

He is Risen INDEED!

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[0:00] Well, as you are seated, please grab a Bible, although I'll have the verses on the screen for those online as well. Well, you've already had a bit of practice at the start of the service, so let's see if you can still remember what to do.

Christ is risen. But here's the question, why do we say indeed? Why not I think? Or he's risen, perhaps?

Why is it that we can say indeed? Well, John tells us today that we can say indeed because of the evidence we have.

John chapter 20, we're looking at the whole chapter. It's a long chapter, so we're going to get straight into it. For starters, we have eyewitness testimony that they saw the empty tomb.

So we're at point one in the outlines and verse one and two in your Bibles. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

[1:07] So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb. And we don't know where they have put him.

So here in verse one, Mary sees the empty tomb. She sees that the body is gone and then runs to tell Peter about it.

Although do you notice there that in verse two, she says, we don't know where they have put him. The plural there means there was others with Mary that morning.

And the other gospel accounts tell us that there was other women. By my account, at least five other women who were there who all saw the empty tomb. But it's Mary alone.

It seems she leaves them there. And Mary alone runs back to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, who is probably John. It sounds like John is boasting when he says that, doesn't it?

[2:09] You know, like a kid getting attention. I'm the one Jesus loves. But I should point out, it's not what he's trying to do. It's actually the opposite. John avoids using his name in his gospel account.

So he does not get the attention. And his comment is meant to be with a tone of humble amazement. The disciple Jesus actually loved. And it's this John with Peter who now see the empty tomb themselves.

So verse three, Peter and the other disciples started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb, which is very Peter like. He saw the strips of linen lying there as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus's head.

The cloth was still lying in its place separate from the linen. Oh, it's not quite like that. So here we see that Peter and John run and see the empty tomb.

[3:16] Now, the women were genuine eyewitnesses. And as I said, there's probably at least five of them. But according to Jewish law, to establish truth, you needed at least two male witnesses, which I realize is sexist.

But here it is. Here are Peter and John. And we can tell they're not making it up. They really did see an empty tomb. Because did you notice all the details they give?

Like how John was faster, but Peter entered first? Or how the cloth around Jesus's head was lying in a separate place to the rest of the linen around his body?

In fact, when it says that it was lying in its place at the end of verse 7, it's literally folded in its place. Why would you include such a detail like folded?

Unless you were there and saw it. See, this is eyewitness testimony. Testimony we can trust. They saw an empty tomb with the linen lying there.

[4:21] And it's interesting that they make such, the gospel writers make such a thing of the linen being left in the tomb. I mean, why is that? Why does Jesus not take it with him? Why does he go for a change of clothes?

Well, because these are grave clothes, aren't they? And he is risen. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, you might remember, Lazarus does emerge a bit like this picture on the screen, like a mummy.

In fact, Jesus has to tell them to unbind Lazarus and let him go from the grave clothes. It's as though his grave clothes still clung to him.

Because for Lazarus, death still clung to him. His resurrection was more like a resuscitation. Death would come to Lazarus again. But not so with Jesus.

The linen is left lying in the tomb because death no longer has hold of him, you see. It's why we don't say Christ was risen as though he might die again.

[5:28] We say Christ is risen because he remains risen today without death ever coming to him again. And while this empty tomb is not definitive proof that Jesus rose, it was enough for one to believe.

Verse 8 to 10. Finally, the other disciple, John, who reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. He saw and believed.

He saw and believed. Where King David says that God will not abandon him to the realm of the dead. That he won't stay dead. That he won't let his faithful king see decay.

And whether David meant himself in this psalm or his descendant, who is Jesus, the idea of God's king not being left for dead is present in the Old Testament.

Even if John didn't yet get it. But that's actually only another indicator that what we're reading here is accurate. That he would actually admit some sort of failure or something.

[7:05] Not like the fact that they didn't get it. I once heard a criminal barrister say that I'm used to listening, he said, to eyewitness statements and sifting for the truth. I'm looking for authenticity.

