

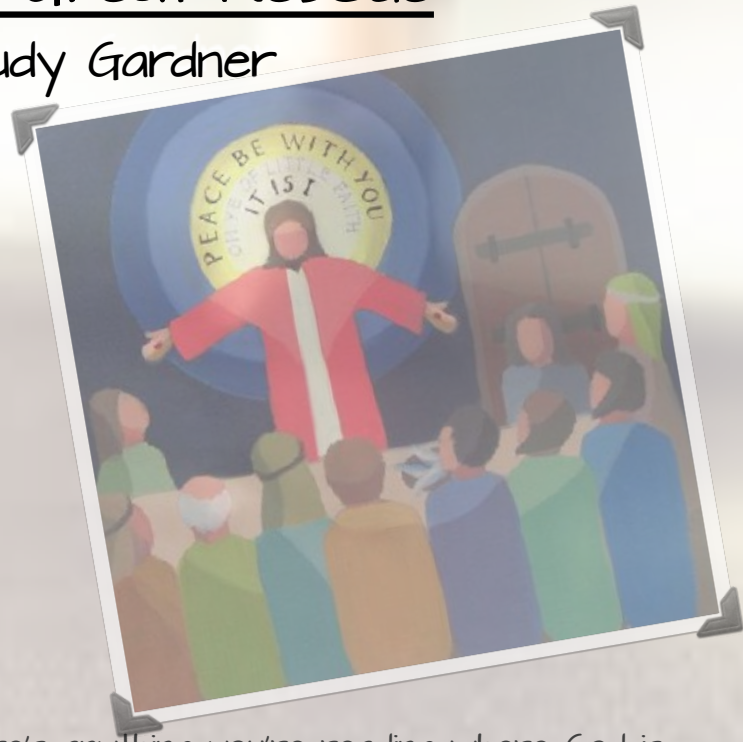
May 2-6, 2022 Edition

# Following The Year Of Jesus Part 18

## Honest Thomas & The Pinnacles Of The Great Rescue

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](https://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we'll be looking at a few really important concepts that we see in the story of Jesus appearing out of nowhere in the middle of a locked room when His disciples were on edge hiding from the people who had killed Jesus. We'll learn an awful lot about the pinnacles of the Great Rescue, our own resurrections and hopefully a bit about one of the most famous disciples- a guy named Thomas.

Have you heard of Thomas the apostle? Of course you have. What do you know about him? I'm gonna go out on a limb and say the one thing you know about Thomas is that he was a doubter. But the fact that Thomas is mainly known as "Doubting Thomas" does a real disservice to him. I mean, sure, he doubted. But so did the other disciples. When Jesus "appears" to them on that Easter afternoon/evening this is what He says:

*"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me." Luke 24:36-39 (NLT)*

Jesus Himself says the disciples were "filled with doubt". Remember what happened earlier that morning? Jesus appears to three of His disciples (Mary, Mary & Mary) but when they tell the men that Jesus is alive what did the male apostles do?

They doubted.

But do we call them the "Doubting Apostles"? No. But Thomas does exactly the same thing (although with a bit more dramatics) and he's stuck with the title of doubter for 2,000 years now. And what's sad is, Thomas has every bit as much faith as the rest of the apostles- maybe more. So what do we know about Thomas?

First off we know that Jesus had a nickname for Thomas (and it wasn't Doubting Thomas)- Jesus called Thomas "The Twin". Nobody knows for sure why Jesus called Thomas that but we do know that Jesus loved to give people nicknames. Some people think Jesus called Thomas "The Twin" because Thomas was a twin. I like the theory that Jesus called Thomas "The Twin" because they looked alike. No way of knowing but that's Thomas' nickname given to him by Jesus.

We also know Thomas was not faint of heart. When Jesus learns that His friend Lazarus is sick He doesn't leave right away to go to Bethany to heal him. They wait a few days which the disciples think is the right move because the Jews are searching for Him to have Him killed. After a few days Jesus says they're headed to Bethany to "wake Lazarus up" and Thomas has something to say about that:

*Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too-and die with Jesus." John 11:16 (NLT)*

Thomas isn't afraid to die with Jesus if that's where all of this is leading. Thomas is no shrinking flower. But he does have an incredibly well known interaction with Jesus after he is told that Jesus came and appeared to the other apostles. We'll get to that story in detail on Friday but I think what we'll learn in that story is that we should be calling him Honest Thomas rather than Doubting Thomas. We'll dive into much more from this story as the week goes on but maybe today spend some time thinking about why we think of Thomas more as Doubting Thomas rather than Honest Thomas...

