

Believing the Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, Church. The scripture reading for today is taken from John chapter 20, verses 1 through 31.!

And we do not know where they have laid him. So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth which had been on Jesus' head not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in and saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

[1 : 2 2] Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and she wept. And as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb.

And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping?

She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned and said to him in Arammeric, Rabbani, which means teacher. Jesus said to her, Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

[2 : 2 9] But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that he had said these things to her.

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 hands and his side. 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.

[3 : 39] 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 in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in 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 find 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 believed.

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.

[4 : 52] Amen. Thank you very much, Joan. Unlike the death of Jesus Christ, which is not disputed, and the burial of Jesus Christ, which is also not disputed, the resurrection of Jesus Christ remains a point of dispute for almost 2,000 years.

Matthew's gospel alone gives us the background to this dispute. Matthew tells us that in order to cover up the resurrection, the Pharisees bribed the soldiers to say that while they were sleeping, the disciples of Jesus came and stole his body away.

Matthew tells us that that legend spread among the Jews, and he said that it was still being spread, even at the point of his gospel that he was writing some 30 years later.

And since that time, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been disputed for all kinds of different reasons. And although we are all in church and we would assume that we are here because we believe in the resurrection, it wouldn't surprise me if there are some, rather present or listening online, who might have doubts about that.

And so I want to ask you personally, what do you believe? Do you believe that God raised Jesus up from the dead on the third day, or do you have your doubts about that?

[6 : 40] And either way, the question has huge implications. It has huge implications whichever side of it we land on.

It has been said that the resurrection is the hinge upon which Christianity swings. Without the resurrection, all that we are doing here this morning is a waste of precious time.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, our living for him, our serving him, our being together this morning, brothers and sisters, is pointless.

If Jesus, at this very moment, is not seated in heaven, waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool, and all that we are doing this morning is really an exercise in futility.

And I sincerely wish that all of us believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

[7 : 50] I sincerely believe that we are all persuaded that that is the truth. But the reality is that even Jesus' own disciples, and one in particular prominently featured in the passage that we are considering, doubted his resurrection.

One who walked with him, one who ate with him, one who heard his teaching, one who heard him say again and again, he's going to rise from the dead. He did not initially believe.

And so this morning, I want us to consider from this passage an eyewitness account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And my prayer is that any who doubt will be able to dismiss that from their hearts. And also for those of us who do believe, that our belief will deepen.

Because none of us believes as deeply and as strongly as we can believe. None of us believes perfectly. And so my prayer for us this morning is that wherever we find ourselves, our faith in the resurrection will deepen.

[9 : 08] So let's pray towards that end. Father, we are so grateful this morning that we are able to gather in this place. Thank you for the ways that you have already spoken to our hearts in song and in prayer and in the reading of your word.

Father, would you speak to us now in the preaching of your word? Lord, you know where each one of us is. You know the deliberations of our hearts.

Lord, you know what we need. And I pray that you, by the power of your spirit, would minister to our hearts that which we need from you today.

Father, we pray that you'd be glorified in the preaching of your word and that all of our hearts will be edified. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. For the next few moments, and that's a promise, for the next few moments, I want to consider from this passage three reasons, three reasons that we should believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 24] The first reason we should believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the witness of Scripture. John's Gospel opens with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb of Jesus early on that Sunday morning after he had been crucified, that first Sunday after he'd been crucified, when it was still dark.

And she noticed that the large stone had been rolled away. And so Mary Magdalene ran, and she went to Peter and to John, and she told them, quite oddly, they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've laid him.

I thought, that's the way women tell things that they see. So she just assumed that somehow Jesus had been taken out of the tomb, his body had been taken away, and she didn't know where they had put him.

Now, clearly, Mary did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. And remember that Mary would have been one who was numbered among those women who followed Jesus and ministered to Jesus.

So her immediate reaction was not that Jesus rose from the dead. Her immediate reaction was, they took him out of the tomb, and we don't know where he has been laid.

[11 : 51] John tells us that he and Peter ran to the tomb, and John is a very modest man. He says he arrived before Peter. He was faster than Peter. I suspect John was younger than Peter as well.

But John arrived first, and John says when he got there, he didn't go in the tomb. He said he looked in, and he just stooped down, looked in, and he saw the burial cloths, and he saw the face cloth of Jesus as well.

