

One Thing That Matters

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's good to be back at Bells Hill. And let me bring you the greetings of the folks at Calderwood Baptist Church in East Cobridge.

They continue to pray for the church at Bells Hill. I continue to pray for all of you and for Carl and for Jen. And continue to encourage others just to keep praying into how they, one or two, might even just commit themselves to the work that we want to see ongoing and thriving in this community.

This morning we're going to look at God's Word. We're going to be in John's Gospel, chapter 20. And we're going to read from verse 19 through to the end of that chapter.

John, chapter 20, 19 and following. This is sometimes referred to as John's Great Commission. We often talk about Matthew's Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son. Teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

[1 : 1 9] And lo, I am with you always to the very end of the age. And that's a text of Scripture that is written on my heart, if truth be told. But this is often called John's Great Commission.

So let's read there in John's Gospel at verse 19. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands at his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

[2 : 4 0] So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here and see my hands, and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

And Thomas answered, My Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen me, and yet have believed.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

- [4 : 11] Amen. And we pray that God would speak to us. Let's just join our hearts in prayer. Our gracious Father, we thank you that you've gathered us together this day.
- Father, you've gathered us in your presence, your living, abiding presence. And Father, you've gathered that you might receive the people's praises, their worship, their adoration, their thanksgiving.
- Amen. We praise you, Lord our God, that our salvation is not just a mechanism that puts us right with you, but it is a miracle.
- Our Father, we thank you that our salvation, which is always of grace, is a gift given freely to each one of us. It's not a right.
- And yet we marvel that you would make us sons and daughters of the living God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [5 : 21] And so we come and we pray that as your people who would praise and adore you, you would speak to us in your Word, and that your Word would be a Word that we would long, not just to hear and to receive, but we would long to put into practice that we would be those who live in the light of the full revelation of who you are, and that we would magnify you in all things.
- So speak in these moments, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, as Stephen was saying, we're starting, when I'm able to come and visit and be amongst you, a little series about Word-based evangelism.
- And what do we mean by that? Word-based or Word-centered? All we mean by that is that as the people of God, we might be a people who are utterly convinced of the power of the Word of God, of the reliability of the Word of God, as it speaks in power, as it speaks with authority into people's lives to bring about transformation, to bring about the conviction of sin that all of us need before we can come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring about the repentance that all of us need in order to put us in a right standing with God, and to bring about the faith that all of us need that just surrenders who we are to our Lord Jesus Christ.
- You know, I've been reflecting this week on that little note that I was praying. Grace is always the gift of God. It is not a right.
- We don't deserve to be the people of God. None of us merit what it is to be in a right standing with God. This is the most incredible gift. You know, I had a significant birthday in between Christmas and New Year, and I received some incredible gifts from the family.
- [7 : 35] A new watch that I'm wearing that deliberately counts my steps so that, you know, at a man of my age, you know, I'm keeping myself in better condition, and so it does that.
- But all manner of gifts, including one from the government, a bus pass. Because every 60-year-old needs one, right?
- And so they gave me a... I've never used it yet, right? I need to actually go and find out where buses go, right? But at the end of the day, I get given a bus pass, significant gifts. But, you know, my friend, here we are as the people of God, standing in a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's all of a gift.
- It's all a gift. The free gift of God in Christ. By grace you have been saved. Our salvation is a miracle.
- That's what it is. You know, sometimes we think of it as a mechanism that just puts us right with God. And then we live any way we like. But it's a miracle.
- [8 : 44] It's a miracle that God would reach into your heart, my heart, put us in a right standing with Himself. And then He says, by grace you will stand, by the Spirit you will be my witnesses, by my Word, as you proclaim it, as you make it known, as you share it, as you turn the pages of Holy Scripture with those who don't know Jesus, God will move in power, and others will come to know Him and to love Him.

And I love John's Gospel. I love the writings of John, actually, whether it's John's Gospel, or whether it's 1, 2, or 3 John, or whether it's the Revelation of John.

But I love the way in which, by the Spirit of God, He takes time to put everything He wants to say in an order. Right? There's a beautiful order about it.

But the other incredible thing about it is that each thing flows into the other. So by the time He gets to the end of chapter 20, He can almost stop His account there.

All these things I've written in order that you might believe. What's His whole heart? What's His whole heart? His heart is that others might come to know, might come to believe, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10:02] And He says, in believing on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will have life. Life eternal. Life forevermore. Life as God intended.