And there is a level of honesty about the disciples' failure in the Gospels, which speaks of authenticity. Because witnesses in court, when they are fabricating, always come out purer than pure.

You see what he's saying? People, when they're making stuff up, they often present themselves in a perfect light. And the very fact that the Gospels record the failures and all is an indication that what we're reading is true.

All these details show us that this testimony is one we can trust. They really did see an empty tomb and they really did see a risen Jesus.

Point to verse 11. Now Mary stood outside the tomb. It seems that Mary followed them back. They left, but she stayed, standing outside the tomb crying.

[8:11] As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been. One at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, woman, which is our modern day madam, if you like, why are you crying?

They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you're looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. And Jesus said, do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

As I said, it seems Mary followed Peter and John back to the tomb. And when they left, she stayed crying. And in verse 12, she saw two angels. Verse 14, she then saw the risen Jesus.

[9:20] Though didn't immediately recognize him, did she? Back in chapter 10, Jesus said that he is the good shepherd and he calls his own sheep by name and then leads them out.

And it's interesting that she doesn't recognize Jesus until he, as her shepherd, calls her by name, Mary. And then she recognized him as her shepherd, as her teacher.

It's a beautiful scene, isn't it? One of joy and reunion and clinging. But Jesus then says, don't cling to me.

Is it because he doesn't like PDA, you know, public displays of affection? Of course not. Rather, verse 17, he must return to his father to rule and she must return to the disciples to tell.

And this is the second response we see in our passage. Have a look at verse 18. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news. I have seen the Lord.

[10:23] And she told them that he had said these things to her. Having seen the risen Jesus, she tells others about Jesus, doesn't she?

But it's not just Mary who does this. It's the disciples too. 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.

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. You see, like Mary, the disciples are overjoyed too, for like Mary, they saw the Lord.

And it's not as though they got the wrong person, did you notice? Jesus shows them his hands that were nailed, his side that was speared as we saw on Good Friday.

And so this is the same Jesus who was crucified, dead, buried, now risen from the dead.

[11:35] They saw the risen Lord. And this matters because his resurrection proves he has paid for our sins. You see, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then death still has a hold of him, doesn't it?

And it means he hasn't finished paying for our sins. It's a bit like this. If someone is held in prison, they're held there until they're finished paying for their crimes, don't they?

And they're only released after they've finished paying. Well, so also with Jesus. He is released from death because he has finished paying for our sins.

That's why God could raise him from the dead. As we heard on Friday, it is finished. He's paid for them all. The resurrection proves it. And this matters because it means we can now have forgiveness and peace with God.

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.

[12:49] If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. And if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. And notice Jesus says, peace to them again.

I mean, why? He just said it two verses ago. I mean, it hasn't been that long, has it? Well, he says it again because that's precisely what his death brings. Having paid for our sins, he brings us forgiveness and peace with God.

Restored relationship. Part of his family. In fact, Jesus highlights this by the way he orders what he says and does. I don't know if you noticed.

Verse 19, he says, peace to you. Then in verse 20, he points to his death. Shows them his hands and side. And then verse 21, peace to you. It's like a sandwich, isn't it?

And the point is that his death brings this peace we can have. And it brings it to others too. Which is why he then breathes on his disciples and says, receive the Holy Spirit and talks about forgiving sins.

[14:00] Now, at this point, they don't actually receive the Spirit. And that happens on the day of Pentecost. What Jesus is doing here is like a living parable that prepares them for what will happen and what they will do.

They will receive the Holy Spirit. And then they will be sent to tell others. Just like Mary told them.

And to share the good news that Jesus paid for our sins at the cross that first Good Friday and rose from the dead to prove it is finished.

That Easter Sunday. And for those people who believe, the disciples can then pronounce forgiveness. And they will be forgiven. Not because the disciples become church leaders and it's in their authority to pronounce forgiveness.

