

Doubting Thomas Got a Bad Wrap

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[0:00] Thank you. So my introductory question is, how in the world can we believe in a risen Jesus without! Books have been written about this. Debates have taken place over hundreds of years.

! How can we believe in a risen Christ when we haven't seen the risen Christ? In the 20th century, a number of scholars discounted the physical resurrection of Jesus, believing it was maybe rhetorical or an image to help us in our faith. Let's talk about that, shall we? Now, today is called Low Sunday. What a terrible name.

It's low because mostly attendance is low. We've been to the mountain, Easter Sunday, family, friends, gathering, praising God. Then we go into the valley, Low Sunday. Then we rise again. There are 50 days in Easter. We are in a beautiful season of emphasizing the resurrection. Now, this low Sunday always, always discusses a man named Thomas. And what's the label we give him? Doubting Thomas. The poor guy got mislabeled. We're going to talk about that today. So, we're going to look at John the Apostle's rendition of those events following the resurrection. Now, when I say his rendition, I mean his rendition is flavored by the Holy

Spirit's guidance. So, what we read here is what happened. So, let's look at that. We're going to go verse by verse. So, on the evening of that first day, the first day of the week, that is the day of resurrection. So, Jesus has been appearing in his resurrected body through that day in various settings. Then it says the door is being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews. Okay, so, they're probably in that upper room where Jesus had the last supper.

They're afraid. They're thinking, you know what? They got Jesus. We're next. They locked the doors. Not exactly a great group of evangelists here, would you think? In fact, they look like a lot of us in parish churches. A little reluctant, you might say. So, in that day, when the doors were locked, it says, Jesus came and stood among them. How did he get there? Was he a ghost?

[3:13] A lot of us want to see the resurrected Jesus as a ghost. The gospel writers don't want us to see him as a ghost. They wanted us to see him as having flesh. Okay, so, how did he get in there?

Do you know in the book of Acts where Peter is in prison and he's awakened? And what does it say about the doors?

They came open. Well, if that could happen to Peter. Hey. So, we just have to assume that Jesus unlocked those doors and there he was in the middle of them. And he said to them, Shalom. That's what every Jew says to every Jew when they say, hello, Shalom. Peace be with you. And when he had said that, it says he showed his hands and his side. Why? I'm not a ghost. Look, look, look. I'm alive.

This is me, risen. And the disciples who probably, these are mostly the apostles here, when they were fearful. And suddenly they say Jesus right there. And Peter, of course, thinking, I locked those doors.

It's a ghost. They realized this is the risen Jesus. It says, then they were glad when they saw the Lord, which meant they became open to his teaching. And so he gave it to them. He said again, peace be with you as the father has sent me. Even so I am sending you. That's number one.

[5:00] And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. That's number two. If you forgive the sins of any, they're forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from any, anyone, it is withheld. That's number three. We'll talk about those three things in a minute.

He gave them three gifts. Okay. Now the scene shifts. Now, Thomas, one of the 12 called the twin was not with them when Jesus came. Why not?

Everything about that. Why wasn't Thomas there that night? Thomas had a personality in the Bible, a little bit of an Eeyore. Or, you know, it's sunny now, but I know it's going to rain in a minute. That was kind of Thomas.

He might not, there are many reasons why he might not have been there that night. Had to buy some groceries. Probably not a good thing. That's probably not what it was happening. He was so despondent, he could not bring himself to be with the group. Can you identify? You ever been in that position? That's probably what was going on with Thomas.

[6:17] The Eeyore was coming out. All is lost. We've lost everything. I can't even go back with that group of guys. It's just too embarrassing.

Well, we don't know exactly why Thomas wasn't there, but we know he was not there that first night. So when he did return, the other disciples said to him, We've seen the Lord.

And of course, in Thomas' fashion, probably would be my fashion, unless I see his hands at the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I'll never believe.

I'll never believe. That sounds kind of doubting, doesn't it? What would you have done? You saw Jesus carted away.

You were, only a couple were there when he was crucified, but you know he was done in. Buried. You've given up. How would you feel if someone said, We just saw him, he's alive.

[7:25] Thomas. Honest Thomas. Instead of calling him Doubting Thomas, we ought to call him Honest Thomas. Honest Thomas. And so it sits there.

It just cooks for a week. Cooks, cooks, cooks, cooks. Next Sunday. They're in the room. Doors unlocked? No.

Doors still locked. Low profile. Well, they're just standing there, sitting there, wondering what's going to happen. Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them again. How did you do it?

Doors unlocked. And he said, same thing, shalom. Then he turns his attention to Thomas.

Now, why did he turn his attention to Thomas? Did Peter kind of grab him and say, you got a doubter here, Jesus? Or did he perceive in his soul, Thomas wasn't here last week?

[8:31] Thomas has a little doubting thing going on. I think I'm going to give him some assurance. Jesus turns his attention to Thomas. Say, Thomas, why don't you put your finger here?

Look at my hands. Put out your hand and put it in my side. Here, take a look. Now, did Thomas do that?

