

PM John 20:19-29

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[0 : 00] The Holy Bible from the Gospel according to John, chapter 20, and it's page 1093 in the Church Bible.

And then at the beginning of chapter 20, we read of events of the early morning on that first day of the week, the day that Jesus rose from the dead, and then Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. And then we'll take up the reading in verse 19, which begins, And 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 and 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, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 28] 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.

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.

Thomas answered him, My Lord, and my God. Jesus said to him, Have you believed, because you have seen me?

[2 : 44] Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. May God bless to us that reading of his word. Let's join together.

I'd like us to turn back to the passage we read, to John chapter 20. And we're looking particularly at verses 24 to 29.

Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ, is most famous for doubting.

He's been called the patron saint of skeptics. And his motto might be, Seeing is believing. And maybe Thomas is someone you feel an affinity with.

And if not, I'm sure you know people who would feel an affinity with Thomas. Well, I want us to look at the occasion that made Thomas famous for doubting.

[3 : 44] And how he was led from doubt to faith. So we have three headings, three points. First of all, doubt. Second, love.

And third, faith. So first of all, doubt. Jesus, we read in the first part of the reading how Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of the day that he rose from the dead.

And the disciples are overjoyed to see him. They're just ecstatic with joy. They can hardly believe it. But Thomas is absent on that occasion.

And sometime during the week following, Thomas meets the other disciples and they say to him, We've seen the Lord. And Thomas doesn't believe it.

He says, Unless I see, I will not believe it. For Thomas, seeing is believing. In 1991, I spent a few months in Romania teaching English.

[4 : 54] And it was just over a year after the fall of the communist regime in that country. And I was leading a Bible study on this passage. And one of the guys at the study asked a question.

He said this. He said, If Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, did not believe without seeing, why should we accept anything less?

How can we be expected to believe in the resurrection of Jesus without seeing for ourselves? Now, I can't remember what I answered. And I'm usually better at thinking of answers half an hour after it's too late.

But this is how I would try and answer the question today. The first thing to say is that in many areas of life, we believe without seeing.

I mean, just one example. If you're ill and you go to the doctor. And the doctor takes a blood sample and sends it to a laboratory for tests. And the results come back.

[5 : 59] And the doctor gives you some medicine. Now, you don't see the blood samples under the microscope. And even if you did, certainly speaking for myself, I wouldn't understand.

I wouldn't know what to look for under the microscope. And the doctor gives medicine. And, you know, I'm not a pharmacologist. I don't know what's in the medicine.

I don't understand how it works. But I take it. Because I believe without seeing for myself. Because I trust the lab staff, the doctor, the pharmacists.

I trust them. And especially if you know the people. You know that they're in your locality, your community. And they treat lots of people all the time. And there's not too many disasters. Then you trust them on their record.

So that's the first thing. And that's just one example. There's loads of examples where in life we believe without seeing. The second thing is that Thomas ought to have believed that Jesus would rise from the dead.

[7 : 05] Because the scriptures and Jesus himself had said that this would happen. Now, there are scriptures from the Old Testament.

Thomas' Bible was what we call the Old Testament. And there there are passages such as Isaiah 52 and 53 that speak about the servant of the Lord. Who suffers, who dies, but then who is vindicated and exalted.

Or passages like Psalm 22 which speaks of intense suffering. Suffering which just remarkably bears resemblance to the sufferings of Jesus. That we read about in all the Gospels.

And then the sufferer moves beyond that into being exalted. Into this situation of rejoicing and praising God. Oh, there's the psalm that we sung.

Psalm 16 where the psalmist sings. Says, you will not abandon me to the grave. Nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Now, you might say, well, that's maybe a bit cryptic.

[8 : 15] We can understand that looking back. We can see how those fit with Jesus. For Thomas, it wasn't so easy. Because he didn't have the benefit of being able to look back and sort of reflect on these things.

But even if that's the case, there was Jesus' own words. Jesus, on a number of occasions, spoke about how he would suffer and die and then rise. So, just one example in Luke chapter 9.

Jesus says to the disciples, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. And he must be killed.

And on the third day, be raised to life. And Jesus said that and said similar things on a number of different occasions that we have recorded in the Gospels.

And so, Thomas ought to have believed, not as some blind leap of faith, but because he knew the Scriptures and because he knew Jesus, to be trustworthy.

[9 : 15] He had seen other Old Testament Scripture being fulfilled. He'd seen Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as in fulfillment of what the prophet Zechariah had foretold.

And many other fulfillments of Scripture. And he knew that Jesus was trustworthy. And he should have believed him. And so, that's why Jesus rebukes him.

