

The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

the sins and transgressions of a person (cf. Mark 2:7), and so a few might wonder if created entities, such as human disciples of Yeshua, could possess such power. This could lead to some thinking that Yeshua might be created.

John 20:23 does not include a statement about these disciples having the power to forgive all of the sins of an individual human or mortal needing to be reconciled to his or her Creator. The intention of John 20:23 is properly taken as a restrictive power, concurrent with the Disciples' authority to determine *halachah* or orthopraxy for the faith community. Related statements from Yeshua appear in Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven," and Matthew 18:18, "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Yeshua's direction, "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; but if you hold back, they are held back" (John 20:23, TLV), probably involve the power to include or disclude members from the assembly. John 20:23 is an authority granted by the Lord to these followers, to enact or withhold reconciliation to those who have committed an offense.

John 20:24-29 "My Lord and my God!"

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Yeshua came. So the other disciples were saying to him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Yeshua came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Yeshua said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.'"

Many of us, not only in our reading of the Bible—but also in various experiences in our lives—have taken some direction from the example of the disciple Thomas. Even though Thomas had heard about Yeshua's resurrection from the dead by many other disciples, he exclaimed how he would not believe until he touched Yeshua's physical wounds himself (John 20:24-25). At a gathering with various disciples, the resurrected Yeshua comes to them (John 20:26). As Yeshua directs Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27, NIV). Thomas issues a word in the affirmative (John 20:28), and Yeshua says in response, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NIV).

What Thomas says to the resurrected Yeshua, bears significant importance as to how not only he, but also readers of the Gospel of John are to perceive His identity and origins: "**My Lord and my God!**" (John 20:28). Adherents of a high Christology of Yeshua being uncreated, and integrated into the Divine Identity, such as this writer, take Thomas' affirmation as direct evidence of him declaring Yeshua to be God.

When encountering the source text *ho Kurios mou kai ho Theos mou* (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου), "the Lord of me and the God of me" (Brown and Comfort),²⁷³ what Yeshua is not stated to be is the Heavenly Father. Yeshua is stated to be Lord *and* God. John 1:1 opened this Gospel

²⁷³ Brown and Comfort, 404.

with the exclaim, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” but the Word is not all there is of a plural Godhead of *Elohim*. Yeshua’s statement of John 5:23 should also be well taken here: “so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” While Thomas declaring “My Lord and my God!” is hardly exhaustive as it regards the totality of God’s Being, it is definitely a significant revelation of Yeshua integrated into the Divine Identity.

The author certainly had the ability to write something along the lines of *ho Kurios mou kai ho Despotēs mou* (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ δεσπότης μου), “My Lord and my Master!”, which would affirm that Yeshua was a significant authority, certainly a Rabbi of Rabbis, and most probably also a highly exalted supernatural entity. But the combination of “My Lord and my God!”, and its likely Tanach background (Hosea 2:23; Psalm 35:23-24), necessarily takes examiners in another direction: of Yeshua being uncreated.

Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua being a created entity, even if a supernatural entity, either make a point to avoid Thomas’ confession of John 20:28, or they will claim that Thomas has said the First Century equivalent of “O my God!” to the resurrected Yeshua, standing in total shock before Him. While “O God!” or “O Lord!” might be viewed in the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries as shock language, in ancient times and only up until a few decades ago, statements like “O my God!” or “O Lord!” might be taken as profanity at best, and blasphemy at worst. Indeed, a better explanation for Thomas exclaiming “My Lord and my God!” might be that he is urging Yeshua to finally overthrow the Roman occupiers of Judea. As the *NIV First-Century Study Bible* indicates, “This directly parallels the title by which Emperor Domitian demanded to be addressed. The phrase in Latin was ‘*Dominus et dux noster*.’ John’s Gospel was written and circulated around the time of Domitian’s reign.”²⁷⁴ Yet, there is no hint in the text that Thomas’ words had a political overtone to them, but rather they are the response of someone who has witnessed a miracle.

It should hardly come as a surprise that among the Christian examiners of the Gospel of John we have been considering, that most take Thomas’ word of “My Lord and my God” as a declaration supporting a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity:

- F.F. Bruce: “It is probably a mistake to make a distinction between ‘my Lord’ and ‘my God’, as though Thomas meant, ‘It is my Lord (as I knew him before his death) but now that I see him risen he is also my God’... ‘My Lord’ should rather be taken as a divine ascription alongside ‘my God’. The words are to be construed as nominative, not vocative. Thomas is affirming his new-found faith.”²⁷⁵
- Leon Morris: “It is significant that it is an ascription to Jesus of deity, corresponding to ‘the Word was God’ in 1:1... ‘My God’ is a quite new form of address. Nobody has previously addressed Jesus in this way. It marks a leap of faith. In the moment that he came to see that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead Thomas came to see something of what that implied. Mere men do not rise from the dead in this fashion. The One who was now so obviously alive, though He had died, could be addressed in the language of adoring worship.”²⁷⁶
- George R. Beasley-Murray: “His statement is not simply a mode of address to Jesus, in the vocative (‘O my Lord and my God!’)... Rather it is a confession

²⁷⁴ *NIV First-Century Study Bible*, 1373.

²⁷⁵ Bruce, *John*, 394.

²⁷⁶ Morris, *John*, pp 853-854.