Did he reach out and touch the wound? We don't think so. Jesus said, don't disbelieve. Believe. Thomas answered him.

Okay? Thomas is the first apostle to say this. My Lord and my God. First apostle to say that.

He didn't need to put his fingers in the wounds. His eyes were open. And he saw Jesus as not just a smart guy who was doing good teaching.

[9:36] He saw him as the Lord of life and the God of the universe incarnated. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you've seen me?

Blessed are. Now, here's you and here's me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. It all comes back to us, doesn't it? It's a message from God to us.

And then John puts the icing on the cake. He says, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. If you've ever written a book, you've got scads of material and you've got to cut to get the right number of pages.

Or words, as they call it. Well, so there were a lot of stuff that we don't know that Jesus did. But, John says, these are written, and here's the whole purpose of the gospel.

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you have life in his name. Wow. Praise God for what he's done in this passage.

[10:50] Which brings us to point two. That's what the passage says. Now, what does it mean? Well, there are some really interesting things in this passage that grab us.

And one is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shown in divine activity. Listen to this, verses 21 and 22.

Jesus. Who's Jesus? God, the Son. 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, Receive the Holy Spirit. There's the Trinity. Some people like to say, well, we didn't even know about a Trinity until it was proclaimed in the 4th century.

Balderdash. We didn't use the word Trinity, but we obviously knew God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit right in the Scriptures.

[11:50] So that's a great thing about this passage. It teaches us. Alright, then, the last area. I have written these things so that you might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life.

Alright, so, once again, to review the gospel. Many years ago, a man named Bill Bright put together what we call the four spiritual laws.

It was simply taking the whole Bible and encapsulated it into four laws, and we should have it memorized. Number one, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

But there's more. Wait, there's more. Number two, you have sinned. I have sinned. We've moved ourselves out of that wonderful plan.

We are stuck. Number three, God, loving us, wants to bring us back into His plan. He does that by assuming our humanity.

[12:56] Dying in our place on the cross. Taking away the consequences of our sin. That's three. Number four, we come back into the plan by repenting of our sin, receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

That's the gospel. That's what John is talking about in this passage. That's what touches our life. In this passage, Jesus wants to move these fearful disciples from fear and doubt to confidence and faith.

He's got a challenge. Those disciples were like us. Do you love to stand on a street corner and say, Believe in Jesus! No.

Do you kind of walk around those folks? I kind of believe what they're saying, but this is embarrassing. We, each one of us, have a kind of a fear about sharing Christ.

Let's just be honest. So did those disciples. Jesus wanted to move them from fear and doubt to confidence and faith.

[14:14] And so He does with us. That's why this passage. Do you want to have the faith that moves mountains? Yeah.

Or would you like just to have enough faith to get through this week? What do we settle for? We settle. You want to get through this week, Maria, right? We tend to settle for a lot less than what God offers us.

I tell the story of last month we were in Florida and our Sarah and Matt and their two children came to visit us.

And Natalie is three years old. And so she's right now the smartest kid in the world. So we went to the beach. Okay, so you have to visualize this.

Parking lot, dunes, beach. She was so excited about going to the beach. We got out of the car in the parking lot. We got to the dunes.

[15:11] She sat down and started playing. She loved the dirt. She had her shovel in her bucket. And I said, well, Natalie, we want to go to the beach.

This is good. I had to really convince her that it's okay to walk through these dunes. It's going to be really good on the beach. That is such a story of us.

We settle for so much less than what God wants to shower upon us. Moving us from fear and doubt to confidence and faith.

How's that working for you? We're moving to point three. What does this passage mean to me personally, to you personally? How do we live a life of confidence and faith?

I'll give you a hint. It's not easy. Even the heroes of the faith had to deal with that. Thomas had to deal with that.

[16:17] That Eeyore, when all the other apostles were evangelizing the West, he went East. He evangelized India.

He's known as the father of the faith in India. He got the confidence. He got the faith to do it. I think of other people. A man named Augustine of Hippo.

We call him St. Augustine. He was a bishop. What a life he had. You know, he grew up in a home where his mother was a devout believer. She prayed for him every day of her life.

And he didn't get it. He went with what you might call 21st century culture back in the 5th century. He had a gal move in with him.

He joined a cult. Had a child by the woman he was living with. He just was... His mother's here with Christ. He's over here wandering.

[17:19] Until... Until... He was 32 years old. And he was converted... By a little girl.

She was in the yard next to where he was sitting. In Bishop Ambrose's backyard. And she said, take and read. There's the Bible.

It's open to Romans. He read Romans. And he fell into the arms of Jesus. The rest is history. We are Augustinians in our beliefs.

As Anglicans. What a wonderful gift God gave him. And gave us in turn. Go another thousand years. Teresa of Avila. Some of you know St. Teresa.

Well, probably not personally. But... She was a nun. Now, she didn't mean to be a nun. She meant to party. But when she was 15 years old, her mother had died.

[18:25] Her father saw the direction she was going. And he did what you did in those days. Sent her to the convent. And so, she became a nun. She believed in Jesus.

