

## **Encounters with the Living God, Part 4: John 20 – Jesus and the Sceptic**

Thomas was not there the first Sunday night after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to his disciples. And Thomas just couldn't believe his friends when they told him. Why did Thomas doubt and how did he come to faith? How is Jesus relating to skeptics – and how can we help skeptics today?

### **Intro: Is there a fixed point?**

Archimedes: “Give me a fixed point and I will move the world.”

Bertrand Russell: “...only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.”

Paul: “Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” 2 Tim 1:10

### **I. Why did Thomas doubt?**

A. Contemporary expectations on the Messianic king

B. Wrong assumptions led to disappointment and doubt: “I will not believe”

### **II. Why did Thomas receive VIP-treatment?**

A. The special role of the apostles

After his suffering, he presented himself to them [the apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command ... Acts 1:3-4

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” Acts 5:30-32

He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:41-42

#### B. Objection: Bad strategy!

1. Why use witnesses?

2. Why not more witnesses?

3. Why not show himself to sceptics?

### III. Why was Thomas criticized?

A. Thomas was *right* in his honesty and in his search for reasons

The Queen in “Alice in Wonderland” is not a Christian ideal:

“There is no use trying, said Alice; one can't believe impossible things. I dare say you haven't had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

B. Thomas was *wrong* in two of his assumptions:

1. Seeing does not equal believing
2. We have no right to demand specified evidence from Jesus

C. Why the ambivalence in Jesus' response?

Seeing was necessary for *Thomas the Apostle*, called to be amongst the unique group of witnesses, but already – after one week – unnecessary for *Thomas the Disciple*, because of the growing amount of evidences for the resurrection.

#### IV. How can we have faith like Thomas?

Thomas is not the doubter; he is a hero of faith!

A. Listen with an *open* mind to the apostles' testimonies

B. Be open to the ways he chooses to make himself known

C. See his love

D. Receive his peace