

## Living Word Small Group Study Guide

April 5-11, 2020

### Sermon Series: This Changes Everything

#### Week Six: “From Doubting Thomas to Believer”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

#### **Suggested Opening Prayer:**

*Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.*

*Almighty God, You are the light and life of every soul, and our only source of hope. Grant that in this time of study, we may experience Your transforming power, preparing us for the ministry of this week. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

#### **Sermon Series Theme:**

Throughout the Gospels we find that when people encountered Jesus they were changed, and for the better. That same transformation is available to you, a change for the better, when you encounter Christ in your life.

#### **This Week’s Sermon Theme:**

Thomas is known for his capacity to doubt. However, he becomes a strong believer when he witnesses the risen Christ. He goes on to be a great evangelist in India. What doubts do you allow to prevent you from fully living your faith?

**Sunday Scripture Reading:** John 20:24-29 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

#### **For Group Discussion:**

##### ***What does the text actually SAY?***

*The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.*

Which disciple wasn’t with the rest of the Twelve when Jesus had first appeared to them behind closed doors? (20:24)

What do the other disciples tell him when he joins them? (20:25)

What does Thomas say he must SEE in order to believe? (20:25)

What two things does Thomas say he must DO in order to believe? (20:25)

How many days go by before the disciples again meet in a house, this time with Thomas with them? (20:26)

What does John emphasize about the door of the room? (20:26)

What does Jesus say when he enters? (20:26)

What three things does Jesus first tell Peter to do? (20:27)

What two things does Jesus tell Peter to do in the end? (20:27)

What is Thomas' exclamation to Jesus after Jesus' words? (20:28)

What two kinds of belief does Jesus contrast in His final words to Thomas? (20:29)

### ***What questions does the text raise for us?***

*The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.*

We might wonder, why wasn't Thomas with the other disciples the first time Jesus came to them?

We might also wonder if the other disciples kept insisting on the truth of what they had told Thomas in the eight days between first telling Thomas about it and the rest of the story, or if they left him alone!

We might even wonder if the other disciples started doubting their OWN experience based on Thomas' attitude.

We almost certainly wonder, in this story, just how Jesus DID come to be among them in a locked room.

We wonder at the fact that a resurrected body can be seen, can speak to us, can hear, can be touched, but can also somehow appear in a locked room!

We might wonder, how did Jesus know precisely the three things Thomas said he would have to do to believe, such that He addresses exactly those three things with Thomas? Was He somehow present at that conversation, but unseen?

We probably wonder whether or not Thomas actually DID these things when Jesus invited him to! The text doesn't actually say if he did or he didn't!

What all do you think Thomas is really saying in exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!"?

How do you think Thomas would have reacted to Jesus' final words? Do you think he would have felt chastised? Or do you think he would have been encouraged to share the good news with others who would have to believe on faith rather than sight?

## Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: John 11:16; John 14:5; Luke 24:1-12; Matthew 28:17; John 4:43-54; John 1:1-18; John 5:23

John's is the only Gospel that includes Thomas as more than a name in a list of the twelve disciples. He has appeared earlier in the Gospel of John in two places – first, in 11:16, as a loyal disciple who seems willing to follow Jesus even into death, and again in 14:5, where he is portrayed as somewhat slow to comprehend Jesus' full meaning when Jesus says the disciples know the way to where He is going. Now, in this Resurrection appearance, Thomas earns the name that will follow him for two thousand years – “doubting Thomas.”

It's important to recognize that according to Luke 24:1-12, none of the disciples at first believed the story the women told regarding the message of Jesus' Resurrection that they had been given by the angels, either. Matthew 28:17 tells us that when Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee, even then, some of them doubted. But it is John's telling of the story of doubting Thomas that has been remembered through the years. Still, it would seem that many of the disciples, at some point in the aftermath of Jesus' Resurrection, expressed the same doubting attitude as Thomas.

A previous passage in John helps shed some further light on Thomas' attitude. In the story in John 4:43-54, an official from the town of Capernaum calls upon Jesus to come to his home to heal his sick son. Jesus says to him, “Unless you see miraculous signs and wonders, you won't believe.” (CEB) Given the narrator's words in 4:45, it would appear Jesus was suspicious of this official, fearing that he has a shallow faith based only on what he had seen Jesus do in Jerusalem. The official still insists Jesus come with him, but Jesus heals the boy then and there – and the man believed Jesus' words that his son had been healed. The story of Thomas doubting the disciples' testimony of the Resurrection is an example of the same attitude that Jesus had criticized in the earlier story – refusing to believe without miraculous signs and wonders. Thomas demands visible proof, a miraculous sign. The official from Capernaum and his family became believers in Jesus after going home and finding the boy recovered. Thomas becomes a believer after seeing Jesus' hands and sides.

But notice that Jesus expresses a similar sentiment to that in 4:48 here. He challenges Thomas, in what seems to be partly a rebuke and partly an invitation – stop doubting, and believe! The rebuke centers on Thomas' typical human attitude of requiring signs and wonders, even after traveling with Jesus for three years. The invitation is an invitation to faith – to believe out of a trust and confidence in Jesus Himself. Even though the story doesn't say so, the early church developed the tradition that Thomas did, in fact, reach out and touch Jesus, and that the other disciples followed suit. Much Christian art has depicted this scene, such that Thomas reaching out to put his hand in Jesus' side or to touch his wounds is part of our common view of what must have happened. But in verse 29, Jesus Himself says that Thomas believed because he had SEEN Jesus, not because Thomas had TOUCHED Jesus. The impression is that Thomas declared “My Lord and my God” in response to seeing Jesus, not in response to touching Jesus.

Thomas' declaration is his confession of faith. The most famous doubter of the Resurrection has become a believer. Notice, though, that Thomas does not simply declare the fact of the Resurrection – he doesn't say “I believe you now, you really did see Jesus.” Rather, Thomas actually sees deeper into

what the Resurrection truly means. His declaration is an expression of the full MEANING of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection. Not only is Jesus truly God (as John's Gospel has insisted from the beginning – see John 1:1-18), but Thomas has acknowledged what this implies for himself personally! Note the personal pronouns, MY Lord, and MY God! Thomas confesses to the risen Christ that now, Thomas belongs to Jesus, Thomas will serve Jesus as his Lord and Master, and Thomas will worship and adore Jesus as God incarnate! Thomas is the fulfillment of Jesus' words in John 5:23 – “everyone will honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” The final words of Jesus in the story (“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”) are an invitation to future generations, including us. We may not have the privilege of seeing the risen Christ in person, but we are assured that we will be blessed, happy, if we believe by faith.

### **Final Thoughts for Discussion:**

*The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.*

We live in the “Show-Me State,” named for our lack of gullibility! Where do you usually land on the “I’ll believe it when I see it” spectrum?

What doubts do you have that affect your ability to live out your faith more fully?

What can you point to in your life as an example of living by faith?

Do you feel like your faith is overcoming your doubt, or like your doubt is defeating your faith?

What changes could you make to strengthen your faith?

Are you able to look at Jesus and declare, “My Lord and my God!”?

How would making this declaration your own impact your faith and doubt?

### **Suggested Closing Prayer:**

*Gracious God, give us eyes to see Jesus. Help us to live by faith, to trust in Your grace, and not to depend upon miraculous signs and wonders. Overcome our doubt, and transform us into believers who are eager to share the gospel. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus, our Lord and our God. Amen.*