It's got nothing to do with them being church leaders or disciples. It's got everything to do with what the gospel promises. That whoever believes in Jesus will have forgiveness of sins.

[15:09] And the disciples actually get a chance to practice this now. To tell others because Thomas turns up. Point three, verse 24.

Now, Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the 12, 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.

Like Mary, these disciples tell Thomas what they saw, don't they? In fact, they even use the same words as Mary. We have seen the Lord.

But Thomas gives us the third response in our passage this morning, which is a negative response, isn't it? He says, I won't believe unless I see.

[16:08] Their eyewitness testimony is not enough for him. And this response is one we often see in our world today, don't we? People often say they won't believe unless they see for themselves.

Now, at one level, it's a natural response, isn't it? I mean, we don't see people rise from the dead every day, do we? And so we can understand that response.

We can sympathize with Thomas, perhaps even relate to Thomas ourselves. And while this might be a natural response, it's not actually, though, a rational response.

Let me explain. You see, Thomas doesn't actually take the time to think through the evidence he already has. He simply dismisses it out of hand, doesn't he?

But he has a lot of evidence. I mean, he's been with Jesus. He's seen some amazing things. In fact, only a week ago, he had dinner with Lazarus, who was raised from the dead. I mean, not that long ago, is that?

[17:13] A week. If he thought about the evidence, reasoned through it, he would have responded differently.

His response might be a natural one, but it's not actually a rational one, given the evidence. For he had enough to believe. And that's the point Jesus now seems to make.

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.

Then he said 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. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[18:14] Jesus basically rebukes Thomas, doesn't he? He even kind of quotes Thomas' words back to him, as if to say, I heard what you said. And Jesus tells him plainly to stop doubting and believe, which Thomas does.

With those famous words, My Lord and my God. And that's the right response. Yet Jesus goes on to pronounce a blessing on those who do what Thomas should have done.

Those who believe without seeing themselves. Those who believe because others have seen. And we have their testimony. Their reliable eyewitness testimony.

It's enough for a court of law, isn't it? And it's enough for us to believe. They really saw an empty tomb. They really saw the risen Lord.

John wants us to know that we can say Christ is risen indeed. Not maybe, or I think, or perhaps, but certainly. As the kids say these days, for reals.

[19:26] In fact, we have even more evidence than what John has given us here this morning. I mean, we have a creedal statement that mentions the resurrection and is dated within months of Jesus' death.

And so this belief in a resurrection, it's not one that grew up over time. It's been there since the beginning. We have thousands of copies of the New Testament over time.

More than many other history books. And so we can compare and make sure that what we have here today in our Bibles is what they written back then.

The Bible hasn't changed over time. We're still reading their testimony. We have the spread of Christianity. I mean, the Romans and the Jews wanted to stop Christianity in its tracks.

We have letters of them complaining about this Christian religion. And so if the Romans or the Jews had stolen the body, like Mary thought, don't you think they would have produced it to stop Christianity?

[20:26] Oh, here you go, guys. Here's your risen Lord. He's not really alive. Stop it. Go about your business. Move on. Nothing to see. But they don't produce it, do they? We have the disciples who went from being locked, scared in a room for fear of the Jews, to not long later, boldly preaching openly in Jerusalem that Christ is risen.

And most of them died for Jesus. Some crucified, some beheaded, some thrown off a cliff. And when he didn't die, they beat him with a club until he was dead. Now, would they really have died in such terrible ways if they knew they had buried the body out the back?

Of course not. Would they really have died for something they knew was fake? Would you? Even the miracles are evident. Some people have told me over the years that they cannot believe in Jesus because they cannot believe in miracles.

Have you ever heard people say that before? And at one level, I get it. Someone appearing in a locked room out of nowhere is, again, not an everyday occurrence.

And again, while it might be a natural response, it's not, again, rational. Because if Jesus got stuck outside the locked room and he had to knock on the door and say, Guys, I'm here.