And says to him, Stop doubting or stop being unbelieving and believe. Then the third thing is that it was essential that Thomas did see the risen Lord Jesus for his role as a witness, as an apostle.

So, we read in verse 26. 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.

[10 : 20] Do not disbelieve, but believe. So, Jesus shows Thomas the wounds where the nails had been driven through his hands at the wrist to hold him onto the cross.

And where the soldiers had driven a spear into Jesus' side. And these wounds in Jesus' hands and side demonstrate that this really is Jesus.

It's not someone else. It's the same Jesus who had been crucified, now standing before them. The wounds demonstrate that, as also does the empty grave, the empty tomb of Jesus.

And Thomas, of course, has heard the reports about the empty tomb from the other disciples. But second, these wounds, and Jesus says, you know, touch me and see.

He's demonstrating that he's not some kind of apparition. He's not a ghost. But that Jesus has a real material body that can be touched. This is not just some sort of spirit appearance.

[11 : 30] This is Jesus bodily, physically, materially raised from the dead. Well, Thomas sees and he believes.

And that was vital because Jesus had chosen Thomas as an apostle. And the primary role of an apostle was to be a witness of Jesus' teaching, his miracles, his death.

But especially his resurrection. We see that in Acts chapter 1. After Jesus has been taken up to heaven. And the 11 disciples are selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

This is what Peter says. He says, Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. So, the qualification there is to have to be a witness of the whole of Jesus' ministry from his baptism by John at the beginning.

[12 : 47] But especially becoming a witness of his resurrection. That was the role of an apostle. To be a witness. To be an eyewitness. So, the apostles were first and foremost witnesses, eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

And of course, there were other disciples beyond the 12 who were also eyewitnesses. And their testimony is what they give in verse 25.

That we have seen the Lord. That is what their testimony consists of. That we have seen the Lord after he has been crucified, after he has been killed.

We have seen him risen from the dead. And their eyewitness testimony went out to their own generation through their preaching.

And then comes to us through their writings, through the New Testament. And the theme of witness, of witness testimony, is especially strong in John and also in Luke and Acts.

[13 : 53] If you read the speeches and Acts where the apostles are preaching to others about Jesus. Again and again they say these words.

We are witnesses of these things. Of Jesus' death and resurrection. And so, for us today, we have every reason to believe the gospel accounts.

We have, first of all, the testimony of the Old Testament scriptures. Which supernaturally predicted these events beforehand.

Passages like the ones we've mentioned. Isaiah 52 and 53. And Psalm 22. And many, many more too. But then also we have the testimony of the apostles.

Who were eyewitnesses of these events. And their testimony is preserved for us in the New Testament. And it was a testimony that they were prepared to die for.

[14 : 51] And in fact, most of the apostles did die for their claim that Jesus. They had seen the law. That Jesus was risen. And all of them and many other of those eyewitnesses suffered greatly for that claim.

For their proclamation of that. That's perhaps why the Greek word for witness. Which is the word martyrs. Developed another meaning. Which is the word martyr.

Someone who tells what they believe. Even if it results in being killed for it. That's what a martyr is. And the apostles.

So many of them were killed. For their claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Would they be prepared to die for something that they had fabricated. That they had made up.

Now people do sometimes die for a cause that is false. That's based on falsehood. But only if they themselves believe it to be true. No one is going to die for something that they know to be false and made up.

[15 : 56] And so it tells us about the nature of the gospel's message. The gospel is not presenting to us fables. Just fairy stories. Fables don't need eyewitness testimony.

The gospel is claiming to present to us events. Things that happened in history. And things that happened in history do need eyewitness testimony.

And of course these are unique events. A man dying and rising from the dead. A man being crucified horrifically. And then being raised from the dead.

Is unique. And it has relevance to everyone. In every culture. In every age. In every place. This passage at the end of our reading.

In verse 29. Jesus says to Thomas. Have you believed? Because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen.

[16:55] And yet have believed. And of course that. That is all of us here. If we are believers in Christ. That is us. We have believed without seeing. In fact most almost all believers.

Throughout world history. Have believed without seeing. It was only that first generation. Who actually saw. Jesus alive for themselves. And yet I hope we have seen.

That it is not an unreasonable belief. It is not some wild. Blind leap of faith. But it is something that is. Is entirely reasonable.

And Jesus promises that if we believe. We are blessed. We are blessed with all the. The blessings that are spoken of. In the gospel. The blessings of salvation.

Of peace. Of forgiveness. Of eternal life. Of life that is full. Life that is abundant. That Jesus came to give us. Well the second is love.

