

Too Good to be True?

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Date: 12 April 2026

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[0 : 00] Lord God, it's your voice we want to hear this morning. It's your words that speak comfort to our hearts.! It's your words that bring us hope.

So help us to listen for your voice just now. Amen. We're told, aren't we, if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.

We don't want to get caught out, do we? We don't want to be the one that gets suckered, that gets taken in by something that is so outlandish that it couldn't possibly be true.

And, you know, it's quite a good principle to live by when it comes to dealing with scam correspondence.

And emails and telephone calls. If it sounds too good to be true, then it is. There isn't likely to be a Nigerian prince with millions of pounds that just wants to rest in your bank account.

[1 : 17] It doesn't really work like that. But when we take this too far, we become sceptical about all the good things that might happen.

They all seem too good to be true. And the same happened in Bible times. Think of the women coming back to their friends in the upper room.

They'd been to the tomb and found Jesus wasn't there. And in Luke's gospel, it says this. When the women came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and all the others.

But they did not believe the women because their words seemed like nonsense. So all Jesus' friends thought the idea of him rising from the dead sounded like nonsense.

But as the day, as last Sunday wore on, maybe at least the possibility that Jesus might be alive began to dawn.

[2 : 33] At least for Peter and John who take themselves off and check it out for themselves. And that brings us then to our reading in John.

We've read, had read to us that they were all in the upper room with the doors locked out of fear. They'd seen what the authorities had done to Jesus, their friend.

And they didn't want it to happen to them. So they'd locked the door. And Jesus comes and stands amongst them. And he says, peace.

Peace be still. Peace be with you. Shalom, peace. Not just stop arguing, stop squabbling. But that deep sense of wholeness.

Jesus speaks into them. And their fear and their anxiety is turned to joy.

[3 : 40] And they're just amazed. And they're just so full of incredulity that Jesus is alive. And so when Thomas shows up, they want to tell him.

They want to say, we've seen the Lord. He's risen. And they want to share their experiences with him. To try and persuade him that it's true.

They are giving that powerful eyewitness testimony of what they've seen. And Thomas, he chooses not to believe.

He doesn't doubt what they're saying. He just doesn't believe it. Because the idea of doubt means you're sort of swithering. You're not sure. Maybe it's true. Maybe it isn't.

Thomas was adamant it wasn't true. It couldn't possibly be true. He'd seen Jesus die on the cross. He'd seen the nails in his hands and his feet.

[4 : 45] He'd seen the soldier shove that spear into his side. He knew he was dead. And nothing that his friends were going to say was going to persuade him otherwise.

But who is Thomas? He appears a few times in the Gospels. He's called the twin, Didymus, which means twin.

And he was somebody who had a bit of a ready wit. One of the things that he did was when Jesus says he's going to go and see Lazarus. And the others are saying, well, why are we going to see

Lazarus?

Because Lazarus has just died. You know, what's the point now? It's Thomas who says, are we going to die too? Just to check it out. He has that sharpness about him.

We've given him the nickname down the years of doubting Thomas. Partly because Jesus tells him to stop doubting. But we label him in a way that we don't label the other disciples.

[6 : 01] As we've seen, none of them wanted to take in what the women had said to them. They all thought it was nonsense. But they're not called the skeptical disciples or anything like that.

And he wasn't the only one who got it wrong, who got it very badly wrong. Judas gets it catastrophically wrong. But then there's Peter too.

Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration wanting to build booths. And just completely missing the point of that wonderful experience that God had granted him.

And then Peter, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, denying that he even knew him. And of course there's James and John who were known as sons of thunder because of their hot-headed, quick-temperedness.

You see, the disciples were a mixed bag of people. And Thomas was no better or no worse than any of them. When he returns to his friends on that Resurrection Sunday night, he is still locked in deep grief.

[7 : 26] He's seen his friend die. Die horribly. And he's not over it. How could he be?

It's only three days ago. And added to that, he's now got this feeling of being left out. Of being somehow on the margin.

Maybe he didn't. He thought, well, I'm not good enough for Jesus to appear to me. I'm somehow not worthy of the same experience that my friends have had.

Sometimes I think, I'm very much like Thomas. Unless you prove it to me, Lord.

I won't believe. I can't believe. And sometimes we make all sorts of excuses that some sad event has happened in our lives.