Life at its best. That's what it is to know Jesus. Life at its best. And He longs for us to have that, and so He's written it all. And yet He continues and He gives us, you know, chapter 21, which is so beautiful and so precious in so many other ways.

But He longs for it. But here's the thing that I love. He writes that little bit about these things I've written just after Thomas. The one that we often call Doubting Thomas.

The one that we often, you know, sort of give that little, you know, prefix to his name. But truth be told, I think Thomas is Honest Thomas. He asks questions, right? And He just wants things to be, you know, clear.

He just wants to be assured. But right after the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ has appeared again to Thomas, and even in His grace and His mercy says, Thomas, you know, put your hands in there.

[11:10] You know, put your finger on my side. Blessed are those who believe, even though they've not seen, right? And Thomas, Thomas, of course, cries out, my Lord and my God.

It's a profession of faith. My Lord and my God. And my friends, if you and I are amongst the people of God this morning, and we cry out, my Lord and my God, Thomas deliberately says, I'm writing these things so that others might believe.

And your life and my life have to be a declaration of the grace of God, the salvation of Christ, the message of Jesus to others. You know, Thomas, John puts everything deliberately in all the right place.

And so, I want this morning to talk about the one thing that matters and three things we must do. The one thing that matters and three things we must do, okay?

As we think about word-based evangelism. So, we're going to think about one and three but not the Trinity. We're going to think about the one thing that matters and three things we must do. The last time I was with any of the folks at Bell Cellop was the men.

[12:23] And we were in Cafe Hepburn and we were having one of those little evenings together. Good evenings. And I was able to share just a little bit of all that God was doing in my life at the present moment in time.

And I said to them two fascinating things that happened last year out the back of all that would come through the pandemic was there were two major surveys took place in the UK.

One was the National Ministry and Mission Survey by an organisation called McRindle and the other was a report called Talking Jesus that was carried out by a host of different ministries.

The incredible thing is that they were trying to find out attitudes that those who don't know Jesus Christ have towards the church and towards those that are followers of Christ. That's a fascinating survey isn't it?

They were trying to find out what people that don't come to church that don't believe in Jesus that are not Christians think of those of us who do come to church who do believe in Jesus and are Christians. Right?

[13 : 28] That's an interesting survey for us to have a look at. And so that's what they were trying to work out. But they also were in their survey they were asking those who don't come to church those that don't believe in Jesus those that are not Christian they were saying to them if you wanted to know anything about Jesus Christ if you wanted to know anything about the Christian faith where would you go?

And of course the top answer amongst all of them was Google. Right? And we all know we can trust Google don't we? Right? So at the end of the day the top answer was Google.

Right? If a person was trying to find out something about the Christian faith the first place they would go to is Google. That's scary. Right? But at the end of the day because there's all manner of rubbish on there.

Right? But at the end of the day that's where they would go. Now there's no surprise there that's the world we live in. Here's the thing that excites me. Here's the reason why I would bring us a little message to launch this session and this little series that's called One Thing That Matters Three Things We Must Do.

Here's the part that really excites me. The next three places they would go were these. They would go to a Christian friend that really lived what they believed.

[14 : 51] Now you and I might immediately think well that Christian friend could be me. But notice that little caveat that really lived what they believed. Right?

They would go to a Christian friend that was really living it. Not just talking it living it. You know not just kind of making a vague profession but that vague profession changed who they were and how they lived.

Right? And they would go there. Second place after that was they would go to a church that was dynamic. It was really living it out. In its ministries and what it was about and the stand it was taking.

Here's the interesting thing. In a society that we think is very hostile they said actually we'd go to a church that took a stand. Right? Here's the third area they'd go to.

They would go directly to the word of God itself. That's why I love training people and equipping people in the word one to one and we'll do that at some point as a congregation together in order that we can take people straight to the word.

[15 : 53] That's unbelievers we're talking about. That's really exciting for you and I as God's people. Because that means that if we're living it and we're seeking for the church to be as dynamic as you possibly can and we're convinced that if we take people to the word there is huge hope.

Here's the other thing. Many of us think that non-Christians don't like us don't we? Here's the interesting thing is they asked non-Christians about you know Christians they knew and they said what did you think of them?

