

We have seen the Lord

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Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] John 20, 19-31. 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 hand and his sides. 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.

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.

[1 : 22] 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? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. 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.

Good morning, everyone. Thanks, Ian. Well, none of us expect to attend a funeral one day and bump into that person at Woolies the next, do we?

[2 : 37] The finality of death makes it so frightening and so painful. Have you ever known a person to survive beyond the grave?

Not just out of it for a few minutes on the operating table, but after being buried. Have you ever known one person? The death of our loved ones and the threat of death, as Ian just talked about, it robs us of peace.

In our scientific age, we all know that death is final. Even if we go to other religious beliefs, we find the same assumption.

Buddhists and Hindus believe in reincarnation or other beliefs of joining ancestral spirits or going to a spiritual paradise. The soul might be believed to go on, but not the body.

Perhaps the ancient Egyptian practice of mummification is one of the few exceptions, thinking death was a temporary interruption. But they're still on display in museums.

[3 : 59] And for the sake of sleeping at night, we kind of hope those mummy corpses don't come back to life. There is a solid line that is universally understood.

Death of the body is final. That's why we're all afraid of it. That's why it robs us of peace. So the claim that the man Jesus rose bodily from the dead, never to die again, seems simply unbelievable. It would be absolutely amazing news if it was true. We all crave for death to be conquered. Our hopes are in scientific advancement to at least prolong life.

Our craving for death to be conquered, I think, is tapped into with myths and stories like the fountain of youth or Wolverine healing himself or Superman being immortal or more recent movies of a personality being transplanted into a new body.

Although it would be the best news you have ever heard, if death could be conquered, it belongs in fantasy and science fiction, doesn't it?

[5 : 16] We want it to be true, but it's just, it's unbelievable. Here's something I hadn't fully appreciated even until this week.

I was struck by it this week. The founding members who started the whole Christianity movement, who wrote the New Testament, they didn't believe it at first either. Not even they thought it was possible. But we are about to hear their account of what they saw with their own eyes, what they experienced. They say it's undeniable. And here we run into a dilemma. Dismissing their testimony simply on the grounds that it's never happened before or since is not rational. Because if Jesus really is the unique son of God, if what he came to achieve was unique, if what he promises to you is unique, then you should demand that what he did is totally unique and unheard of in the history of the world.

[6 : 34] Anything less than that, anything less than unbelievable, I don't think would be worth listening to. So let's hear what they experienced.

Let's hear their story. Let's hear what convinced these people and changed their lives. So we pick up the story on the evening of that first Sunday, that first Easter Sunday, John tells us. We heard last week that Peter and John, who's writing this account, had seen inside the tomb with Jesus' grave clothes that formed something like a cast.

And while the cast was intact, there was no body in it. Perhaps he was taken directly to heaven. And then Mary, not Jesus' mother, but someone with a dirty past, she is the first eyewitness. While crying at the tomb, she turns around and sees Jesus standing there, but she assumes he is an ordinary man, a gardener. She wasn't expecting it.

[7 : 43] There's this little word that keeps appearing in John's account. Out of all the verbs he could have chosen, John chooses one of the most mundane verbs to say something profound.

Mary saw Jesus standing. Dead people don't stand. We see this word coming up in our story a few times.

She asked the gardener, where have you laid him? And when Jesus calls her by name, she recognised him. And this woman with a history becomes the first to testify to the greatest event of all time.

She runs back to Jesus' most devout disciples and says five simple words that demand a verdict from them. I have seen the Lord.

Now, out of everyone in the world, these guys were the most inclined to believe. Every five of them would have wanted it to be true.

[8 : 51] They had the most to gain for it to be true. In fact, before Jesus died, he told them that he would rise. And they had seen with their own eyes Jesus do other unbelievable things, turning water into wine, healing a paralysed man, giving sight to a blind man, raising Lazarus from the dead.

Surely these guys, out of everyone, will be the quickest to believe. But what do we find them doing? On that night, after hearing Mary's words, they're hiding.

They're hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. They feared the Jewish leader's power. They had orchestrated Jesus' death.

Now, all they had to do is pick off that inner circle of followers and the Jesus movement would be dead and soon forgotten. Their fear is understandable.

But not if what Mary said is true. If not even death could stop their Lord, what could anyone do to them? They should have had the door open, eagerly anticipating Jesus walking in.

[10 : 14] But not even these most inclined to believe expected it to be true. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.

I couldn't help laughing imagining this moment. These men huddled in a living room, perhaps frantically planning what they should do next, afraid and confused, full of sorrow and fear, believing they were safe behind locked doors when suddenly an intruder is just standing there in their meeting.

Perhaps John didn't record the statements of shock they uttered. Grey clothes were no barrier. Locked doors are no barrier. He came into this world when he wanted to and he will return to heaven when he chooses.

He went into death when he wanted and he stood up when he wanted. It wasn't some spirit or vision. It was the same body.

He shows them his scars, his hands where the nails had pierced his flesh and his side where the spear had ripped him open. And what's his message to them?

[11 : 26] Peace be with you. And I don't know why the ESV translates their response as being glad. The word is overjoyed.

They rejoiced when they saw the Lord. No one expected it. They didn't expect it. It was unbelievable. But their experience was undeniable.

But Thomas, one of the inner circle wasn't there that night. Now he has five simple words that demand a verdict from him. Not just Mary now, but also the ten or so guys testify, we have seen the Lord.

Now I reckon Thomas gets a bit of a bad reputation. I think it's a bit unfair. He's famous as doubting Thomas.

Maybe he should be known as rational and reasonable Thomas. He just wants evidence, first-hand evidence. But it is fair to say that he was sceptical.