**Tuesday Reflection:** This week we're talking about the time on Easter afternoon/evening when Jesus appeared to His disciples (minus Thomas who was away when Jesus showed up). The apostles had heard from the female disciples that Jesus was alive but they doubted those women's testimony. One of the main things we learn from this story is what Jesus' resurrection body was like. Why is that important? Because I think we're given here a unique insight into what our own resurrection bodies will be like.

*Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. 1 John 3:2 (NLT)*

We will be like Him. What does that mean? Well, nobody knows for sure and I think we can get ahead of ourselves sometimes when we take a characteristic of Jesus (especially physical characteristics) and apply them universally but I also think this is the best insight into what our own resurrection bodies will be like and the first thing I'd like to focus on today is that this story teaches us that there is physical life after death.

When Jesus returns to Bethany to "wake up" Lazarus, Martha (one of Lazarus' sisters) comes to Him and tells Him that if He had been there Lazarus wouldn't have died. Jesus tells Martha that her brother will live again. Yes yes... I know at the resurrection he'll live again but Jesus basically says, no no... you don't understand my meaning Martha:

*I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. John 11:25 (NLT)*

Here Jesus tells us that there is physical life after death and a few days later He'll show us what that looks like with His own resurrection. And as we look at the what His resurrection looked like I think it's important to realize that this is also what our resurrection will look like. Not just a spiritual resurrection but a physical resurrection as well.

Last week we talked about Jesus' surprise party for a couple of His friends on the road to Emmaus. If you remember, after He uncorked His big surprise He disappears and they immediately jump up and run back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles what they had seen. Then this happens:

*And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me." Luke 24:36-39 (NLT)*

This kills me- Jesus waits for Cleopas and Mary Joanna (Cleopas' wife) to get back to Jerusalem after running 7 miles from Emmaus and just as they're telling the apostles what happened (how they had seen Jesus ALIVE!!!) Jesus pops in. He just appears in a room with locked doors. And what moves the apostles from terrified to filled with joy? When they realize it's REALLY HIM! Not some spiritual manifestation but REALLY HIM. Literally what He says is, "it's Me... Myself!"

Why is that important? Because I believe this is an insight not just into Jesus' resurrection body but ours as well. If you've been following Jesus' actions on that first day with His resurrection body then you know solid walls do nothing to keep Him in or out of a room. If you read the resurrection accounts carefully you'll see the angel doesn't roll the stone away from the tomb so Jesus can get out- He's already gone when the women show up early on that Sunday morning. The angel rolls the stone away not so Jesus can get out but so the women can see the tomb is indeed empty. He walks through walls. He appears and disappears. And He eats and drinks.

*Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. Luke 24:39-43 (NCV)*

Why does He ask for something to eat? Because apparitions don't eat and drink. Apparitions can't be touched. Jesus is NOT an apparition. He is flesh and blood. And yet He can walk through walls and appear and disappear at will. I can't wait to be able to do that. I hope we can fly too but that we don't see the resurrected Jesus doing. Doesn't mean we won't be able to fly but I'm not as sure about that as walking through walls. Does that fit with your ideas about what heaven will be like? I'm gonna go out on a limb and say, probably not. We have this idea that heaven will be completely spiritual. That our flesh will be gone and we'll be pure spirits. But that's not what the Bible teaches and that's confusing for us, isn't it?

We don't really have a category for this kind of dualistic description of the resurrected self, do we? We think that you could have a spirit that passes through walls or you can have a physical body that can eat and drink and be touched- a body with flesh and bones or a spirit but you can't have both. And yet here is Jesus doing both. We'll talk more about the physical resurrection of our bodies tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time thinking about why we believe what we do about our "heavenly bodies" (and why we believe what we do about heaven, hell and the afterlife as well).

