

JOHN — WEEK 29

FINDING TRUE FAITH



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) by Caravaggio

Thomas starts out sounding like a hard skeptic about the resurrection, but as soon as Jesus invites him to touch His wounds, Thomas melts. This is all recorded so that we will believe.

Peter randomly decides to go fishing and everyone else joins him. No catch that night. But when Jesus shows up, and gives them a boatload catch, Peter flips out and jumps overboard to swim to Jesus.

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1 John 20:24–25

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.”

It’s not surprising that Thomas feels this way; it’s been all too much to process.

But Thomas doesn’t just feel that way; he blurts it out. His inability to hold his tongue speaks volumes.

The psychological residue of the long weekend with His Lord in the grave is too much for him. He can’t erase those feelings instantly.

That may seem strange, but it’s actually quite common. The classic example of this is when you struggle to shake off a nightmare. You wake up and realize that all those horrible things weren’t real. They didn’t happen.

You should feel better instantly, right? Fat chance. You might even be off your game for the whole day. This is what the colloquialism “getting out of the wrong side of bed” is all about. We’re not robots and our emotions don’t always do what we’d like them to.

This isn’t even all that sinful. Not everything irrational is sin. If you’re terrified of heights, or of spiders, that’s not evil; it’s just how you’re wired.

So, Thomas is simply being honest about his feelings. That’s better than bottling it up and not letting folks know your struggles.

It’s a cry for help.

Being secretive with our feelings is unhealthy, yet our society almost demands it. We ask, “How ya doin?” and don’t want to hear a real answer. Give someone a serious response that opens up and they may look at you like you’ve got a screw loose.

What’s amazing about this is that we could have just as easily have waved or said something like, “Good morning.” But to ask about how they’re doing sounds more friendly. Except that it isn’t because it’s a lie.

So, how can you really ask how someone is doing? You almost can’t. Our society has effectively blocked that kind of healthy interaction.

And, frankly, that might be a good thing. While being secretive with our feelings is unhealthy, being open with them often isn’t safe. Few folks can be trusted with personal information.

More on this tomorrow.

2 John 20:26–29

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!” 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.”

And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

It doesn't appear that Thomas actually touched the wounds. John doesn't record any touching, and Jesus supports that view when He says, “*because you have seen.*”

This, despite Thomas explicitly saying, “*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.*”

That was a prediction, not a promise. Thomas doesn't understand his own feelings.

No one understands his or her own feelings. That's just human nature. Thus, the structure of Christianity includes features designed to help us deal with this inherent weakness.

One is *koinonia* (Christian fellowship). Friends—real friends—will see the things in us that we can't see ourselves. And real friends will say something when something needs to be said. This is why fellowship groups are so important to a church. People need real friends.

Curiously, the secret sauce of a fellowship group can be the hanging out that isn't studying the Bible or doing anything else “churchy.” It takes time to get people to open up. The trust that requires comes from everyone dropping their masks and just being normal. A Bible study isn't always the best place for that.

Another great feature of Christianity is accountability partnerships. These are like fellowship groups only smaller and deeper. Accountability is generally one-on-one, though groups of three can work. “No man is an island.”

A Christian without a genuine accountability relationship is a Christian at risk. Unfortunately, most men don't have one. You can't just pick an accountability partner from a list or be assigned one. They generally happen by dumb luck (AKA providence). Thus, praying for God to provide you one is an essential first step.

Of course, we can't ignore marriage here. A spouse will notice everything and usually will say something when something needs to be said. Two rules are paramount: first, don't keep secrets. Second, react favorably to constructive criticism even if you don't feel like acting that way.

That much of our own feelings we do understand.

3 John 20:29–31

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Verse 29 is repeated here because it is the springboard of verses 30 and 31. Thomas has seen the risen Lord, but the readers of this gospel, written at least four decades later, haven't. How will they believe?

