

My Lord and My God!

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[0 : 00] All right, well as we come to God's Word this morning, we are picking up the story again where we left off. We're in John chapter 20, and we heard last Sunday what John's experience was, the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

It all started for John when Mary Magdalene showed up at the front door with news that Jesus' body had been stolen. We heard how John and Peter ran to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, empty.

And even though they didn't see angels or Jesus, John told us that this was the moment that he believed. We ended last Sunday with Mary knocking on John's door again, so to speak.

But this time with the news that she had seen Jesus alive. Now we're about to hear what happened later that same day.

Let's pick up the story. John chapter 20, verse 19. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

[1 : 31] After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

So this is the moment when John first sees Jesus alive after he had risen from the dead. He had to wait the whole day until the evening before he got his turn.

And Luke, in his gospel, is the one who describes this occasion, this appearing of Jesus that evening in the fullest detail.

Luke describes how earlier in the afternoon, Jesus had appeared to Cleopas and his friend on the way to Emmaus, a little town just down the road from Jerusalem.

And Jesus had walked with them, though they didn't recognize him. And then he had a meal with them at their house in the evening.

[2 : 33] And Cleopas and his friend recognized Jesus. And Luke tells us that at that moment, Jesus vanished right before their eyes. And Luke tells us that Cleopas and his friend then got up at once and returned to Jerusalem.

And when they got to Jerusalem, Cleopas and his friend found the eleven disciples all gathered together. Eleven because Judas is no longer part of the group. And the disciples were saying, according to Luke, It's true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

That is, Simon Peter. And then Cleopas and his friend share about their encounter with Jesus alive. And Luke will go on to tell much more about this occasion when Jesus appears in the evening than John does.

But what does John remember from that awesome moment when he first saw Jesus alive? Well, first, there is the unexplainable surprise of the moment.

Look at how John describes this. He says, Jesus came and stood among them. But from where? And how?

[3 : 51] It's as if one moment Jesus wasn't there. And the next moment, there he was. Standing. Right there in the room. It's like he just appears seemingly out of nowhere.

And John mentions a significant detail that Luke chose to leave out. He says, we were all together and we had the doors locked.

We had the doors locked. Now, this wasn't a case of how it sometimes is with you and your car when you drive to the city.

Most of you, I hope, lock your car when you park it somewhere in the city. That's a prudent thing to do in a fallen world. That's good stewardship. But probably most of you who are drivers have had that moment where you wonder to yourself, did I lock the car?

Some of you have long forgotten those days because you have one of those fancy new cars that locks itself when the remote gets far enough away. But I still have one of those old vehicles and I still ask that question from time to time.

[4 : 59] Did I lock the van door? I better go back and I better check. But this was different. John and everyone else in the room, they knew that the doors were locked. And they knew why.

We were afraid, says John. We were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Now, let's dig into this fear a little bit.

Most likely, if the crucifixion had been the end of the story of Jesus, they wouldn't have been afraid of the Jewish leaders. Most of the anger and the hatred and the jealousy of the leaders was fixated on Jesus.

But now, with Jesus gone, their leader gone, we won't have to worry too much about his disciples. We saw how they scattered that night in the garden when we arrested him.

But now that word is getting around that Jesus has risen from the dead, the tomb is empty and there's no body of Jesus to be found. Well, this changes things.

[6 : 08] Matthew tells us in his gospel that the soldiers who had stood guard at the tomb, they came and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened earlier that morning.

That would include the earthquake. That would include the angelic being who rolled the stone away from the entrance and sat on it, after which probably the soldiers fled in fear.

And the chief priests, when they met with the soldiers, they gave them a bribe and told them, you are to say, his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

So we can imagine that now the disciples are indeed quite afraid. Afraid of the religious leaders.

They definitely, the religious leaders, they definitely don't believe Jesus has risen from the dead.

And all they need to discredit, the resurrection of Jesus entirely, is the body of Jesus, to show the public the body of Jesus.

[7 : 22] Jesus couldn't have risen from the dead. No, his followers must have stolen the body. And now they're claiming that he rose from the dead. They have the body.

We've got to find them. And the body. So they had the doors locked because they were afraid.

And this is what caught John by surprise. Like, what? Where did he come from? How did he get in here? Much like Jesus vanished from the table in an instant before the very eyes of Cleopas and his friend, here Jesus seems to appear miraculously out of nowhere.

There was no other explanation for how he got in here. So Jesus appears and he greets them. Peace be with you.