What do you think of them? Now most of us think you know that they're going to say we're homophobic we're bigoted we're hypocrites and all that sort of stuff and there were some who said that but the majority of people actually said this about the Christians they knew actually I really quite like them.

My friend that's incredibly encouraging right? If there's people that know you as a Christian and really quite like you then you're the most likely person that God is going to use by his spirit to speak into their life about what it is to love Jesus and live for Jesus you're the most natural witness into that person's life it's incredible isn't it?

Coming out of it right now what's the one thing that matters? You know what I love about John chapter 20 and the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ it tells us at verse 19 it says that you know on the evening of that day the first day of the week the door's been locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews one of the great ways in which we know the reliability the authenticity the genuine nature of the word of God is that the word of God doesn't paint things pretty right?

[17 : 44] The disciples should follow Jesus who'd been subject to his teaching the disciples who you know who had been told that he was going to die and rise again the disciples after he was crucified were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews now if you and I were going to write an account of the heroic work of the disciples we'd probably have left that part out right?

But John tells us exactly as it is the Holy Spirit when he reveals the revelation of God in his word just gives us the truth they're hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews they know what the Jews have done to Jesus right?

So they're terrified that they're next in line so the disciples and the evening of that day what day is it? It's Resurrection Sunday that's what day it is you know we're like as a church on Resurrection Sunday you come in together Christ has died Christ has risen Christ will come again hallelujah the disciples on Resurrection Sunday are hiding for fear of the Jews that's where Jesus meets them and sometimes when it comes to us doing word-centered evangelism sharing our faith we're afraid that's our starting position right?

We're afraid of that with what we think of is you know we ask that question too often it doesn't matter what they think of us it's what they think of him that matters right? But at the end of the day we ask that question all the time don't we?

and so there they are for fear of the Jews hiding behind locked doors and here's the beautiful thing right? The Lord Jesus Christ in his grace in his mercy he appears you know we're not going to get into all that we can try and understand about his resurrection body but he appears through locked doors and here's what I love about the Lord Jesus Christ he says to them peace be with you is that not the most beautiful thing to say to a frightened group of disciples is that not the most beautiful thing even to say to a group of Christians like ourselves who are very often afraid to take a stand for Jesus to share Jesus to tell others about Jesus he says peace be to you you know one of the great things about John when John writes his gospel John often repeats things and he does it deliberately and he does it for emphasis right so sometimes he'll say truly truly I say to you and he's quoting the Lord Jesus Christ and actually when he does that he's saying this is really important if he says truly truly set up right and here's the incredible thing in John chapter 20 he doesn't just say peace be to you the Lord Jesus Christ the resurrected Christ doesn't just say peace be to you once in actual fact he says it twice in the first appearance and then when he appears again to Thomas eight days later what's the first words out of Jesus' lips peace be to you now the beautiful thing about this is that's not just the Hebraic greeting the Jewish greeting shalom it is that but it's weighted with so much more because really what Jesus is saying as the resurrected

[21 : 00] Christ the one who has gone to Calvary's cross the one who has been raised from the dead the one who in a little while will ascend to the Father what he's saying is shalom all the peace of God be yours because I am the one who is able to give you peace I have conquered in Calvary's cross I have risen from the dead I am ascending to the Father I am going to pour out my Holy Spirit you have peace with God in Christ that's the one thing that matters have you got peace with God in Christ now that's a question that I don't want any of us to miss this morning because some of us could think oh it's church it must be about the three things we've got to do the one thing that matters is do we know the peace of God in Christ do you know that have you repented of your sin is all your trust all your hope in Jesus Christ has God in Christ reconciled you to himself you've got the peace with God and the peace of God because God himself dwells in you that's that matters and Jesus turns to his disciples and he says to them peace be to you peace be to you

Thomas I'm not believing until I mean when you think about it it's pretty horrible isn't it I'm not believing until I poke my fingers into the wounds and the first words that Jesus says to him are peace be with you you know my friend the one thing that matters is that we know the peace of God in Christ the one thing that matters is that you and I are in a right relationship with God what does it mean to be at peace with God what it means is the hostility is over what it means is that the sin is cancelled out we're forgiven we're reconciled is the word that Paul uses when he says that and he says this to his church to all of us we are ministers of reconciliation what do those who are ministers of reconciliation do they make peace between warring enemies right and the world in its sin is an enemy of God it's set against God but God in Christ through people like you and me as we make known the full revelation of the word of God we're enabled by God to take sinners like ourselves and make peace with God in Christ reconciled reconciled peace with God peace is a beautiful thing we know that in human terms even just when we've been out of sorts with somebody and the relationship is soured and things are a little bit difficult and then somehow by some reason you know that relationship gets healed and there's a wonderful peace about that there's a beautiful peace and that's our testimony you know so the one thing that matters is peace and that's why