**Wednesday Reflection:** Yesterday we spent some time reflecting on our heavenly bodies. Not heavenly bodies in the sense of we're going to look like super models but rather our resurrection bodies that we'll have for eternity. We saw yesterday that Jesus' resurrection body was a physical body that could be touched. He could eat and drink. But He could also walk through walls and teleport at will. I think that's going to be so awesome. I'm looking forward to giving that a try when I'm resurrected.

But the idea of a physical resurrection body is somehow foreign to us in the western church. I don't know about you but I always pictured heaven as a bunch of disembodied spirits floating on clouds in white robes strumming on harps. Why do/did we have that kind of idea about heaven? Partly because of Bugs Bunny cartoons where the afterlife was depicted as a bunch of disembodied spirits floating on clouds in white robes strumming on

harps. But where did Bugs get that idea from? I'll tell you this much- he didn't get it from the Bible.

So where did that idea come from? Greek philosophy. As the gospel moved westward through the Roman empire it encountered deeply entrenched Greek culture and thought. The Greeks believed that the flesh was evil and the spirit was inherently good. They believed we would attain perfection when we were finally able to shed this disgusting earthly body and become pure spirit. But that's not what the Bible teaches us. The Bible teaches us that in the beginning when things were perfect in paradise we humans were a perfect blend of spiritual and physical beings. When we brought sin into the world we "short circuited" humans and somehow the spiritual was separated from the physical. We live in this weird Bizzaro world now where our spirits and bodies live in tension with one another. We feel the struggle and tension and if we're not careful we'll assume it's because the flesh is bad and the spirit is good.

But if you actually read the scriptures that talk about what's coming after the resurrection it's not the shedding of our physical bodies to become purely spiritual beings- rather it's a perfect reuniting of our physical bodies with our spirits. What we learn is that there is physical life after death (as well as spiritual life after death but I'm getting ahead of myself). And the idea of physical life after death is not new with the New Testament- the oldest book in the Old Testament is the book of Job. It doesn't tell the oldest story but it was written about 500 years before Moses put his pen to paper and wrote the book of Genesis. In the midst of his suffering Job would say these words:

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Job 19:25-27 (NLT)*

Huh? After my body is decayed yet in my body I will see God? How does that work? How will Job be able to see his "redeemer" stand upon the earth after his body has decayed? How on earth does Job expect to see his redeemer "in his body" for himself?

Resurrection. A true physical resurrection. Where you and I (and Job too) will have flesh and bones. Where we can touch and be touched. Where we actually eat real food. And where we can walk through walls and appear and disappear at will. Want to know what that might look like- this vision that Job has of his redeemer coming and standing upon the earth? I know I do. The Bible is vague on all of that but I do like the image we're given if we read Job's words literally as they were written in Hebrew:

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon **against** the earth ~~at last~~ **on the last day**. Job 19:25-27 (NLT)*

Why did the translators change the wording? Well it's not because they were trying to trick us. The translators have a tough job faithfully translating the Bible languages into English. They want to make the text as clear as they can but sometimes that's difficult and

like with anything- their current beliefs and suppositions do quite a bit to guide their translations and interpretation of the text. What would people think if we translated Job 19:25-27 as saying that one day Job's redeemer would stand "against" the earth "on the last day"? Well, here's what I'd think- I'd think that one day Jesus will return and He will come "against" the earth in the sense that the earth is holding His children's "bodies". Not our spirits- our physical bodies. And when Jesus returns He will say to the earth, "ok earth- give them up to Me! Give me My children! Rivers, oceans, mountains, deserts, jungles- give Me My people!"

And the earth will give us up. We will rise. Bodily and spiritually. We will once again be perfectly united in body and spirit. Paul puts it like this:

*It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (NLT)*

Spiritual bodies? What in the world is a spiritual body? Well, as it turns out it's what we're headed towards. A complete unity once again of the spiritual and the physical. We will once again be as we were in the beginning before sin corrupted everything and split us humans apart physically and spiritually. Tomorrow we'll spend some time reflecting on the spiritual side of our afterlife but for today maybe spend some time thinking about what that moment that your Redeemer returns and stands against the earth and demands that your body be given back to Him might be like. What will the sound of Jesus' voice sound like to us as our bodies are once again perfectly united (spirit and physical bodies) as we were in the beginning.

