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# Man, You Should Have Been There!

Richard Norris III



# **Man, You Should Have Been There!**

Richard Norris III

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I'm sure we all at one point in our lives have had FOMO: fear of missing out. It's exactly what it sounds like: when one feels that they are excluded from an event or experience because, for whatever reason, they were not able to experience it firsthand. With the advent of social media, it has become much easier for someone to have FOMO because, at the click of a button, you can be exposed to a multitude of activities and adventures that you cannot actively engage in. And if you have the opportunity to speak with someone who did have the experience firsthand, more often than not, they will open their retelling by saying something to the effect of, "Oh man, you should have been there!" This saying is not to imply that the person in question should have rearranged their schedule to have this experience, but rather that the account they are about to give could not possibly capture the fullness of the experience they had.

We find a similar situation in our text for today. Christ had died. Christ has now risen and, according to the fourth Gospel, first appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, in the stillness of the morning. And later that day, He appeared to the disciples, who had locked themselves away in fear. In what I can only imagine was an emotional reunion, He shows them

His hands and feet, shares His peace with them, and gives them marching orders. And there we find the words of our text. We are told that one of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the rest of the twelve when Jesus appeared to them. And when they found him and told him that they had seen Jesus, surprisingly his response was “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (Jn 20:25).

In my spiritual imagination, as I reconstruct this scene, I can hear the disciples saying to Thomas, “Man, you should have been there! Jesus is alive and He came to see us! I gotta admit, I wasn’t sure that He’d actually come back, but there He was right in front of us!” But since Thomas does not have the luxury of looking at the group selfie that they took with Jesus or seeing the posts that Mary and the disciples made on Facebook, he simply is unfazed by this and replies, “Yeah, you’re right. I should have been there. And until I see Him for myself, I will not believe.” Beloved, I believe that Thomas was having an extreme case of FOMO in this moment.

**My dear siblings in Christ, there will come times in our walk with God when we experience FOMO in a manner not too**

different than what Thomas experienced. But this story gives us three great lessons on dealing with FOMO.

**1. Remember our connection.** a. This story is unique to the fourth Gospel, and there is plenty of mystery that surrounds it. So, there are many interpretive directions we can go. For starters, all the author tells us is that “Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with [the rest of the disciples] when Jesus came” (Jn 20:24). And that just leaves me wondering: where was Thomas?

b. In this Gospel, none of the disciples were present at the crucifixion except the beloved disciple. Nevertheless, by the time we reach Sunday evening, they seemed to have come to this collective decision to stay together behind closed. So what was Thomas doing that prevented him from being there with them? Did he not get the memo? Or did he deliberately decide not to be with them after Jesus had died? And of course, these are questions we cannot answer definitively; the author does not say. Maybe he secluded himself because Jesus’ public trial and death weighed too heavily on his spirit, or maybe because he was questioning what he should do next. But no matter what the reason is, the question remains: why would he not spend these challenging moments with the only

people in the world who could understand what he was going through?

c. The disciples were a diverse bunch; they came from different backgrounds, had different professions, and ultimately lived different lives. But they were united in the fact that they were Jesus' closest followers throughout His earthly ministry. They walked with Him, talked with Him, and learned from Him in a manner not many others could. And after they see the man that turned their lives around dehumanized and executed, surely, they all were hurting, grieving, and in despair. But I would argue that this was not the time for them to detach themselves from the outside world and each other. On the contrary, this was when they needed each other most.

d. Child of God, hear me clearly, I am not saying there will not be moments in our faith walk where need to take time for ourselves in solitude. Without a doubt, there will be days when we just need to step away and spend time alone with God. But don't get so comfortable in that withdrawal that you begin to think that you have to walk this journey completely by yourself. We need each other. God never intended us to work out our soul's salvation in complete isolation. Try as we might to do things on our own, we will always need somebody



to speak life into us when we get weary; we will always need somebody to help guide us when we are unsure; and we will always need somebody to encourage us when we are doubtful. And I am a witness that God will always send an angel into our lives that will give us just what we need, how we need it, when we need it. Beloved, it's in those moments when our backs are up against the wall, when life deals us bad hands, when we cannot see our way forward that we have to remember our connection!

a. The text goes on to say that when the other disciples finally catch up with Thomas, they tell him that they had seen the risen Christ. But interestingly, he responds, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (Jn 20:25).

