord and God
Thomas believes because he saw Jesus in this encounter
Second, Jesus says that others are blessed who have not seen, and yet believe
This is directed to all those who will believe in Jesus, but never see Him
This verse is a blessing on and an encouragement to all future generations

Read John 21:1-2

At the end of John 20, in vs. 30-31, John stresses two things. Jesus appeared to people many more times than the ones that John records, and John chose the things he did record so that people will believe in Jesus. The last example from chapter 21 is another encounter between the disciples and Jesus, recorded so that others who didn't get to see the resurrected Jesus would believe in Him.

14. vs. 1: Jesus appears again to His disciples, this time on the shore of the Sea of Galilee

15. vs. 2: Seven disciples are noted as being present for this meeting
The more witnesses Jesus appears to, the more credible His resurrection becomes
Peter is named first, but Thomas, usually much later, is listed second
Thomas is going to present for another miracle (21:6)

Application: Thomas' experience with doubt, with wanting to see the truth for himself, is a common human response. We are asked to trust evidence that we cannot see firsthand. We are asked to trust the record, the testimony, of those who did see it and left us with the details of what they saw. Thomas' story points out an important spiritual reality. The way toward deep comprehension of Jesus as the Son of God and Lord is challenging. Understanding Jesus as fully God and one with the Father is difficult, too. It takes questioning and wrestling to overcome the doubts and puzzles that inevitably come on the faith journey. Our spiritual eyes need to be enlightened, as Ephesians 1:18 says. Sometimes that requires honest questions and responses that can seem to some as doubting. Coming to the truth always requires engagement with Jesus.

Prayer: Father God, help us to have Thomas' honest heart to ask the things that we don't completely understand. Please open our spiritual eyes to see You more clearly, more deeply. In Jesus' name, Amen.