It's actually a very ordinary greeting. It's the same greeting that's still used today by the Jews in Hebrew. It's a shalom, alachem. Peace be with you or peace be upon you.

[8 : 37] And then John describes how Jesus showed them his hands and his side. This was the proof that it was really Jesus.

Even though his body had been resurrected and made new, it seems God saw fit to leave him with scars. These were to be identifying marks.

Remember, John is the one who told us about the spear that was thrust into Jesus' dead body on the cross. And here John points out that not only did he have scars on his hands from the nails, but also there was a scar on his side in the same place that John watched the spear go in.

It was beyond the shadow of a doubt. The same Jesus. They watched die. Now alive again in their presence. And at this point, John tells us how seeing Jesus made them all feel.

He says in verse 20, We were overjoyed. Literally. They rejoiced. This was a very happy moment. A moment of celebration.

[9 : 58] Excitement. Wonder. Awe. John could finally say with the women. With Peter. With Cleopas. I have seen the Lord.

But now John tells us about some things that Jesus said and did that evening that Luke chose to leave out of his account.

Verse 21. Again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

And with that, He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven.

If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now this little snippet of what John has recorded has caused all kinds of debate and discussion amongst Christians for generations.

[11 : 11] The first thing that Jesus does here is to commission them to His service. And this is not new. This is basically the same thing that Jesus prayed three days earlier during His high priestly prayer.

Remember back to John chapter 17, verse 18. Jesus talking to His Father said, As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

And now here again, He says basically the same thing, but instead, directly to His disciples. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

Now this, I think, is most likely something Jesus said to commission them as apostles, rather than a generic sending of all believers to preach the gospel.

And I won't get into the fuller discussion for why this morning, for the sake of time, but there are some who do see this as a more general commissioning of all Christians to represent Christ in the world.

[12 : 17] Then there's what Jesus says in verse 23. He says, If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven.

If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now these words have been debated a lot.

Probably, though, we can all agree that there's some sense of special authority being granted to the ones Jesus is sending.

And so that's why I'm inclined to think that this sending has to do with them being apostles and not just typical Christian followers. Let's talk about this verse 23 for a minute.

If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. What do we do with this?

What does it mean? Some might point to this saying of Jesus to suggest that we cannot directly confess our sins to God.

[13 : 27] We must go through a priest or a member of the clergy. But is Jesus saying that from now on, other people will need the apostles to find forgiveness from God?

I don't think so. That's not the way the rest of the Bible points us. Other people, perhaps in reaction to that, will explain this statement in a way that basically flips it upside down completely to mean the very opposite of what it seems to mean.

They'll say something like, well, it doesn't mean that the apostles will have any special authority from God to forgive sins. Because actually, you know, maybe it means that because God has already decided to forgive them, when they go and forgive someone, it's because God has already made that decision.

Well, that sounds interesting, and it kind of seems to exalt the sovereignty of God. But we have to wonder, did Jesus really mean the exact opposite of what it seems like he said?

You've got to be doing some pretty fancy grammatical gymnastics here to make the condition of this statement the result. And the result, the condition. And so I'll be honest.

[14 : 51] I'm not entirely sure what Jesus meant here, but if I had to guess, could it be that God gave a special role to the apostles, unique to them, such that just as they would speak the very words of God to people, like the prophets of old, in the same way, by the Spirit, they would be able to speak authoritatively on God's behalf, pronouncing, granting God's forgiveness to those who were coming and repenting and putting their faith in Jesus?

And this not indefinitely, but for this time of transition between the old covenant and the new covenant. Could it be that they would be able to say to a person, truly on God's behalf, as Jesus' representatives, whether or not God had forgiven that person?

Perhaps God gave them special divine knowledge of whether people were sincere and truly believing. Perhaps the reason was to make it clear and to give assurance that yes, God really has forgiven you.

Maybe it was a way during this time of transition for God to put His authoritative word over who was truly in and believed and who was not.

perhaps a way to protect the church from people who were pretenders and insincere. And this does seem to fit a little with what we see in the book of Acts with Ananias and Sapphira.

[16 : 33] They are struck down for lying to the apostles because lying to the apostles, as we read in that story, with the unique role that God had given them, was tantamount to lying to God since they were the ones He had sent.

And so Peter seems to, on that occasion, pronounce judgment and Sapphira drops dead. So that's one possibility for what that means.

Another of the well-debated things that Jesus said. But then there's this other thing that has caused quite a lot of head-scratching as well. John tells how on this evening that Jesus rose from the dead, he says that Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

Now if that other thing Jesus said didn't turn us upside down, well this certainly does. How come Jesus seems to give the Holy Spirit to them before the day of Pentecost?