And then he says Peter arrived after him, and Peter didn't just look in. And Peter went in, and Peter found the burial cloths, and Peter saw that the face cloth was folded and set aside away from the other pieces of cloth.

Something that's easy for us to miss is in verses 8 and 9. I want us to look at it again. John says, Then the other disciple who reached the tomb first, referring to himself, also went in, and he saw and believed.

For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. And here's the question. What is it that John believed as a result of what he saw?

[13 : 16] Did John believe that Christ arose from the dead? I don't think so. I think this passage and the rest of scripture would say otherwise.

Instead, it seems that John believed the account that Mary Magdalene told them. Believed the account that the body was taken away, taken to some place that they didn't know.

And his initial reaction was not that he had risen from the dead. Because notice what he says in verse 9. John tells us why he and Peter believed that the empty tomb pointed to Christ's body being taken out of it.

He says because up to that point, they didn't understand the scripture that Christ must rise from the dead. So the first part of John's resurrection account ends on a kind of down note.

John simply says in verse 10 that they went back to their homes. That's not the reaction of someone who would have really believed that Jesus Christ arose.

[14 : 29] They simply went back to their homes because they believed the tomb was empty and somehow the body of Jesus had been taken away. In Luke 24, we have an account of how and when the disciples came to understand the Old Testament scriptures that Jesus was prophesied to rise from the dead.

And the way they understood it is the Lord himself opened their understanding and enabled them to grasp that truth. Beginning in verse 44. You can follow on the screen. You don't need to turn there.

Luke 24, beginning in verse 44. Then he said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Jesus had told his disciples these things through his earthly ministry throughout that entire three-year period, but they were dull of hearing.

[15 : 57] They were dull of hearing because they had other ideas about the Messiah, who the Messiah would be and what the Messiah would do. And dying was not a part of what they thought the Messiah was all about.

And so when Jesus would have told them he was going to die and rise again, that went through one ear and out of the next. About two months later, after Jesus would have opened their understanding, we find the apostle Peter preaching the first sermon that was preached in the church.

And in that sermon, Peter points to one of these Old Testament passages that point to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is in Acts chapter 2. Actually, let's turn there.

Would you turn there with me? Acts chapter 2, beginning at verse 22. And what we find in this passage is that Peter quotes from Psalm 16, verses 8 to 11.

So starting in verse 22, this is what Peter says to the crowd who's gathered on the day of Pentecost. Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man, attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

[17 : 21] This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. And here's the quote. For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken.

Therefore my soul was glad and my tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence. So Peter quotes Psalm 16, 8 to 11, a prophecy about Jesus.

And no doubt it came from Jesus opening their understanding to understand the scriptures. But in addition to the Old Testament scriptures, which prophesy the Messiah's death and resurrection, throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly predicted his death and that he would rise again on the third day.

[18 : 46] And you'll find these predictions again and again throughout the four gospels. These predictions of Jesus were in such abundance that even the Pharisees knew that Jesus repeatedly said that he was going to die and he was going to rise again.

The Pharisees knew it. And that's the reason they told Pilate, we need to make the tomb secure because this man has said he is going to rise on the third day and we believe what's going to happen is his disciples are going to steal his body and say he arose and so we need to make the tomb secure.

They knew it. Jesus said that so many times. The Pharisees knew. But he had predicted his resurrection. And so they appointed a guard to secure the tomb.

Again, based on Matthew 28, Matthew tells us that after Jesus arose, the Pharisees bribed the soldiers to say that they were asleep. And this is really not a good lie.

This is a bad lie. I mean, if you want an example of how not to lie, look at this. They say, while we were asleep, how do you know what's going on when you're asleep? You know nothing when you're asleep.

[19 : 59] And so there's no way to know that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body when you were asleep. But here's the point. The first reason we should believe the resurrection of Jesus is the witness of Scripture over thousands of years.

The Old Testament Scriptures prophesied the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And in the New Testament, Jesus repeatedly made predictions of his crucifixion and of his rising on the third day.

And so the personal question is, do you believe the witness of the Scriptures? And if you do, you're part of countless thousands of men, women, boys, and girls who over the centuries have come to believe the witness of the Scriptures.

But if you don't, please keep listening. The second reason we should believe the resurrection of Christ is the witness of others.

In verses 19 to 23, John tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples later that evening when he arose. They were locked away for fear of the Jews.