John's answer is to write this book. He wrote it *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

And, no surprise, verse 31 is a purpose construction in the Greek. John wrote this gospel [for the purpose] *that you may believe.*

But John notes that his gospel only describes a sampling of all that Jesus did. *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.*

The point of those *many other signs*, and the reason John mentions them, is to confirm who Jesus is [for the purpose] *that you may believe.* Those signs were only seen by a few people, but for a purpose. Their faith was strengthened.

Their faith will become a testimony that strengthens our faith.

The faith of the eyewitnesses to the resurrection is foundational to how we can know that it's all true. Those eyewitnesses lived and died in poverty and torture without recanting. They really believed that He is who He said He is and that He rose from the dead.

Paul says this differently. Instead of, “really believe,” he says, “believe in your heart.”

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9

We sometimes give this, “believe in you heart” requirement short shrift. It's essential that we not merely think that Jesus rose from the dead. We must have absolute—willing to die on this hill—faith.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. — Hebrews 11:1–2 (NIV)

That's why *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.*

And that's why *these are written.*

4 John 21:1–3

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.”

They said to him, “We are going with you also.” They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

This is a perfect example of things going badly for a holy purpose. These disciples needed to catch nothing to set up Jesus’s grand entrance in the next few verses.

This starts out with Peter just randomly saying, “*I am going fishing.*”

Given the time (apparently evening, or night), it’s a curious choice. They’ve been disciples of the Lord for some time, and their sleep patterns have been normal.

Peter’s announcement has the feel of him saying, “I just need some ‘me’ time.” He wants to do something normal to settle his soul and give him time to think, even if it’s at a time where he should be asleep. Still, it feels impulsive.

But this sounds good to everyone else, so they say, “*We are going with you also.*” Unfortunately, *that night they caught nothing.*

For these guys, on this sea (Tiberias, AKA Galilee), catching nothing is an off-night. They literally pull an all-nighter fishing and the whole thing is a bust.

Or is it?

Fishing can be a source of shalom. Many great quips speak to the wisdom of this.

“Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.” — Henry David Thoreau

Here’s a list with some real keepers.

<https://www.liveoutdoors.com/fishing/241195-30-of-the-all-time-best-fishing-quotes/>

The disciples’ non-catch that night will become the launching point for an important encounter with the risen Lord. With His help, they will catch a huge number of fish.

Still, I can’t shake the image of them jokingly replying to Jesus with, “Why’d you go and ruin a perfect night with all these fish?”

Then again, they were hungry.

5 John 21:4–8

But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?”

They answered Him, “No.”

And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.

Don't you just love Peter's craziness? They can get to shore quickly enough, but he has to jump overboard. He may have beat the others to the shore but not by much.

There's a scene in the movie *Forrest Gump* that mirrors this so closely that I suspect it's intentional. Forrest is out shrimping and spies Lieutenant Dan on the dock. He leaps overboard and swims to him, leaving his boat running on its own.

A few minutes later the boat slams into a pier. Forrest sees it and instead of reacting in horror, just says, “Muh boat.”

This scene has the same silly feel—except that Peter puts on his coat before jumping overboard.

No clue about that one.

Peter's heart for his Lord is what makes him Peter—the rock on which Jesus built His church. There's a great lesson in that.

Be yourself.

But that implies something deep, even challenging.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. — Romans 12:2

The word “transformed” here is often underappreciated. It means to be changed so deeply that you act differently even when being yourself. Self-control isn't enough; you must really be changed.

Two things to note here: first, this doesn't happen quickly. Second, it's the purview of the Holy Spirit. To be changed at this level, you must ask the Lord to change you.

No other prayer is as foundational to life in Christ.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How can we kindle real communication?
2. When have you had the most meaningful fellowship?
3. Who has/had the strongest faith you've ever seen?
4. When has a complete bust been useful or providential?
5. Have you even known a "crazy for Jesus" person like Peter?

Items for prayer: