



Reach Out Your Hand

Believers can be confident that Jesus is resurrected.

JOHN 20:19-29

Robert Ripley was a sports columnist who, during a slow sports news day, wrote an article about unusual competitions and called it “Champs and Chumps.” In time, oddities from around the world took on a new name, “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.” We are fascinated by things that seem unbelievable or out of the ordinary. Some things may test what we think to be possible until we see the evidence. Even Jesus’s closest followers had questions about His resurrection until they saw the evidence.

What is the most unbelievable thing you have ever seen?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 20:19-31

Throughout John's Gospel we find a connection between seeing and believing. John the Baptist declared that he had seen and testified that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:33-34). At a wedding in Cana where Jesus turned water to wine, we are told that the disciples believed as a result of seeing the miracle (2:11). After giving a blind man sight, the formerly blind man professed his belief in Jesus (9:38). After raising Lazarus, John tells us that many Jews saw Lazarus and believed in Jesus (11:45). This theme finds its culmination in Jesus showing His scars after His resurrection.

Fearful of Jewish reprisals, the disciples hid behind locked doors, possibly in the same upper room where they celebrated the Passover. They did not realize the significance of it being the third day since Jesus's crucifixion. Although Jesus repeatedly told them He would rise on that day, they could not connect His promise with their reality—until Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst.

Jesus showed them His scars and ate with them. They needed complete confidence that Jesus had triumphed over the grave if they were to carry out the mission He was about to give them.

Thomas was not present at this gathering. When he returned and heard his companions' testimonies, he said he would have to place his fingers into the nail prints of Jesus's hands and put his hand into the Lord's side before he could believe. Thomas could not comprehend this supernatural reality without hard evidence.

Thomas continued in his despondency for a week. As suddenly as His previous appearance, Jesus stood among the disciples again. He invited Thomas to do exactly what he had requested—to put his finger into Jesus's scars. Thomas fell at Jesus's feet and acknowledged Him as Lord and God. He saw and believed. Jesus commended persons who could believe even what they had not seen.

As you read John 20:19-29 in your Bible, look for the connection between seeing and believing. How did seeing the risen Christ impact people's belief that He was indeed the Savior?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

COMMISSIONED (JOHN 20:19-23)

¹⁹ When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” ²² After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

VERSES 19-20

Each of the four Gospel writers specified the women arrived early morning on the ***first day of the week*** and found the tomb empty. John wanted his readers to know what happened several hours later that same day. Because of what happened that morning, the *first day of the week* would come to be known as “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10).

Despite Peter and John’s visiting the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene’s telling the disciples she had seen and spoken with the Lord, the disciples were still fearful. Knowing the role ***the Jews*** played in the crucifixion, the disciples were afraid of what they might do to them. Thus, they were behind locked doors.

Rather than hearing temple police banging on the doors, they heard a familiar voice: ***Peace be with you.*** Jesus, who miraculously passed through grave clothes, evidently passed through the walls and ***stood among them.*** The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost (Luke 24:37). Jesus showed them ***his hands and his side.*** Although John had been the only disciple to stand at the foot of the cross, the others had certainly heard details about the crucifixion. Luke reported that Jesus “presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3). The wounds offered such proof.

When teaching His disciples during the Passover supper a few days earlier, Jesus had foretold, “But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice” (John 16:22). This was what happened; upon seeing the Lord alive, ***the disciples rejoiced.***

How does the joy of knowing Jesus is resurrected motivate believers to tell others about Him?

VERSES 21-23

During the Passover meal, Jesus foretold details about the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16). He said, “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning” (15:26-27). Those words were partially fulfilled in these verses. Just as the Father had **sent** Jesus to minister and speak in His name, Jesus would now **send** His disciples to do the same.

Having commissioned His disciples, Jesus **breathed** on them and spoke of their receiving **the Holy Spirit**, an event that would occur in a few weeks at Pentecost. By breathing on His disciples, Jesus was providing a visible preview of the Spirit’s arrival. He was also affirming His divinity by echoing what the Father had done after creating man from dust: God “breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit*

At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 12:13; Hebrews 5:9.)

The Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead still transforms people’s lives today and equips believers for Christ’s work and service. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

When Jesus spoke of sins being **forgiven** or **retained** by His disciples, He used legal terms that referred to a judge’s ability to discern the legitimacy of a person’s behavior. The question for the judge to determine was whether a person was innocent or merely acting innocent. In the same way, Jesus was saying His followers

could, based on someone's behavior, declare that person had truly repented and thus been forgiven—or had not.

BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Review a Bible dictionary article on the term “breath.” Notice passages identified in the article that point to God’s breath and His sovereignty over life. How does the article give you a deeper understanding of Jesus breathing on the disciples in John 20:22? What does Jesus breathing on them communicate about the nature and role of the Holy Spirit?