b. Now, the Gospels disagree on a multitude of things, but they all speak with a unanimous voice to this truth: nobody expected Jesus to be alive that Sunday morning. The women who come to the tomb do so with the intent to either see or anoint the remains, not to greet the risen Lord. And had they not gone back to the disciples, who had locked themselves away in fear, in the words of German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, "we would have no knowledge of the

Resurrection,” because they seemed to have accepted the finality of Jesus’ death, too. They all knew He had died and His body had been sealed in a tomb, so it is not hard to see why Thomas could have reacted this way. But I want to suggest a different perspective.

c. It is tempting to believe that when Thomas expresses his conditions for believing, it is because he did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But I contend that that is not the only way to interpret this statement in verse 25. It could be that Thomas is not so much challenging that Jesus had risen from the dead, but rather that the other disciples had seen Jesus risen from the dead. In other words, maybe the question that Thomas was asking was not so much, “Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” but rather, “Are you *sure* the person

## **2. Speak with conviction.**

You saw was Jesus?” And could it be that, these days, the world is asking the church similar questions, “Are you sure you’re following the God you teach and preach about? Are you sure that you are listening to God? Are you sure you are seeing God in what you’re doing?”

d. Could it be that today, the world is not questioning the existence of the God we worship, but rather our witness to the God that we claim to know, love, and serve? Oh my dear siblings in Christ, if we are going to be the people that God is calling us to be in this season, then we cannot be timid in testifying to the reality of the incalculable, incomprehensible, overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God. The truth of the matter is that too many people have been deceived, too many people have been abused, too many people have been hurt “in God’s name,” and it is our duty to make sure everybody knows that God is greater than any hatred that exists in the world. We cannot just speak in the seemingly reserved tones of the disciples, merely saying, “We have seen the Lord,” but we must boldly declare with conviction, “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ one day will come again. And even while we are waiting, Christ is still yet speaking to His people!”

a. The text goes on to say that a week later, the disciples had gathered again. This time, Thomas was with them. Jesus again comes among the disciples. And it was almost as if He knew exactly what Thomas had said because after sharing His peace with them again, He turns to Thomas and says, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out

your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas responds, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (Jn 20:26-29).

b. Therein lies what Jesus wanted Thomas and all of us who dare to follow Him to understand. This interaction with Thomas a week after the Resurrection tells me two things. First, God is always ready, willing, and able to step into our lives and do what we need God to do. For Thomas, that meant seeing the physical effect of the Resurrection. Secondly, and this is the more pressing matter, because God is a personal, relational God, you do not have to rely on someone else’s experience to tell you who God is and what God can do. Simply put,

### **3. Come to your own conclusions.**

there is no need for FOMO when you follow God because the old adage is true that if God is blessing your neighbor, then that means that God is in your neighborhood.

c. Jesus was not just speaking to Thomas; He was telling us that if we truly want to be His followers, we have to believe that God did not stop performing miracles 2000 years ago. We have to believe that God is still able to move in God's people and God's world. We have to "believe that [we] shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps 27:13). And I believe that is why the author closes chapter 20 with these two verses, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). He has already laid the foundation and paved the way. It is now up to us to come to our own conclusions about who we believe God is, what we believe God can do, and how we believe God is forming us to be God's hands in the world for this moment and beyond.

I'm going to my seat, but there is a word today for believers who are having FOMO after Resurrection. Child of God, I know you might feel like you're at the end of your rope, but don't quit. I know you might feel like you can't go on, but don't throw in the towel. I know you might feel like God has forgotten about you, but don't give up on God. My

grandfather used to say, “If you just give God half a chance,” you’ll find out that God is still able to do exceedingly abundantly above all you ask or think, according to the power that is already at work within you (Eph 3:20).

The hymnwriter put it this way, “Come come, ye saints, no toil nor labor fear, but with joy wend your way. Though hard to you the journey may appear, grace shall be as your day. We have a living Lord to guide, and we can trust Him to provide; do this, and joy your hearts will swell: All is well! All is well!” Keep on serving God, keep on trusting God, keep on believing God! And when it is all said and done, I promise you will have a testimony to share. You will have an account to give. You will have a story to tell. And you will probably begin that story the same way I believe the disciples began their story when they first saw Thomas, “Oh man, you should’ve been there!” Amen.





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2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
412-835-6630  
[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)