**Thursday Reflection:** We've spent quite a lot of time this week looking at how there is physical life after death so today let's spend some time reflecting on the opposite idea. And what is the opposite idea to physical life after death? Well, maybe it's that Jesus' resurrection also shows us that there is spiritual life before death.

Remember a few days ago we read the beginning of Jesus' statement to Martha?

*"Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. John 11:24-25 (NLT)*

Jesus then immediately followed up this idea of physical life after death with this:

*Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha? John 11:25-26 (NLT)*

Ok what's the difference? First He says that anyone who believes in Him will live even after dying and then He says that whoever lives in Him and believes in Him will never,

ever die. Isn't He saying the same thing here? Not really. In the first statement I believe Jesus is giving us insight into physical life after death and in the second He's giving us insight into spiritual life before death. Why would He do that?

Because it's important to note that eternal life isn't something we're sitting around waiting for- it's available to everyone here and now on this side of death's doorway. Jesus talked about it all the time:

*I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life... they have already passed from death into life. John 5:24 (NLT)*

Jesus says over and over that eternal life is available on this side of eternity too. Yes we will continue our eternal life after we die but we can't wait for death to pick it up and experience it. And if we listen to Jesus' message and believe in God then what does Jesus says happens? We (already) have eternal life (I added the "already" in there but it's suggested by Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus you aren't waiting for eternal life to "begin". You are already walking in eternal life. What does that mean? Spiritual life before death.

And what does eternal life look like? Well, it looks like Jesus. Literally. Jesus calls us to become His disciples. A disciple didn't just want to learn what his/her Rabbi knew- they wanted to do everything just like their Rabbi. They tried to walk like their Rabbi, talk like their Rabbi, eat like their Rabbi, sleep like their Rabbi... you get the point. Over and over we're invited by Jesus to "follow" after Him, which is a picture of the Rabbi/Disciple relationship. Disciples would try to walk in the footprints of their Rabbi so they could become "just like" the Rabbi. What does that mean for us as followers of Jesus today? Paul puts it like this:

*Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times- speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly- and so become more and more in every way like Christ. Ephesians 5:14-16 (TLB)*

What's Paul saying? He's saying we need to grow up and stop believing things just because we're told that's how it is. Like what? Well lots of things but how about we start with what the afterlife is like? If you want to do a deep dive into what the Bible truly says about the afterlife read (or if you're like me listen to the audio version) Rob Bell's book entitled Love Wins. It's pretty controversial because people don't like you messing with their entrenched ideas of the afterlife- even if the Bible itself is what's doing the messing up. So stop believing the clever sounding ideas of what the afterlife is like and go straight to the source- Jesus. And as we become "more and more" like Him we will be growing up and maturing. Oh, you'll also be shining "more and more" brightly:

*And all of us... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)*

I love that verse because it's so simple. Who can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory for the Lord?

All. Of. Us.

There are a lot of confusing verses in the Bible that leave us scratching our heads wondering what they might mean- this isn't one of them. This is as clear as it gets. All of us can be mirrors that brightly reflect God's glory and the more we walk in Jesus footsteps and the more the spirit of the Lord works within us the more brightly we reflect His glory.

Crazy, isn't it? That I could reflect God's glory just like Jesus. That you can reflect God's glory just like Jesus.

There is spiritual life before death. At least there's supposed to be.

**Friday Reflection:** Today we're going to look at the pinnacles of the Great Rescue and they're both found in the story John tells about Honest Thomas. You remember Honest Thomas, don't you? He's the guy who was honest about his doubts and because of that was given a unique opportunity that none of the other disciples were offered:

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." John 20:24-25 (NLT)

We talked a bit about Thomas on Monday and how he gets a raw deal being referred to now as "Doubting Thomas" but I prefer the nickname, "Honest Thomas". Thomas doesn't do anything the other disciples didn't do (I know that was a weird sentence but you get what I mean, don't you?)- they doubted the women who were the first eye witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus Himself tells them to stop doubting when He appears to them (while Thomas was gone somewhere else). So why is Thomas saddled with the title "doubter" but none of the rest of them are? Jesus doesn't call Him Doubting Thomas- Jesus calls him the Twin.