[21 : 22] And Jesus appears in their midst. He appears in their midst. In verse 21, we're told that Jesus showed them his hands and showed them his side and they were glad when they saw the Lord.

They were glad when they saw the Lord. But Thomas was not present. Thomas was absent for some reason. Not sure what Thomas was doing, but he wasn't there. And so here's what we read in verses 24 and 25.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we've 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.

By his response, Thomas was saying that he did not believe the testimony of his fellow disciples who were eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 39] But why would they, why would they want to lie to Thomas? Or why would they all be hallucinating? Hallucinating? Or why would they all be sadly mistaken at the same time?

Now one of the things we should not suppose is that this was scripted as it is in the gospel. That all that happened was they said to Thomas, we've seen the Lord and all Thomas said is, I don't believe you unless I put my fingers in the marks of the nail and my hand in his side, I would never believe.

It's not like a drama. They said that and Thomas said this. I think there was back and forth. I think they may have said to Thomas, we saw the Lord, he showed us the marks in his hand, he showed us his side, and Thomas probably then said, I'll never believe unless I put my finger in those marks and put my hand in his side, I will never believe.

And I believe that they went back and forth. I don't think that they just took his response and said nothing. They probably said, we saw the Lord. And so what we have here is an account, but not necessarily a word-for-word account of all that transpired between them.

It's likely that they went back and forth on this particular point. But the bottom line was that Thomas did not believe the testimony of those who had seen the risen Christ.

[24 : 21] Men he knew, men he spent three years with, and he refused to believe the eyewitness account that the Lord Jesus appeared to them and showed them his hands with the wounds in them and showed them his side that was pierced through with a spear.

And there are other eyewitness accounts, other eyewitnesses who testify that they held the risen Christ, they handled him, they ate food with him, and they continued ministry with him for some 40 days after he had risen from the dead.

the apostle Paul tells us that he himself saw the risen Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that at one point, Christ appeared to some 500 of his followers at the same time.

And Paul goes on to say, and at the time I'm writing this, many of them are still alive. So I'm going to be saying something decades later when everybody is dead, he says, as I am writing to you, there are some who saw the Lord in that group of 500 and they are still alive.

You know, Thomas gets a bad rap in Scripture. Thomas is the name that people use for anyone who's doubting. It could be a man or a woman, they say, oh, you're doubting Thomas.

[25 : 58] But those of us who doubt today are really worse than Thomas because we have so much more than what Thomas would have had in that moment when he did not believe the resurrection.

We have those witnesses, the witnesses of the Gospels and we have this account that Paul gives us of some 500 who saw the Lord.

So those who are denying the truth of the resurrection in the face of all of these witnesses, like Thomas, they are saying that these witnesses are liars, these witnesses are hallucinators, or at best, these witnesses for some reason are just seriously mistaken.

but if you don't believe the witness of others, perhaps you might believe the final witness to the resurrection and that's the witness of the empty tomb.

the empty tomb stood as a witness that Jesus arose from the dead and I'll try to explain why. First, the death of Jesus was certain.

[27 : 19] In the Gospel of John, chapter 19, we read that even though Jesus was dead, a soldier came up to him and they were checking to ensure that the three men who were crucified were dead and he took a spear and thrust it into his side and out gushed blood and water.

And so it was beyond the speed that Jesus was dead. But Jesus was not only dead as a certainty, Jesus was also buried as a certainty.

He was buried in the tomb as a certainty. The four Gospel writers tell us that Pilate released the body to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin Council, a serious man, a respected man, not a fly-by-night man.

And Joseph gave Jesus a proper burial and placed him in a new tomb where no one had ever laid. And then Pilate, at the request of the Pharisees, he had a guard set at the tomb to watch it.

Now, how many guards would have been in this watch that was placed in the tomb? If you watch most Easter plays, you'll swear it's two because they always have just two guards.

[28 : 44] But it's highly unlikely that there were only two guards when Pilate said, make the tomb as secure as you know how to. I mean, Jesus had 12 disciples, 11 after Judas committed suicide, but he also would have had thousands of others, not as committed, but thousands of others who would have followed him.

So it's not likely that the guard only consisted of two persons. It's likely, we're told, that there was probably about 40 in that group who would have been there.

