

Risen

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[0 : 01] Our reading is from John chapter 20. We're going to read from verse 24 through to verse 31. 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?

[1 : 13] 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.

But these were 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.

Thanks for reading, Ruth. Good morning, everyone. Happy Easter. It's great to see you, especially if you're a visitor this morning. My name is Andy. I'm in the staff team here at Grace Church. There's an outline on the back of the service sheet.

We can follow along on the screen. As it is the Easter holidays, the TV schedulers like to take it easy, don't they? And like to rerun some of the old favourite classic movies.

Mary Poppins will probably be on soon. Sound of Music. And of course, Indiana Jones. And I watched some of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

[2 : 13] Recently, it was on TV. If you've seen it, you might remember that dramatic moment near the end of the film where Indiana Jones, he is standing at the edge of a deep chasm.

I can't quite see him. He is definitely there. Edge of a deep chasm. And he's got to get to the Holy Grail and to save his father. And he has to do what the ancient clues describe as a leap of faith. And so he's there with nothing in front of him apart from an abyss. And he closes his eyes. He steps out on to nothing.

But instead of falling, his foot lands on a hidden bridge. And of course, he's perfectly camouflaged. The path was there all along.

And he crosses it. And he saves his father. It's a great cinematic moment. But it also reflects how a lot of people think about the Christian faith.

[3 : 15] A blind leap into the dark. And to be honest, we might think that Jesus doesn't really help matters with what he says in verse 29.

If you look at verse 29. Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Now, it looks like Jesus might be saying something like, It would be better to have the kind of faith that did not require evidence, doesn't it? You see, it's a common idea that faith is what you do when there is an evidence gap.

Like that chasm in Indiana Jones. God deliberately made things less certain to give you the opportunity to have faith. And what a pity. What a pity.

If you need that gap bridged by actual evidence. You've got to have faith. Maybe you're here this morning and have been told something along those lines.

[4 : 18] Or believe something along those lines. Or your friends and family definitely think that is what the Christian faith is like. But John chapter 20 shows us something different.

That belief in the resurrection of Jesus is not to take a blind leap in the dark. Because of an evidence gap. It's to actually go where the evidence takes you. And we'll see that in this story of Thomas. He's known worldwide as Doubting Thomas. But what he asks for is what the other disciples have already had. An encounter with the risen Jesus. He wants to see. He wants to touch. You see we could rename him Skeptic Thomas. Or Scientific Thomas. Thomas who wanted proof. Thomas who wanted to check. And yet Thomas began the Easter weekend as a skeptic. But ended it as a firm believer in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. [5 : 25] And John wrote his gospel. So we can too. That's how the chapter ends. If you look at verse 31. 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. So three brief things as we trace through Thomas' story. The first point is this. Thomas' reasonable doubt. And that question mark is important. Because we'll get on to that. Thomas' reasonable doubt. Just to fill in the back story. I'm sure we're all aware. The Roman soldiers crucified Jesus two days beforehand. In front of a large crowd. John himself saw it. He watched it. And they made sure Jesus was dead. By lancing his side with a spear. Mary Magdalene discovers that the stone had been rolled away from Jesus' tomb. [6 : 24] Where they put him. She tells Peter and John. Who run to the tomb and see it empty. More evidence quickly follows. As people start meeting the risen Lord Jesus.

First Mary. Then later that evening. A whole group of his disciples. Except one. And that's where we pick the story up. So if you look at verse 24. 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. Straight away. We can. We can see. Can't we. That Thomas' demand for physical proof. Rejects the view. That people in the first century. Were just gullible. And naive. And foolish. [7 : 24] Thomas knew. Thomas knew the basics of biology. That dead people don't come back to life again. And so he lays down this triple test. I want to see the holes where the nails went into his hands.

In fact I want to shove my fingers into those holes. I want to put my hand in his side where the spear went in. If I don't get that. I won't believe. I don't care what my ten friends say. I will only trust my ten fingers. We might applaud scientific Thomas' desire for proof. Well done Thomas. That you weren't gullible. Well done. That you weren't buying into the latest religious fads. And that you wanted hard evidence. And of course. To be a doubter about extraordinary claims. It's sensible isn't it. Last year scammers. Stole 11 billion pounds. [8 : 23] From people in the UK. So to be a little bit cynical. In our day and age. Of being scammed and deceived. Well. It sounds reasonable doesn't it.

Thomas' request. There's nothing wrong with being careful about evidence. But if we understand who Thomas is. And what he's been taught. Then we. We can see his request is actually quite unreasonable. Now because Thomas had been a close friend. Of Jesus for three years. He saw his miracles. He was there when Jesus walked on the water.