[17:56] And the love is on the part of Jesus. Jesus had appeared to. The other ten disciples. A week earlier. And we read of that in verses 19 to 23. On the evening of the day.

That Jesus rose. But Thomas. Wasn't there. And we don't know the reason for that. But now it is a week later. And it is. Almost a repeat.

A repeat of the events. Of the previous week. But this appearance. Is especially for. Thomas. Jesus addresses Thomas.

Personally. Now at one level. As we have seen. That was necessary. Because Thomas was. A chosen apostle. But at a more basic level. Thomas was also a disciple.

In need. Jesus. His beloved Lord. And teacher. Had died. And in Thomas' mind. Is still dead. And so Thomas is.

[18:55] Is sad. He is. In despair. Because of that. And so Jesus. Comes back. To the disciples. A second time.

Particularly for Thomas' benefit. To meet his need. And to care. For him. Because Jesus loves. And cares for Thomas. As an individual.

And Jesus' visit. Involves a rebuke. Stop being unbelieving. And believe. But it also brings. Joy. And renewal. To Thomas.

And so. We see that Jesus loves. And cares for Thomas. As an individual. In spite of his doubt. And unbelief. Just as Jesus cares. For every. Individual.

Disciple. In. Jesus' kingdom. We're not. Just cogs. In a great machine. We each of us matter. To the Lord.

[19:54] As individuals. He cares. For each one of us. And. Of course. He cares for us. To the extent. That he gave his life. For us.

Well third. We come to faith. And the faith is Thomas'. And in verse 28. We read that Thomas said. To Jesus. My Lord. And.

My God. Now that is a. A very startling. Statement. Thomas was. A Jew. He was. A monotheist. His most fundamental.

Belief. Was expressed in. The statement of faith. Called the Shema. From Deuteronomy 6. Verse 4. Hear. Hear. O Israel. The Lord. Our God. The Lord.

Is one. So that was the most. Basic. Foundational. Statement of belief. For Jews. That there is only one God. That God is one.

[20:51] How did. A strict. Monotheistic Jew. Like Thomas. Come to confess. That Jesus. Is God. God. Well I think the answer.

Involves a. A journey. Of discovery. About Jesus. Over. The period. Of about three years. That Thomas. And the other disciples. Spent. Following Jesus. And.

During that time. Jesus didn't just sort of. Come on day one. And say. Hello I'm. God incarnate. Or something like that. No one would have believed him. If he'd said that. What he does instead.

Is he. He does. Mighty works. Some of those works. Are things that only God. Can do. Or that only God does. In the Old Testament. And he made claims. About himself. Claims to be. Have the authority. To do what only God. Can do. Just a few things. Examples from. From John's gospel. First of all. There's John the Baptist. Testimony.

[21 : 45] About. The one who comes after me. The thongs of whose sandals. I'm not worthy. To untie. And then Jesus claim.

In John 11. I am the resurrection. And the life. Whoever believes in me. Will live. Even though they die. And whoever lives and believes in me. Will never die.

And of course. Jesus performs that. Remarkable sign. Of raising Lazarus. From the dead. Or Jesus words in John 8. 58. That before Abraham was born.

I am. Or in chapter 14. Anyone who has seen me. Has seen the father. I am in the father. I am in the father. And the father.

Is in me. Or Jesus prayer in John 17. Father glorify me. In your presence. With the glory I had with you. Before the world.

[22 : 38] Began. And the other gospels. Matthew. Mark. Luke. Also record other events. Where Jesus does things. That only God does. And claims authority. And right.

That is God's alone. To be able to forgive sins. For example. At the end of the miracle. Of the calming of the storm. The disciples in awe. And fear.

And amazement. Ask each other. Who is this? He commands. Even the wind. And the waves. And they obey him. And that question. Is something that. I think they. They wrestled with.

During their three years. With Jesus. And. Of course. It wasn't straightforward. Because. They. They're. Jews. They.

Know that there's only one God. There are not two gods. There's only one God. And they hear. Jesus. Addressing God. As a distinct other. He. He prays to his father. In heaven.

[23 : 33] And. Jesus is clearly. A man. Clearly a human. Just as. Human as Thomas. And the disciples are. They see him fall asleep. They see him eat. And drink. And weep.

And die. He's a human. And that. That just. You know. How can he. Also be God. And yet. He makes these claims. And.

Demonstrates. A uniquely divine. Authority. And power. And now. Thomas has witnessed. Jesus glorious. And powerful.

Resurrection. From the dead. Which confirms. All the claims. That he made. About himself. And Thomas comes to believe. That Jesus is. The God.