But she had what you call restless faith. She couldn't settle down. Do you remember Maria in The Sound of Music? That's Teresa. Couldn't settle down.

Until she was 42 years old. She married Jesus.

And in turn, she married the church. 42. Before she settled into that faith. I'll give you two more. John Wesley.

A few hundred years later. John Wesley was one of like 15 children to a Church of England priest and a very tough mama.

[19:28] He was what you might call a bouncer. A faith bouncer. Bounced hot. Bounced cold. Never lukewarm. But when he was cold, he was really cold.

Well, he was 35 years old. He had been a missionary in Georgia. Thrown out of Georgia. Tried to excommunicate the guy that his fiance was dating.

Can you hear that? On the ship heading back to England. Moravians. The Moravians were so filled with faith. Even in a storm.

That he said, there's something there that I don't have. And then back in England one night, he says, About a quarter of nine, I was sitting in worship at Aldersgate.

Someone was reading the preface to the epistle to the Romans. And what happened to his heart? My heart was strangely warmed. I knew that God did forgive my sins through Jesus.

[20:33] 35. You see how it works? God uses different means and methods to just show up in the middle of our life the way Jesus did.

He shows up. He touches our lives. He turns them toward him. Like Thomas, these other heroes I just mentioned had to lay down their pride.

Lay down their besetting sin. And just be open to the one who appeared. He appeared seemingly out of nowhere.

When I was a young man, I was a lieutenant in the Marines. And we were training in Quantico, Virginia. We had to build a perimeter defense, which is kind of like a circle. And you got little Marines kind of hanging all around that circle.

So if anybody tries to penetrate, there's a Marine there. So we're all gathered around the perimeter. I'm kind of in the middle. It's night. It's cold in Quantico.

[21:39] And I'm saying, this is crazy. This is not really a war. Why am I doing this? Why am I so enthused about this? Suddenly, standing there beside me is our captain instructor, who was not supposed to be in the perimeter.

Oh, my career is done. How did he get in the perimeter? He just seemed to appear out of nowhere. And instead of saying, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, he just talked about he had been in Vietnam, about what he had gone through and how perimeters can be loose and how you help tighten up perimeters.

He gave me a gift. Appeared out of nowhere and gave me a gift. That's what Jesus did. That's what he wants to do in your life.

That's what he wants to do in my life. That's why he's built little parish churches all over creation.

Last week, a couple weeks ago, we were in a church in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Holy Spirit, Tulsa. It's a big congregation. They have a couple hundred members. It's a quiet, charismatic congregation. They like to raise their hands.

[23:00] They like healing ministry. But they've got their seatbelt buckled pretty tightly for charismatics. Jesus gives them a mission.

Spread the gospel in Tulsa. He gives them the Holy Spirit to do the job. He gives them forgiveness, the power to forgive and to accept forgiveness so that they can be an effective instrument in Tulsa. Those three things. Remember this is what I said at the beginning of that sermon 57 minutes ago? That Jesus gave those disciples those three gifts? Next week, we'll be in a great church down in Pensacola, Florida.

All Saints, Pensacola. Pensacola, All Saints, is about your size. They're a little unique in that they are a 1928, don't you forget it, prayer book congregation.

But you know what? They are solid citizens loving the Lord. They have three gifts. They have a mission, Evangelize Pensacola.

[24:09] They've got the Holy Spirit. And they've got the power to forgive and be forgiven. And then there's the Church of Holy Trinity in Syracuse. What do people say about you?

What do they say about us? I hope they will soon be seeing that we have a mission, Evangelize Syracuse. We have the Holy Spirit to do it. And we have the power of forgiveness and to forgive. So, we've come to the conclusion of this sermon. I need to say, though, these gifts are given not abstractly.

They're given concretely. Augustine received these gifts through reading Romans.

Teresa of Avila received these gifts through meditation. John Wesley received these gifts through small groups of Christians worshiping together.

[25:24] Aldersgate. I have received great faith through small groups. I want to particularly talk about men.

The gospel is transmitted. Jesus shows up when men gather together. Okay, now, I think every church ought to have a men's group that's big and powerful.

Well, I mean, that's up to the men. But I've seen it happen. It's a beautiful gift. It strengthens the parish. I don't have to say this to the women because they naturally come together.

Guys are a little slower to do that. But my hope is that in the days that come, God will move in our hearts. Jesus will show up in our hearts in such a way that we begin to gather as men in a deep, wonderful, strengthening way.

When I was a priest or early as a priest, one of the guys in my group said, David, what you've got to do is sell all the shares in your company and allow the Holy Spirit to take over as a CEO.

[26:33] Because the way you're doing it, you're going to kill yourself. Wasn't that good advice? I was able to sell the shares. Until that day, I saw myself as super priest.

Nothing fails when I do it. Of course, I would have killed myself doing that. Through a men's group, I learned to lay down my pride, confess my besetting sin, and open myself to Jesus who had shown up.

Does he show up today? Can he show up in your heart? Be open to him. Jesus may show up when you least expect it.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.