Healed the sick. He was there when he raised Lazarus from the dead. He's already seen a resurrection. He already knows that God has got the power. To give life to the dead. And Jesus has that power. He's seen it. And he also had the eyewitness. Tespanee. Ten friends. Plus Mary.

[9 : 19] Telling Thomas. He ought to have trusted them. These aren't random scammers. Ringing him up. Asking him if he's been in a car crash. They're his closest friends. All of them agreeing with the same message.

And Thomas knew the Old Testament as well. He had the scriptures. All of the predictions of the promised Messiah. God's people are waiting for. They knew that he would come.

They were told that he would come and die. And rise again. You see. Thomas is not coming across this concept of resurrection. For the very first time. I can understand if you were skeptical.

Because. If the first thing you heard about Jesus. Was that he was a carpenter. Who came back to life. Well I get that. You might think really. Why should I believe that.

Give me some. Give me some evidence. To believe that. Then sure. But Thomas had the Old Testament predictions. And expectations. He's got what his friends.

[10:24] Have seen. And described to him in detail. And he knows Jesus himself. Thomas had more than enough. You see. He didn't need to be a doubter.

And so his doubt. Is not actually a reasonable requirement. For evidence. Is actually a stubborn. Refusal. To trust. Evidence.

But maybe that's actually. To our advantage here. Because even though it's a tragedy. Thomas is so slow. It's actually for our good. Because his.

Skepticism. Actually ends up giving us. More. Evidence. And so we come to our second point then. Jesus's persuasive.

Evidence. Will a week passes. You can imagine. Thomas's friends. Constantly on him. No. We really did see him. And.

[11:22] Thomas repeating his request. Unless I see him for myself. I won't believe. Will a week passes. We cut to the same scene. And let's read from verse 26. Eight days later.

His disciples were inside again. And. 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. The painter.

Caravaggio. Famously captured what happened next. In this. Astonishing lifelike. Photo. Painting. The incredulity. Of Saint Thomas. It.

It. It's a raw picture of Thomas. Literally poking his fingers. Into. Jesus wound. His eyebrows. Furrowed. Eyes focused.

[12:20] His. His mouth is slightly open. As his. Disbelief. Turns. Into. Belief. And so here.

Thomas. Establishes. At least three things. First. It's not a ghost. But a physical person. Otherwise. Presumably. His hand would have gone straight through. Second.

This person is alive. And third. This is the same person. Who has been executed. Three days. Earlier. As Thomas.

Sees. The wounds. Of execution. And so the question is. Would it have been reasonable. At this point. For Thomas. To remain. Skeptical. Of course not.

If he was actually there. And that. Is what he actually witnessed. Then the. The only. Right response. Is certainty. And so Thomas. Says.

[13:18] In verse 28. My Lord. God. And my God. That is where the evidence. Took him. But again. We might think. Well that's.

So well and good for Thomas. He was actually there. He saw Jesus. With his own eyes. He. He could have touched. Jesus. With his fingers. And lots.

Would say. If Jesus appeared to me. Physically like that. Then I would definitely believe. Well here is where we circle. Back around to verse 29.

If you look down. Jesus said to him. Have you believed. Because you have seen me. Blessed are those. Who have not seen. And yet have. Believed.

Well. Again. It's important to underline. That. Jesus is not commending. Faith without evidence. Jesus is not saying. You should have taken.

[14:15] A leap in the dark. Thomas. This is not Jesus advocating. An Indiana Jones. Picture of. The leap of faith. Now Jesus is not commending.

Faith without evidence. He is commending. Faith. Without sight. Those who have not seen. And yet have believed.

You see there are different. Types of evidence. Aren't there. There's scientific evidence. Produced in laboratories. Conditions. Which is repeatable. The experiment is set up.

The program is run. The kind of germs. Grow in the petri dish. The microscopes. Observe the bacteria. You can repeat it. And repeat it.

And repeat it. But historical eyewitness. Testimony is different. It's no less believable. It's just different. Isn't it? And the laws of time.

[15:13] Mean. We can't just. Rewind the clock. And ask for it to be done again. We can't ask. Wellington. To refight the battle of Waterloo. To prove that it happens.

A couple of years ago. I witnessed a crash. Between a car. And a. A motorbike. It was all fine. I passed on. I passed on my details. To the police.

And they asked me to fill out this lengthy form. About what I saw. The distance I was. How far they were. Away from each other. I even.

I had to draw pictures. I even coloured them in. To add a little bit of flair. It was during COVID. So I had nothing else to do. You see. The police didn't witness.

The incident. But they had. Reliable eyewitness. Testimony. So they can know what happened. You see.

[16:10] All of history depends upon things. We weren't. There to see. But instead. We have reliable eyewitnesses. The event itself. Is unrepeatable. But the people.