The God. The one God. The God of Israel. Who has come to earth. And lived. Among us. If you imagine. A glen. With lots of streams. Flowing off the glen side.

[24 : 30] Into. A pool. And. There's a dam. And so. The. As the water. Trickles down. Flows down. The. The pool. The reservoir. Builds up. And it gets higher.

And higher. And. But it's stopped. By the dam. And then. One day. There's an earthquake. And the dam. Breaks. And the water. Flows out. And I think. That's something like that.

Happened for Thomas. And the other disciples. That. They had all these things. That they were witnessing. Jesus doing all these amazing things. And making these claims. It's like the water flowing. From the hillside.

Into the reservoir. There. But there are reasons. You know. Why. It just seemed so unlikely. That Jesus could be God. That his. You know. Obvious humanity. That. There's only one God.

And Jesus seems to speak to God. In heaven. And so on. And that's like the dam. But then. There's this earthquake. Of Jesus resurrection. And the dam breaks. And they.

[25 : 25] The water flows. And they believe. They come to believe. That Jesus is. God. As Thomas says. My Lord. And my God. So the resurrection. Was God's.

Vindication. Or seal. Of approval. On Jesus. And his claims. So as if God is saying. I want to show my approval. Of Jesus. And the claims. That he made.

And I'm going to do this. By this most amazing sign. Raising him from the dead. And another remarkable thing here. Is. That Jesus doesn't refuse.

Thomas's words. Thomas says to Jesus. My Lord. And my God. God. And Jesus doesn't say. No. Hang on. Don't do that. Don't say that. That contrasts with other people.

Peter in Acts chapter 10. Cornelius. Bows down. To. To. To. To worship him. And. Peter says. No. Get up. Don't do that. I'm only.

[26 : 18] I'm only like. A human like yourself. Paul and Barnabas. The same. In Lystra. In Acts chapter 14. And the angel. In Revelation 19. Chapter 10. Verse 10.

Where John. In awe of this. Glorious angel. Bows down. And the angel says. No. I'm only a fellow servant. With you. In contrast to that.

Jesus receives. Thomas's acclamation. That he is. My Lord. And my God. And that is. Also remarkable. We read in the gospels.

Of Jesus. He is. So humble. He lived a life. Of service. For others. Even washing. His disciples feet. In world history.

There have been. A number of. Characters. Who have come along. And claimed. God status. But those people have. Other people running around. After them. Serving them. There have also been.

[27 : 13] Spiritual. Characters. Figures. Who have. Been very humble. Who have served others. But they have made. They have. Denied any claim. To have God status.

Jesus is unique. In that. He claims. To be God. And he receives. Thomas's acclamation. That he is God. And yet his life. Is so marked.

By humility. By the service. Of others. By washing. His disciples feet. And yet. Jesus accepts.

Thomas words. Words of worship. Because they are true. Because he is worthy. Of that worship. As Lord. And as God. Thomas's words.

Align with. Jesus' own. Self. Understanding. John. The writer of. The disciple. And writer of. The gospel of John. Reflecting on this experience.

[28 : 08] And many others. Sometime later. Pens these words. Which he opens. His gospel with. In the beginning. Was the word. And the word.

Was with God. God. And the word. Was God. He was with God. In the beginning. Through him. All things were made. Without him. Nothing was made. That has been made.

And then a bit further down. The word. Became flesh. And made his dwelling. Among us. We have seen his glory. The glory. Of the one. And only. Who came.

From the father. Full. Of grace. And truth. And the context. Is that. That is speaking. Of Jesus. A bit further on. No one has ever seen God. But God. The one and only.

Who is. In the closest relationship. With the father. Has made him. Known. Later. Scholars. Would. Speak of the.

[29 : 04] Of the trinity. They would develop. This doctrine of the trinity. Which all comes from the bible. Though the word trinity. Isn't in the bible. But it comes from. Events like this. Thomas' experience.

And John's. Reflection. On that experience. But lastly. I want to just reflect on. The pronouns here. Thomas says. My lord.

And. My god. Thomas hasn't. Merely. Reached some. Sort of. Intellectual. Conclusion. To a philosophical. Problem.

No. These words express. Thomas' personal. Commitment. And. Devotion. To. The lord. Jesus Christ. And the question.

For. Us. In closing. Is this. It's really the most important. Question. There is. Can we. Join. Thomas. In these words. Of faith.

[29 : 59] Devotion. Submission. And love. For Jesus Christ. Is he your lord. And your god. Is he the one. You trust in. The one you have come to.

For life. And light. And peace. The one you live for. And the one with ultimate worth. In your life. I pray that that would be true for all of us here.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.