[8 : 25] And that prevents us from believing. We just say we can't do it. And so the Bible leaves Thomas on that night, still in his grief, still in his misery.

With these words echoing around that room. 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. In a sense, it's a bit of a cliffhanger, isn't it? That won't resolve until the next weekend.

Well, we know that it won't resolve until the next weekend. But for Thomas, that was where he was left. And he didn't think that anything would happen to shift what he thought.

But the week goes on and he has time to think, to reason. Time to try and get things straight in his head. To take in all that's happened.

[9 : 39] And I think that's possibly why, although Thomas has chosen not to believe, he couldn't walk away from his companions. He couldn't walk away from his friends.

He's still drawn back to their company in that upper room. He still wants to be part of the group. And I think there's people who come to church who haven't yet found Jesus.

But there's something that draws them in. Maybe it's the fellowship. Maybe it's the camaraderie. Maybe it's just being part of a group. It doesn't really matter what holds us here.

What does matter is that in the end, we find Jesus. But is Thomas really asking too much?

Because after all, he's only wanting the same evidence as the others have had. He's just wanting to be like his friends, to have that same experience.

[10 : 44] And so we come to the second part of our reading. Where Jesus steps in.

And everything changes. Jesus knew what Thomas had been saying, what he'd been thinking. After all, in Psalm 139, the psalmist writes, you know my inmost thoughts. So of course, Jesus would have known just what Thomas had been thinking.

And whatever turmoil was in Thomas' heart, it was put right. Peace was given to him in this meeting.

Jesus says, put your fingers here. Put your hand in my side. Do you think he did?

[11 : 41] I don't think he did. I think he was probably too ashamed. Why was he trying to test Jesus?

Jesus? What was that all about, he's thinking. And instead of testing Jesus, Jesus examines Thomas.

You can imagine that look as the exchange between them.

And Thomas is changed. In those brief words, from adamant unbelief, to perhaps the greatest declaration of belief.

My Lord and my God. What a definition for who Jesus is. The others have accepted Jesus back as the joy of having their friend return.

[12:52] But Thomas, Thomas sees much more. Thomas sees that Jesus being raised from the dead is declaring just who he is.

My Lord and my God. John bookends his gospel with two really mind-boggling statements.

He starts by declaring, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God, and Jesus is the word made flesh.

And he ends it with this statement from Thomas, my Lord and my God. And everything in between is the way John shows us just who Jesus is, so that we too can come to that same point as Thomas did, and declare that Jesus is my Lord and my God.

Because this is a word for us too. It wasn't just a word for those gathered in that upper room.

Because Jesus says, blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

[14:12] Since New Testament times, no one has seen him in this life. Now, the word see, we can use in the terms of understanding, a light bulb moment, a flash of inspiration.

Faith is simple childlike trust in him. And blessed are those who have not yet, not physically seen Jesus, and yet that light bulb moment of understanding has happened, and they trust in him.

And that echoes down through the centuries to include us. Jesus is blessing us as those who have not seen and yet believe.

Peter, who was there at that time in that room, picks up on this, and he writes in his first letter, though you have not seen him, you love him.

And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy. So what are the implications of Jesus' resurrection?

[15:37] Well, I think if you want to really get to grips in detail, I'll turn you to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. But we haven't got time to go into that and give it the significance that it deserves.

But take it for homework and have a read. The outcome of it is, if Jesus has not been raised, we are the most to be pitied.

What are we doing? We've based our lives on a lie and we've missed out on so much that we could have really enjoyed because we've wanted to live God's way.

And, well, God doesn't exist and Jesus didn't rise from the dead. So we're very pitiful, aren't we?

But Paul doesn't leave it there.

He praises God because Jesus is risen. He is alive. He has indeed been raised from the dead. And so, as in Adam, all die.

[16:48] So in Christ, all will be made alive. We are alive in Christ. Alive now and in the life to come.

It isn't a fantasy story. It's real. It's what happened. And we have the evidence in Jesus' resurrection that we too will be like him.

And that gives us a hope, a living hope. And again, I go back to Peter's letter. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

this inheritance is kept in heaven for you. What a hope. It's not a pipe dream.

[17:51] It's not wishful thinking or delusional. It's what's in store for us. So, the news of the resurrection isn't too good to be true.

we have the testimony of so many witnesses to the validity of it. And we too can choose, like Thomas, to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and our God and in doing so become inheritors of that promise of eternal kingdom life.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.