[21 : 46] Let me in, please. What kind of king is that? What kind of God is that? The very fact that he does miracles are precisely the sort of thing you'd expect from someone who claims to be God, who claims to be king.

If he didn't do miracles, I'm not sure I'd trust that he's the real deal. Miracles are actually even rational evidence for him.

We have enough evidence to believe. And so, as John says at the end of the chapter, 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 Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the king, the son of God.

And that by believing, you may have life eternal in his name. And so, the first application for us this morning has to be, will you believe?

Like John and Mary. Will you believe in Jesus, that he is the king who paid for your sin and then rose again?

[22 : 58] We have enough evidence. And so, don't be like Thomas, who simply dismisses it out of hand. Think through the evidence. And talk to me. I've got books that can walk you through it and you can decide for yourself.

We can believe, so will you believe? And for us to do, then, secondly, will we take opportunities to share this news with others, to tell others?

Just like Mary and the disciples. I'm sure we are not eyewitnesses like them, so it will look a bit different to them. But we can still use their testimony to tell others as we're able.

Last week, I got my hair cut in preparation for Easter weekend. And my hairdresser mentioned that she had some JWs, some Jehovah Witnesses, knock at her door.

She knew I was a Christian. And so, she asked me what the difference was. And I must confess, I can't for the life of me remember everything they believe. But I do know every other religion or cult says you have to do something yourself to earn your way to heaven, except Christianity.

[24 : 10] Christianity says it's not about what you do. It's about believing in what Jesus has done at the cross. And so, I was able to take the opportunity to share that good news with her.

We're starting training in sharing the good news next Wednesday night. And lastly, will we know with confidence our faith is not futile so that we might keep going in following Christ in life?

For despite what the world thinks, we follow not a lifeless corpse, but a living Lord, don't we? Our sins really are paid for. Our hope really is certain.

Our hope that just as Jesus rose bodily, so one day he will raise us and give us a new body in a perfect world to come. I was talking with someone just before the service who's struggling with his body at the moment.

And he said, oh, I'm looking forward to that new body. You see, because we follow not a lifeless corpse, but a living Lord, we're not wasting our time.

[25 : 20] We're not wasting our time following Jesus as king. We're not wasting our time trusting in him. Nor are we wasting our time believing our loved ones in Christ are in heaven with him.

And that we'll get to see them again one day if we believe too. We're not even wasting our time in praying for God's help when life is hard or coming each Sunday morning to gather with his people.

These are all things that are part of our faith and our faith is not futile. Because we don't follow a lifeless corpse, but a living Lord. As our next hymn will say, because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

I may have told you this rather cheeky joke before that I've heard. It's about a man who went on holidays to Jerusalem with his family and his mother-in-law, which is why it's cheeky.

And while there, the mother-in-law passed away. And the hotel manager had a brother who was a funeral director. So the hotel manager said to this man, look, I can arrange for your mother-in-law's body to be cremated here in Jerusalem.

[26 : 23] It'll cost you about \$1,000. Or I can arrange for it to be flown back home on a flight with all the special requirements. But it's going to actually cost you \$10,000. And the son-in-law said, I'll pay the \$10,000.

The hotel manager was shocked. He'd seen how the mother-in-law had treated him while on holidays. And so he asked why. And the man replied, well, I heard someone else died in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, then rose again.

So I'm not taking any chances. I'm not sure that's the type of response we're meant to have to the resurrection. But we can believe in him.

We are to share the good news about him. And we can know our faith is not futile. For the evidence we have means we can say Christ is risen indeed.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you that on that first Easter morning, Christ was raised from the dead.

[27 : 33] And Father, we thank you. As amazing as this is, we have evidence to help us believe this amazing but beautiful news.

And so knowing that it is not fiction but fact, knowing that we have evidence to believe, knowing that it's not irrational or blind faith but rational faith, help us to keep remembering that we follow not a lifeless corpse but a living Lord.

help us to keep remembering that we are in the dead. And so rejoice in our Saviour and King. Help us with this. In this we pray. In Jesus' name.