Jesus says peace be to you peace be with you is what he says you know and it's absolutely beautiful what a beautiful thing to say to a discouraged group of believers what a beautiful thing to say to a people who are afraid peace be with you see the incredible thing is that many of these believers many of these first disciples in actual fact all of them in all probability with the exception of John were going to be killed for their faith they were going to become Christian martyrs right now how you know how can you be a martyr if you don't know the peace of God and Christ see for us in the western world we don't think a lot about that but the truth be told all over the globe there are many many Christian people losing their life I've got a dear friend who's Archbishop

Ben Quashie Ben is the Archbishop of Jos in Nigeria and he's a beautiful man of God a man given over to declaring the good news of Jesus Christ to taking a high and a holy stand in the word of God and the revelation of God a man whose own family have been beating and victimized and abused a man whose life they've tried to take on several occasions a man who has lost so many dear friends because of the proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ but he writes very very clearly about the fact that when you've got the peace of God when you're at peace with God there's nothing you're afraid of even death itself and he turns around and he says to you know the church in the UK says I see a need for Bible literacy in the UK people of God have lost sight of what God has said in his word he said people should go back to reading the Bible to find out what God says about people instead of listening only to what people say about God and his word the UK should go back to reading the Bible for themselves to hear what God has said and a wonderful man of God and a dear friend of our ministry and they let me think about that one thing that matters it's that one thing that ought to be the catalyst that ought to motivate that ought to mobilize that ought to drive that ought to be at the center of what we do there are many different things we might do as the church of Jesus Christ and whenever we do any of them we should do them unapologetically in the name of Jesus and we should do them in such a way that we want to show people how they can have peace with God and Christ because God is the one who has made peace possible and so Jesus when he speaks to that group of disciples and says to them peace be with you when he shows them his hands and his side and the disciples are glad and they rejoice at seeing the resurrection Lord he says to them look at that in verse 21 he says

Jesus said to them again peace be with you as the Father has sent me even so I am sending you so the one thing that matters is this peace with God and Christ the first thing we ought to do is understand that as the church of Jesus Christ our primary calling our primary purpose is to be about the mission of Jesus what was the mission of Jesus well Luke states it in Luke chapter 19 verse 10 doesn't he the son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost that's why we're here right and Jesus in John's great commission says as the Father has sent me so I am sending you now there's so many things that are beautiful about that right step back to the beginning of the sentence as the Father has sent me now if you can allow your mind the mind that God has given you the mind that he wants to equip the mind that he wants to fill the mind that he wants to strengthen right think about this right if you can just go back and say so in the eternal counsel in the eternal plan of the eternal mind which is

[29 : 37] God's right that's why it's kind of difficult to get your head around all that right in the eternal plan and purpose and mind of God the Father was going to send the Son the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world right and we marvel we did that over Christmas didn't we marvel at the incredible incarnation of God and Christ you know child of a virgin's womb born as a helpless babe born in the squalor of Bethlehem stable we marvel God in human flesh all the vulnerability of a child of a kid a kid that baffled the religious leaders in the temple right about the age of 12 as the

Father has sent me as the Father sent me and then Jesus turns around and he says I am now that those little words together they should just are my every what is it call it in the brain everything should be lighting up right now when Jesus says I am he's pointing to his God head isn't he I'm sending you as God the Father sent me I am sending you do you ever sometimes sit there and think why me I mean sometimes I sit there and say Lord just do something that just makes them awful in their face in front of you but in actual fact he will do that it will be called the end of the age but then it will be too late he's already done that in the incarnation of

Christ he's already done that in the power of Calvary he's already done that in the resurrection of Christ from the dead the first fruits of all who will be raised from the dead and he says right now right now you need to believe what will happen when you do what I'm sending you to do in my name as the father has sent me I am sending you that means every single one of us not just Cal or any of the leaders every single one of us walk out the church with a purpose sent by the father sent by the Lord Jesus Christ to be his witnesses to testify to the peace of God and Christ and the only thing that matters is the father has sent me I'm sending you and we're sitting there at that point going oh we're back with the disciples terrified and that's why he turns round and he says no no no