DEMANDS (JOHN 20:24-25)

²⁴ But Thomas (called “Twin”), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were telling him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “If I don’t see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

VERSES 24-25

Thomas had demonstrated great loyalty to Jesus by saying he was willing to die for Him if necessary (11:1-16). Later, when Jesus told His disciples He was going away to prepare a place for them, Thomas, not wanting to be separated from Jesus, asked where He was going and how they too could get there (14:1-6). These snapshots highlight Thomas’s devotion to Jesus.

For some unspecified reason, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors. When the disciples later saw Thomas, they proclaimed: **“We’ve seen the Lord!”** The Greek verb tense is significant; it indicates that the disciples kept telling him.

Thomas wanted confirmation. He would ***never believe*** unless he could see and touch Jesus's wounds. Before criticizing Thomas, we should recall two things. First, when Jesus appeared behind locked doors, He voluntarily showed the disciples His hands and side (20:20). Second, "He must be alive" was not people's first thought. Instead, confusion and skepticism were the common reactions (see 20:13,15).

After realizing she was seeing the resurrected Christ and touching Him, Mary Magdalene reported her experiences to the disciples; yet, "when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe it" (Mark 16:11). Additionally, when the group of women who had been at the empty tomb told the disciples what they had seen, their "words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women" (Luke 24:11). Not only did the disciples not believe what they heard, some even doubted what they saw. Jesus later appeared to them on a mountain in Galilee. "When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted" (Matt 28:17). Thomas was evidently no more skeptical than anyone else had been. He likely just wanted to verify the report personally.

What kind of evidence might people demand prior to believing in Jesus?

BELIEVED (JOHN 20:26-29)

²⁶ A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though 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 look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe."²⁸ Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

VERSE 26

This encounter occurred ***a week later***. Thomas continued in his comfortless resolution that Jesus was dead. He dared not hope against hope that the others were right. His doubt did not discourage his fellow

disciples. They continued to share meals and fellowship with Thomas, but they did so with the joy of having seen the Lord.

By specifying **his disciples were indoors again**, John infers that they had gained courage to venture away from the safety of their seclusion. It was much like the disciples had experienced on the evening of the resurrection, except Thomas was present. We do not know why Jesus stayed away for seven days. But again, He appeared.

The disciples still made sure **the doors were locked**. They remained concerned for their safety. A greater reason for John's observation was that Jesus did not enter the room through the normal manner. As He did the previous week, Jesus **came and stood among them**. He greeted them in the usual way, **"Peace be with you."**

Jesus promised His disciples a peace unlike what the world gives. It would be marked by an absence of trouble and fear. This peace would endure even amid suffering; it was possible because Christ conquered evil in the world (John 14:27; 16:33).

VERSES 27-29

Jesus focused His attention on Thomas. He addressed Thomas's exact, earlier words and instructed him to do precisely what Thomas had declared—to see and touch His wounds. Jesus was clearly showing He knew both what Thomas had said and what was in his heart and mind—a sense of hope mixed with uncertainty. The instructions Jesus gave Thomas were not a rebuke but a compassionate invitation for the apostle to satisfy his curiosity.

John gave no indication of what Thomas's actions were. Did he put his finger in the wounds in His hands? Did he look at the scars or put his hand into wound the soldier made with his spear? We don't know. What we do know is that Thomas followed the final instruction Jesus gave: **Don't be faithless, but believe**. The apostle's verbal response was an exclamation of faith and personal conviction: **My Lord and my God!**

John's Gospel began with the declaration referring to Jesus, "the Word was God" (1:1). The declaration comes full circle in Thomas's words near the end of this Gospel. The risen Christ was indeed Thomas's Lord and God.

The Jews' daily prayer, the *Shema*, declares, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). Thomas's testimony attributed both

titles to Jesus—Lord and God. Jews would have recognized Thomas’s pronouncement as affirming Christ’s divinity and thus would have been offended by his words. Romans would have also been offended by Thomas’s statement. Romans, beginning with Julius Caesar (ruled 49-44 BC), claimed their emperors were divine. Christians, though, would make no such declaration for him or any other Roman emperor.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Romans built temples throughout the Empire in honor of the emperors. There, priests erected statues of the emperors, sang hymns praising their virtues, and lit candles and incense as acts of worship. John likely penned his Gospel during Emperor Domitian’s reign (AD 81-96). Domitian claimed for himself a title almost identical to Thomas’s declaration, “Our Lord and God.”

Thomas’s words were a testimony about his personal relationship with Jesus, *My Lord and my God*. Jesus, though, looked beyond that moment to a time when no tangible evidence would be available to prove His resurrection. He proclaimed those who do not see and **yet believe** are **blessed**.

To be *blessed* does not mean a person is merely happy or content; it also indicates God has accepted the individual. The declaration Jesus made applied not only to those who would come to faith because they heard the witness of Thomas and the other disciples, it also referred to future generations of Jews and Gentiles who, even centuries later, would come to believe without seeing. Those who received that witness would be blessed. The great news is this promise still applies today. As we believe that witness, may we too respond by proclaiming in faith, “My Lord and my God!”

How does Jesus address people’s doubts about Him today?