[12 : 40] I think Thomas is more sceptical than you or I ever will be. He had already seen Jesus do some unbelievable things.

And he would have known and deeply trusted the other ten or so guys. But instead of believing their testimony, he demands, 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.

It's unbelievable. I want undeniable evidence that this is the same body, the same person who was crucified. He's only asking for what the others had got to see themselves.

He's only asking for what you and I want. Undeniable evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. So much is at stake. The whole world as Thomas knows it, the world as you and I know it, hinges on this.

John takes us a week forward, the next Sunday morning. And all the disciples are inside again. The doors are still locked.

[14 : 08] So we can assume that they're still afraid of the Jews. I think this detail rings of authenticity. It doesn't paint John and the others in a good light, but it's realistic.

They're mixed in their thoughts, rejoicing that Jesus is alive and yet still afraid. And again, Jesus came and stood among them.

Peace be with you. And Jesus doesn't rebuke Thomas. Instead, he invites him to come and see for himself.

Put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. And from the lips that speak on behalf of all the world in its scepticism, now comes one of the most profound and personal expressions of believing.

Seeing the scars for himself, he is brought to his knees in worship. My Lord and my God. So are you a rational person?

[15 : 29] And what will you do with the testimony of Mary, the testimony of the disciples, and the testimony of Thomas? We have seen the Lord.

None of them expected it. It was unbelievable, but it happened. They can't deny it. You might be thinking, I haven't seen Jesus standing in my living room.

Neither have I. How am I supposed to believe? You and I are giving a clear answer. Jesus said to Thomas, you have believed because you have seen me.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. To be blessed means to have God's acceptance, God's approval, his favour. This is such great news.

You don't need to wait for a religious experience. You can have all the life that God offers you. You can share in Jesus' victory over death. You can be assured that all your sin has been forgiven.

[16 : 36] You can have peace with God and certain hope for the future simply by believing and making Thomas' words your own, my Lord and my God.

But what is our belief resting on if it's not on our own eyes? What's our belief resting on? Is it just ignoring reality and wishing for something to be true?

That's not Christian faith. God loves truth. He is truth. And he wants your faith to rest on truth. Did you notice that I skipped a bit in our story?

When Jesus first came to his disciples, he said this, As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they have forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness, it is withheld. These guys at that point in time were scared behind locked doors, but they wouldn't stay there, keeping this peace to themselves.

[17 : 49] When the Holy Spirit was given to them, they were empowered to go out and risk their lives, and most of them did lose their lives because they boldly and publicly testified to what they had heard and saw.

And through their testimony, those who believe their message are forgiven all their sin, sharing in the same peace with God.

A few years ago, Em and I had the privilege of visiting England. Before we left, what I was looking forward to the most was seeing Liverpool play live.

And we got to see them. They scored three goals, and the atmosphere was incredible. We were sitting in the opposition stands, surrounded by a bunch of passionate guys, so I was too afraid to celebrate when Liverpool won.

I thought that would be my highlight, but it didn't turn out to be the highlight of the trip. It was in Manchester, and definitely not seeing Manchester United, but we visited John Ryland's university, the gallery there.

[19 : 06] And we got to see one of the earliest fragments of the New Testament manuscripts, and here's a picture of it. It's called P52. It's a surviving fragment from John's Gospel.

Within a hundred years of John writing the Gospel. So the bit on the piece of papyrus is in Chapter 18.

It's hard to describe why this became the highlight of our trip. It's just this little piece. We were there for about 20 minutes. I think it became my highlight, to put it simply, because my entire life, the forgiveness of my sin, my eternal life in knowing God, is because I can totally rely on John writing his experience down.

In verse 30 and 31, John says this is exactly what he wants us to get out of his testimony.

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.

[20 : 41] This is our way of being invited like Thomas to come, look at my scars, come read, come listen, and see who Jesus is.

There's so much more I could have told you, says John, but this is plenty for you to believe. And God totally accepts the person who believes, even though they haven't seen, but the person who listens.

Come, look at the scars on the Son of God's hands and under his ribs. What do these scars tell you?

They tell us that God intimately knows the suffering and injustice living in this sinful world.

Only his wounds can speak fully into your wounds. They tell us that all the world rejected God when he turned up.

[21 : 51] Although he is the source of all of our life, every person has to one degree or another not wanted God. The scars tell us that instead of blasting us away, he bled for us.

His scars tell us that his wounds have been healed. God has accepted his sacrifice. God has accepted his sacrifice. God has accepted his sacrifice.

You and I can be absolutely sure that his death has secured our forgiveness. His scars tell us that having died our death, he rose victorious out of the grave.

And so will we. He has conquered death because he is the Lord of life. Jesus alone is the Lord of life.

He has conquered death. He has conquered death. Five simple words. We have seen the Lord.

Invite a simple response from you and me.

[23 : 34] My Lord and my God. He alone can give you life and joy and peace.

And joy and peace. What will you do with those five words? We have seen the Lord. Will you pray with me as we finish?

Please pray. Lord, why you would bother to come down to earth to save us, I don't know.

But I praise you that you did. I praise you that you alone can take on death and have the victory. Lord, nothing else can do this.

No one else can do this. Thank you that you are holy. You are holy. You are God. Thank you that you invite us to share in your life. Thank you that we can know that you are with us in our pain. [24 : 39] We can know that you forgive us fully because of your blood. Thank you that as we look into the future, we don't have to be afraid because we are safe in you.

Thank you that we have a good future ahead of us. Father, I pray that you would give each one of us eyes in our hearts to see you and come to trust you and believe.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Thanks, boy. Amen.