I'm sending you and he said to the disciples he said he breathed on them and he said receive the Holy Spirit and it was a foretaste at that moment of what he was about to do at Pentecost when he poured out the Holy Spirit upon them and he says so when I send you I'm not sending you your own strength don't worry I know you I know you can't do this on your own that's why when I send you I empower you that's why you it says in Acts 1 verse 8 you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be non-negotiable you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem Judea Samaria to the ends of the earth I've said it before we're either good witnesses or bad but we are a witness right so at the end of the day we go in the power of the Holy Spirit and we're either a good witness or bad but you shall be my witnesses he says I am sending you receive the Holy Spirit and you know we need to day by day just look for that fresh infilling of the

Spirit of God and go in the power of the Spirit into all that God is doing I know a beautiful prayer Lord lead me to the people today that you're preparing to know you right all I can do is be a witness to the good news of the gospel only God can take the blind eyes and make them see only God can open their eyes to believe but how does he do that he does that through people like you and me who faithfully show the word of God the message of Christ into their life so lead me to the people that you're preparing to open their eyes as the father has sent me so I'm sending you not in your own strength three things we must do go but don't just go in your own strength go in the power of the Holy Spirit so that means we need to take time each day to be in the presence of the

[35 : 36] Spirit that everywhere I go today you would lead me to the people that you're doing a work in their hearts and life so receive the Holy Spirit that you might go in the power of the Spirit and glorify God that you might make him known so the one thing that matters peace with God in Christ three things we must do I am sending you so we go go in the power of the Holy Spirit and here's the last little bit and it's a little again little foresight into the gospel he says if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them if you withhold forgiveness from any it is withheld and we sometimes look at that and we go in what way can we actually forgive or withhold well in actual fact if somebody says to me John how can I be forgiven of my sins what do I do I share with them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ don't I can forgive somebody who maybe personally insulted me I can forgive them for that yes of course I can and we ought to because we walk in the footsteps of

Christ I can do that but in actual fact if that person is looking for complete forgiveness for the guilt to be removed for the punishment to be deferred I've got to share the gospel with them but what if I withhold the gospel from them their sins they could die in their sin they could go unforgiven there's no sin in heaven if you confess your sin he is faithful and just to forgive you your sin to cleanse you and to make you righteous to make you righteous in heaven and so there's a great warning so three things right you know I'm sending you but I'm sending you to the power of the Holy Spirit and I'm sending you to make none the gospel I'm sending you to declare that the one thing that steals our peace is our sinful rebellion against God or sin and God and Christ forgive restore and make peace and you and

I rejoice in that because that's our starting position but he says I'm sending you and I'm sending you the power of the Spirit and I'm entrusting you with the gospel with the message of salvation and I'm sending you out to go and make the good news of Jesus Christ known and in subsequent weeks we'll look more and more about how one of the best ways we can do that is to take people to the word to speak into the light I've got one or two friends in here who I know always carry a little bit of God's word or a little bit of scripture text or whatever it might be that they might give somebody something in actual fact their convictions not just that the person has written about the tract will do the word it is that the word of God and the message of the gospel will do its work and so there's something very powerful when you give somebody something that speaks into the person's life about who God is and what he's doing and again we go in the name of Jesus we go in the power of the spirit we go with the good news of

Jesus Christ with the gospel of God written in our hearts so one thing that matters peace with God and Christ three things we can do you're sent I am sent you you're empowered I am empowers you and you've got a message the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ I'm of to declare it and John writing his gospel he just showed you one of the ways in which by the spirit of God used to write holy scripture in actual fact recorded it all and you and I are able to take that and to allow that life giving word to bring life to bring peace to bring joy into the hearts and lives of others let's pray together our gracious father we thank you for the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we thank you for the one thing that matters that we know in our own life and own experience of what it is to have peace with

God in Christ through Christ father we thank you that you have given to us as your church the most incredible message and father we pray that even today we would be a people who are willing willing to hear you speak into our hearts and into our lives and we rise up sent ones knowing that we are the empowered ones and knowing knowing that in Christ Jesus we can make him known we can make much of Jesus we can magnify your name for your glory in Jesus name we pray Amen