Who are there. Are reliable. So I can trust it. Every courtroom. Every history department. Every family memory. Every biography. Relies on that principle.

And yes. Witnesses can lie. Or be mistaken. That's why evidence. Needs to be evaluated. But when Thomas's friends. Say to him. Thomas. We've seen Jesus alive.

Jesus says. He should have. Believed them. And for the point. For us. In this chapter. Is that. Because we have access. To that same eyewitness. Testimony.

We are to believe as well. You see. Like Thomas. In that week. After the first Easter. We haven't seen. Personally. The risen Jesus. But also.

[17:08] Like Thomas. We have access. To the same. Reliable. Eyewitness testimony. And not just the resurrection. But all of Jesus miracles. And his own teaching.

That he would die. And rise again. And we too. Have access. To the Old Testament scriptures. That predict. That this would happen. That God's king. His Messiah. Would come. Would die.

And rise again. See Thomas heard. This testimony. In the flesh. We read it. In the pages. Of John's gospel. In front of us. But the testimony.

Is the same. And so Jesus. Effectively says. In verse 29. You believe. Because you have seen me. Thomas. Blessed are all the people. Who will follow the evidence. Without being as stubborn.

As ye. Because. As verse 30 says. These things are written. So that we may believe. And verse 31. If we come to believe.

[18:04] That Jesus is the son of God. Who rose from the dead. Then we will have life. In his name. And that's our final. Briefer point. This morning. Our. Eternal.

Life. You see. After the moment. With Thomas. John. Steps back. From the story. And speaks directly. To us. His readers. His hearers.

He tells us. Why. He's written all this down. So verse 30. Again. 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. John isn't just. Recounting history. He's issuing. An invitation. He is saying.

[18:58] I've told you these stories. Not just so you'll know what happened. But so you'll come to believe. In the one who. Defeated death. And through that.

You will have life. Resurrection life. In his name. Jesus himself promised this. When Thomas was there.

At the raising of Lazarus. Jesus said to Martha. One of his friends. I am the resurrection. The life. Whoever believes in me. Though he die. Yet shall he live. And by his own resurrection.

Jesus has proved. That incredible claim. Is not a cruel lie. To give people. False hope. In the face of death. But the truth. At time and time again.

As we look out. Onto the world. And our own lives. We come. Face to face. With the reality. That. That death. Takes away. The people we love. Even to give examples.

[19:55] Seems too much to bear. And yet. Jesus resurrection. Shows us. The amazing truth. That in. Jesus Christ. Death. Death is not. The end. We can have.

A firm hope. In eternal life. To come. And so if you're here. And trusting in the Lord Jesus. And then be encouraged. That you have resurrection life. In his name.

Life that is. Grounded. In truth. And alive with hope. Life that will. Ultimately. Not be ended by death. Eternal life. With God himself. Those are wonderful truths.

To hold on to this. Easter. And yet. This offer of life. With God. Eternal life. Is open to. Everyone. And Jesus.

Means that. As he appears. To his disciples. And says. Verse 26. Peace. Be with you. He's not just saying. Hi. How you doing? He's. This is an announcement. Of peace.

[20 : 54] That his death on the cross. Brings peace with God. His resurrection. Shows. That his sacrificial death. Has dealt with our sin. Our rejection of God.

And a punishment it deserves. And so he announces. Peace be with you. Mission. Accomplished. A peace that isn't.

Just for Easter Sunday. But a forever. Truth. A forever. Peace deal. Peace. Peace. So as we close then. This passage. Is a story of Thomas's personal journey.

From skepticism. To belief. And so the obvious question. Is where are each of us. On that journey. Maybe we are still at the stage.

Of skepticism. Or please do ask. Your questions. Questions. But we need not stay. At that point. We can follow the evidence.

[21 : 53] Of the Bible. John's gospel in particular. And for ourselves. Come to Jesus. And say. As Thomas did. My Lord. And my God. That is not to take.

Take a leap of faith. Into the dark. Because of an evidence gap. But rather to stand. On where the evidence. Takes us. Blessed are those.

Who have not seen. And yet have believed. That is us. If we have done just that. Blessed. Chosen to believe. Even without seeing.

We haven't touched his wounds. We haven't seen his face. But we have the testimony of scripture. We have the witness of the disciples. We have the words of life.

Life. From Jesus himself. Who offered us something. Greater. Than anything in this world. Can offer. Peace with God.

[22 : 49] Eternal life. In his name. A future. That not even death. Can touch. Let's pray together. Blessed are those.

Who have not seen. And yet have believed. Heavenly Father. We thank you for the Lord Jesus.

Rising. Again. From the dead. In history. We thank you for. The eternal life.

That he brings. Beyond the grave. That we can have a firm hope. Of life. In his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.