Thomas is having difficulty believing in the resurrection and who can blame him? Jesus doesn't fault him any more than He did the other apostles. In fact He says almost the same thing to the other apostles when He appears to them as He says to Thomas when He appears to him:

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:27-29 (NIV)

Stop doubting and believe. Those words sound kind of familiar, don't they? At least they would if we re-read something we read earlier in the week:

"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Luke 24:36-39 (NLT)

But there's a difference between Thomas' encounter with the risen Jesus and the other apostles encounter with Him- Thomas' response:

My Lord and my God! John 20:28 (NIV)

Thomas' confession of faith is the single most powerful and all encompassing statement of trust and belief in the entire gospel of John. Heck, it's the single most amazing statement



of faith and trust in all the gospels. My Lord and my God! Jesus is spoken of as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Son of God and probably a few other amazing titles but nowhere else does someone refer to Him not only as "God" Himself but also as "My Lord and my God".

And that is one of the pinnacles of the Great Rescue. Thomas' confession of faith and realization that Jesus isn't just the Messiah or Christ. He's not even just the Son of God. Jesus is God Himself in a way that Thomas (and the rest of us for that matter) will never fully understand and yet Thomas realizes he doesn't have to understand it. He just goes with it.

But Pastor Ed, you said Thomas' statement of faith and trust was only one of the pinnacles of the Great Rescue. What's the other one? John mentions it at the end of his story about Thomas. If we're not careful we'll think it's a non sequitur (a fancy way of saying John changed the subject without transitioning from the Thomas story to John's purpose statement for writing his gospel) but I don't think it is. I think this is John saying, "you've just witnessed one pinnacle of the Great Rescue but if you're not careful you'll miss a much more important pinnacle of the Great Rescue and that is your own personal stamens of trust and belief:

*Jesus did many other miracles in the presence of his followers that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then, by believing, you may have life through his name. John 20:30-31 (NCV)*

Why did John say he wrote his gospel? So that YOU may have life through His name. You. The Great Rescue will never be complete until you (and me too) make our own statement of belief and trust like Thomas did. John says he wrote so that when you finished reading his gospel of Jesus' life you would have the same response that Thomas did- he wrote so that you and I would fall to our knees and confess that Jesus is "my Lord and my God."

Until each of us does that Jesus' work is not complete. It's what this whole thing has been about from Genesis chapter one verse one (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth) up to John 20:31 (by believing, you may have life through his name). Do you have your doubts? Yeah, me too. I guess you could call me, Doubting Ed. But I don't think Jesus would call me that. I don't think He'd call you Doubter either. He may stop doubting and believe but He would never label you or me as a doubter.

But He would invite us to follow after Him. Look at what He says in the very last book of the Bible:

*Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Revelation 3:20 (NLT)*

I love this imagery. What did Jesus do when His disciples were scared and full of doubt? He ate with them. What does Jesus say He's going to do if we open the door to His knocking? He'll come in and... wait for it... eat with us!!!!

Don't ever say Jesus isn't consistent. I think He loves it when we find those connections in the Bible and I am pretty sure there are WAY more there than we've found. But we have found this one connection between us and the original disciples- Jesus is willing to eat

with us. Why is that a big deal? In the first century who you were willing to eat with (or not eat with) was a huge deal. Eating with someone was like giving them your stamp of approval. That's why Jesus got in such trouble for eating with "notorious sinners". Jesus was judged by who He was willing to eat with.

He still is.

He ignored the religious elite's condemnation and ate with these sinners no matter what the cost to His reputation among the people of this world.

He still does.

Jesus still is willing to risk His reputation by eating with the likes of me and you. He is not deterred by what others think of Him eating with you and me. Are we showing the same level of care about what the people of this world think of us admitting to our association with Him?

Because that's the pinnacle of the Great Rescue- when we finally see, trust, believe and confess that Jesus is "my Lord and my God."

So what are you waiting for?

Jesus is awesome!