According to John. I mean, the day of Pentecost happens over 40 days after this. And it's that day that we read in the book of Acts that God pours out His Spirit on His apostles.

[17 : 57] So naturally, some point to this and say, well look, there's a contradiction there. John didn't have his story straight. Or maybe it was Luke who didn't have his story straight.

John says, they received the Holy Spirit from Jesus directly the day that Jesus rose from the dead. While Luke says it was more than 40 days later. What do we do with this?

And there's been no shortage of ideas put forward here. But most of them boil down to one of these three explanations. First, some argue that there was only one moment in which Jesus gave His Spirit.

And somehow, this thing that John is describing here is the same thing that Luke described in Acts chapter 2. And what do we do with that 40-day gap between the two?

Well, perhaps they say John is letting the theology control his narrative more than the chronology. I'll be honest, I just can't accept that view of Scripture.

[19 : 05] That seems to undermine its truthfulness in my opinion. Second, some argue that this was not a moment in which Jesus actually gave the Holy Spirit.

Some suggest that He is just giving them a promise or a command about the Spirit in anticipation of the coming of the Spirit which won't happen until Pentecost.

Jesus did speak in ways that seemed to give us a sense that time was not the way that we would expect it.

You know, my hour has come. Like, it's here right now but then referring to what? Referring to something that's about to happen a week later. He spoke about His departure is imminent even though there are yet, there was still a week and yet 40 days before He would actually go to the Father to stay.

And so maybe that's what's happening here. Maybe this is a giving that starts now with Jesus' words and ends with what happens at Pentecost when the Spirit comes down.

[20 : 29] That's another view. Or, perhaps Jesus isn't giving the Spirit but somehow He's preparing them to receive the Spirit by breathing on them and then commanding them to receive the Spirit at that later time when He sinned.

Certainly a respectable view but I'm not quite sure about it. Finally, the third option that people argue for and this is the one that I think makes the most sense is that there were two givings of the Holy Spirit.

And now there are different ideas about why there were two givings. Was it that the first was somehow a lesser giving and the second a fuller giving? Was it that the first was about them receiving apostolic power and authority and the second about them receiving new life and the new birth?

Or, was it the other way around? Now this third view I think is the most compelling but I don't know this for sure. Perhaps it was this evening that at least some of the disciples first received the Holy Spirit to live in them the night that they were born again by the Spirit as Jesus described to Nicodemus.

We do see in this Gospel of John an emphasis on this that belief goes with the new birth. We heard that back at the beginning of John's Gospel.

[22 : 03] Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God children born of God. So this is probably the moment in the story when many of the disciples first believed that Jesus rose from the dead.

The moment they first knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was who he said he was.

According to that kind of an understanding or view of this then what happens 40 days later would be a second different encounter with God's spirit where God pours out his spirit for empowering and for the work of being apostles and proclaiming the news and you see those manifestations like tongues

and speaking in other languages the gifting required for that apostolic work.

I think it has the most going for it that view but again I don't know for sure whatever conclusion we come to it has to fit with the reality that we're about to see here that one of the disciples one of the apostles was actually not here in the room at this moment when Jesus appeared and gave his spirit.

Verse 24 Now Thomas also known as Didymus one of the twelve was not with the disciples when Jesus came so the other disciples told him we have seen the Lord but he said to them unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side I will not believe.

So kind of like Mary Magdalene seemed to miss out on the first appearance of Jesus to the women now we hear that Thomas misses out on this big moment that evening.

[23 : 58] Can you imagine this for Thomas? put yourself in his shoes as much as you can for a second like man all my friends are going crazy they're out of their minds first it was the women claiming to see angels and that Jesus is alive then it was Mary Magdalene and then now Peter and now Cleopas and Thomas it seems just wasn't buying it.

you've got to be kidding me risen from the dead? It doesn't happen very rare in the Old Testament wouldn't it be great if it was true?