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issuing from the depths of Thomas' soul...So it comes about that the most outrageous doubter of the resurrection of Jesus utters the greatest confession of the Lord who rose from the dead. His utterance does not simply acknowledge the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, but expresses its ultimate meaning, i.e., as revelation of who Jesus is. Yet it is not an abstract theological definition concerning the person of Christ. The personal pronoun is of vital importance: '*my* Lord, and *my* God.' He confesses *to* the risen Jesus that he belongs to him as his willing subject; he adores him and henceforth will serve him as he deserves. And if the flash of inspiration in this moment of revelation extended so far, he may have included the thought that this revelation of who Jesus is has taken place in his exaltation to the right hand of God through his death and resurrection and ascension, and that he, Thomas, is included in the redemption achieved by that event."²⁷⁷

- D.A. Carson: "Thomas' utterance cannot possibly be taken as shocked profanity addressed to God (if to anyone), a kind of blasphemous version of a stunned 'My word!' Despite its popularity with some modern Arians, such profanity would not have been found in first-century Palestine on the lips of a devout Jew. In any case, Thomas' confession is addressed *to him*, i.e. to Jesus; and Jesus immediately (if implicitly) praises him for his faith, even if it is not as notable as the faith of those who believe without demanding the kind of evidence accorded Thomas. Nor are Thomas' words most easily read as a predicative statement addressed to Jesus: 'My Lord is also my God.'...The repeated pronoun *my* does not diminish the universality of Jesus' lordship and deity, but it ensures that Thomas' words are a *personal* confession of faith. Thomas thereby not only displays his faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but points to its deepest meaning; it is nothing less than the revelation of who Jesus Christ is."²⁷⁸
- Colin G. Kruse: "This is the last of a series of confessions of Jesus found in the Fourth Gospel. John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Son of God (1:34), Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel' (1:49); the Samaritans said, 'we know this man really is the Saviour of the world' (4:42), the man born blind said, 'If this man were not from God he could do nothing,' and later worshipped him as the Son of Man (9:33, 35-38), Martha said, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world' (11:27), and the disciples said, 'This makes us believe that you came from God' (16:30). Thomas' confession is not only the last; it is also the climatic confession of the Fourth Gospel. He confessed Jesus not only as *his* Lord, but *his* God. It was a strongly personal confession. By recording it the evangelist brings his readers back to the opening verse of the Prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'"²⁷⁹
- Craig S. Keener: "Thomas' very skepticism makes him the ideal proponent of a high Christology by indicating the greatness of the revelation by which he was convinced. Thomas has spoken for the disciples in this Gospel before (11:16), and his revelation elicits the Gospel's climatic christological confession, 'My Lord and my God' (20:28)...In this case, as in the prologue, the confession of Jesus' deity is

²⁷⁷ Beasley-Murray, pp 385-386.

²⁷⁸ Carson, *John*, pp 658-659.

²⁷⁹ Kruse, *John*, 385.

unmistakable (cf. Rev 4:11). It cannot simply represent an acclamation to the Father, since John explicitly claims that the words are addressed to Jesus (αὐτῷ [autō])...The linkage of 'Lord' and 'God' may derive ultimately from the LXX, where the two terms recur together consistently, translating יהוה [YHWH] and אלהים [Elohim], respectively; the two titles of God continued together in ancient Judaism."²⁸⁰

- Andreas J. Köstenberger: "Apparently, Thomas no longer has need to touch Jesus' wounds in order to verify that his resurrection really has taken place: in his case, seeing was believing. Rather in a peak (at least) akin to the recognition scene in 20:16, Thomas acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and God. Although 'Lord' may have simply expressed respect, the reluctant disciple now realized that Jesus was in fact somehow God incarnate....In the OT, 'Lord' and 'God' are frequently juxtaposed with reference to Yahweh (e.g., Ps. 35:23-24)."²⁸¹

The 2016 *Complete Jewish Study Bible* most appreciably has the following annotation for John 20:18:

"In v. 28 T'oma (Thomas) confesses that Yeshua is God when he proclaims 'My Lord and my God!' This is not a propositional statement but an exclamation by a *talmid* [disciple] who had just seen, with his own eyes, the resurrected Messiah!"²⁸²

One of the things, which needs to be kept in mind here, is that Yeshua the Messiah being resurrected from the dead, is hardly what qualifies Him as Divine. Instead, the disciple Thomas' declaration of "My Lord and my God" in John 10:28 represents the totality of experience, for which recognizing the resurrected Yeshua was the cause. For Thomas, finally encountering the crucifixion wounds and scars of his Lord, had to have made all of Yeshua's teachings, statements, and miracles come to a head. While Yeshua the human being had been brutally murdered, here He was having been resurrected to bodily immortality by His Heavenly Father. And, this is the same Yeshua who had said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25). Upon witnessing the resurrected Yeshua and touching Him, all of Thomas' doubts were jettisoned, and he personally recognized that everything the Messiah had told him was true.

That the language of "My Lord and my God," *ho Kurios mou kai ho Theos mou*, likely taken from a number of Tanach passages in the Septuagint, has to play a role in us recognizing the importance of Thomas' declaration. In Hosea 2:23(25) it is witnessed, "And I will have pity on Not Pitied, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people,' and he shall say, 'You are the Lord my God'" (NETS), *Kurios ho Theos mou ei su* (κύριος ὁ θεός μου εἶ σύ). Psalm 35:23-24 is also important to recognize: "Wake up! And pay attention to my trial my God and my Lord [*ho Theos mou kai ho Kurios mou, ὁ θεός μου καὶ ὁ κύριός μου*], to my case! Vindicate me, O Lord my God according to your righteousness, and may they not be happy over me" (NETS). The only difference between Psalm 35:23 and its employment of *ho Theos mou kai ho Kurios mou*, and John 20:28 and *ho Kurios mou kai ho Theos mou*, is how the order of the Divine titles are swapped; other than that there is no ambiguity about the One God of Israel being addressed.

²⁸⁰ Keener, *John*, 1211.

²⁸¹ Köstenberger, 579.

²⁸² *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, 1555.