And now can you imagine how Thomas is feeling when all ten of the other disciples are now claiming to have seen Jesus how convenient right after Thomas left the room because it seems he was there earlier according to Luke but Thomas wasn't there he hadn't seen it Thomas makes it clear I can't believe it I just can't believe it unless I see the nail marks in his hands for myself unless I put my finger in that spot where the nail was put my hand into his side I will not believe it you've got to wonder what was going on in Thomas' mind in his heart was it deep anguish and grief and man I just if this isn't real I just can't get on that emotional roller coaster and go and all to find out it's just a disappointment it didn't happen or was there some kind of deeply embedded nagging skepticism that just was rising up in his heart or was it a combination unless

I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were put my hand into his side I will not believe notice that for Thomas there is something that will prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt for him and again it has to do with the nail marks it has to do with the spear mark Thomas is saying something here he too was an eyewitness of Jesus' crucifixion he saw the nails pounded in he watched as the spear was thrust into Jesus' body whatever these guys saw the other night maybe it was someone else pretending to be Jesus a lookalike or something I don't know but for me the proof that it really is him risen from the dead will be if he has the scars in all the right places and if I can touch them and feel it and see it for myself and if I don't

I will not go along with this verse 26 a week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them though the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said peace be with you exactly one week later Jesus appears to them all again and this time Thomas is there Jesus gives the same greeting as last time peace be with you and then he turns and speaks directly 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 then Jesus told him because you have seen me you have believed blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed when someone is deeply skeptical how you change their mind how do you get them to see the truth that you know some of us know from our conversations with people that sometimes it takes a miracle and that's what makes this eyewitness moment for Thomas so compelling what could possibly take [28 : 56] Thomas from doubting so deeply that even though ten of his best friends and a bunch of others are saying Jesus is alive I'm telling you we saw him the other night what could take him from doubting that so deeply to now saying my Lord and my God Jesus changed his heart and his mind in an instant he appeared and if his appearance alone with the doors locked wasn't enough it was what Jesus said to Thomas when he appeared it was as if Jesus had heard the very words Thomas had been saying to the other disciples throughout the week Thomas had been saying unless I see where the nails went in and put my finger there unless I reach into and touch the side where the spear went in I will not believe and it's as if

Jesus heard every word of that he knew that Thomas had said it and now he looks Thomas straight into the eye and says put your finger here see see stop doubting and believe and Thomas is so floored by this he bursts out in an expression of worship my Lord and my God he owns Jesus as his God it wasn't just the miraculous appearance at least I don't think so that caused this response but

how deeply exposed Thomas felt in this moment it was like it just hit home right there Jesus knew everything that Thomas had been saying throughout the week he knew it word for word as only God can he knew Thomas's heart the doubt that was in there as only God can and so Thomas acknowledges Jesus not just as Messiah not just as Lord but my Lord and my God what a sweet reunion for Thomas the disciple who had missed out and there's a lesson in this for all of us Jesus brings that out with what he says next verse 29 because you have seen me you have believed blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed as we mentioned a little bit last Sunday for Thomas seeing was believing it took seeing for him to believe but for the rest of the world and coming generations who didn't witness firsthand the coming of

Christ and the resurrection of Jesus for the rest of us believing must come without seeing without seeing it firsthand anyway and Jesus says there's a special blessing of God there is favor of God which comes to those who simply take him at his word and believe without having witnessed like Thomas just did and so I want to draw this to a close by asking you a personal question where are you at in your relationship with Jesus with God do you truly believe in your heart in your heart of hearts are you skeptical are you waiting for God to appear to you or to give you a sign God is inviting you right here right now through these words to put your faith to put your trust your belief in him now without having to see him do you believe this is the whole reason that John has written this account of Jesus story from start to finish verse 30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name it's like John saying I'm telling you what I witnessed I'm telling you everything I saw what I heard about Jesus for your benefit

[34 : 09] I didn't even write down everything in here that Jesus did I couldn't as we'll hear next Sunday I didn't have space for all that he did and said but the things I wrote were for this purpose it was so that you might have the opportunity to see through my eyes what really happened and to know it that he rose from the dead and that you might believe and find that life that eternal life that Jesus preached about for yourself through John God himself is asking for your response to all of this that we've been hearing every Sunday in the gospel of John God is looking not for skepticism not for doubt like Thomas had but for faith for trust for belief will you give that to

God will you bow before him as your Lord and your God will you surrender your life completely to him devote yourself to him not just as an interesting figure worth learning a little bit of wisdom from but as the very God of heaven and earth the one who knows all things the one who is worthy of your entire life your entire everything your worship your devotion what's your response let's pray father in heaven we thank you for the testimony of Thomas strikes a chord with some of us and you know Lord the doubts that have risen in our minds at times the wonderings love and we ask you forgive us for our moments of unbelief we ask that you would give us eyes to see the truth and that we would put our trust in you

Lord Jesus and that we would own you as our God you are worthy I pray that you would live in each one of our hearts powerfully as our Lord it's in your name we pray amen amen Thank you.