Now, here's the big question. what are the chances of Jesus' ordinary disciples overpowering that guard that was guarding the body of Jesus, guarding the tomb?

What are the chances of them overpowering these professional and well-trained soldiers of the Roman guard? Soldiers who knew that if they fell down on their duty, they were going to be stripped naked and burned alive.

That was the penalty of falling down on your duty. There's really no chance that the disciples of Jesus could have overpowered these trained soldiers and then take a body that was wrapped with about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes and just walk out of the tomb.

[30 : 30] But he had two other pieces of evidence that are also critical that undermines the theory that somehow the body of Jesus was stolen by the disciples.

In John 20 verse 19, we're told that that evening when Jesus arose, his band of disciples were terrified. They were locked away in a room hiding from the Jews.

Don't seem like they were so brave to steal a body. And then the second piece of evidence we have is the tomb itself. Why would anyone go to steal a body and take the cloths off of it and that would have been very intricately wrapped around Jesus to take all the time, take off all the cloths, take off the face cloth and then run with the naked body out of the tomb.

Not very likely that they would have stolen the body in that way. It would have been easier just to keep everything together and take the body with the cloths out of the tomb.

So then how, if that's not the case, if they didn't steal the body, how then was the tomb empty?

[31 : 51] The most logical answer is that Jesus rose from the dead. I mean, this is just really looking at the evidence, this is being reasonable with the evidence, the most logical answer is that Jesus, in fact, rose from the dead.

And the answer is even more logical if you bear in mind the witness of Scripture and Jesus' own witness saying that he was going to die and then he was going to rise on the third day.

And so the three reasons that we should believe in the resurrection of Jesus is the fact that he rose from the dead is the witness of Scripture, the witness of others, and the witness of the empty tomb.

But here's something to think about. It is possible to believe that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead based on the witness of Scripture, based on the witness of others, based on the witness of the empty tomb, and still not believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God and he is the Savior of the world.

And I say that because the evidence is so logical to believe that Jesus in fact did rise from the dead. But it is possible to come to that conclusion and to be pretty certain in your mind that that is true and yet not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Son of the living God, that he is the Savior of the world.

[33 : 33] God, that he is the Lord. And the truth is, the reason that John gives us this account, John does not give us this account to cause us to believe in the resurrection.

John tells us why he gives us this account. He tells us in verses 30 and 31 why he gives us this account.

Look again at what he says. Now, Jesus did many other things 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.

He doesn't give us this account to get us to believe in the resurrection. He gives us this account that we may believe in Jesus and that in believing in Jesus, we may have eternal life.

And the difference is light years apart. The difference between those two believing in Jesus versus believing in the resurrection of Jesus are life years apart.

[34 : 53] apart. It is only by believing in Jesus that we will have life, believing that he is the Messiah.

And this is what we see Thomas' experience was. Thomas vowed that he would not believe until he was able to put his finger in the mark and he was able to put his hand in the side of Jesus.

But look again what actually happened eight days later. in verse 26, eight days later, his disciples were again inside. 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, put, and put out your hand and place it in my side.

do not disbelieve, but believe. And Thomas answered, my Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me?

[36 : 02] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, he gave Thomas the opportunity to do what Thomas vowed to do, but Thomas didn't need it.

Thomas said the only way he was going to believe is if he was able to put his hand in the Lord's side, put his finger in those marks.

And instead, when he encountered the risen Christ, he said, my Lord and my God. And that is what Thomas needed. Thomas didn't just need some facts to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

What Thomas needed was Thomas needed to encounter the risen Christ the same way the other disciples encountered the risen Christ. And brothers and sisters, that's what we all need.

We all need to encounter the risen Christ, to believe in him, to believe that he is the savior of the world, that he is the son of God, that he is the Messiah whom God sent into the world.

[37 : 13] but we don't need to encounter him in a literal way. And John makes that very clear. John is clear that we don't need to encounter Christ literally.

He says, because what I have written, I have written it so that you may come to believe in him. And so that in believing in him, you may have eternal life.

And so if you doubt the resurrection this morning, what you need is not more evidence. What you need is not more and better explanation.

What you need is to encounter the risen Christ. And John tells us that he can be encountered in the pages of scripture. And he says, when we encounter him, we will believe in him, and in believing in him, we will have eternal life.

The apostle Peter agrees with John, and he tells us that it is possible to believe in Jesus, even though we have not seen him. This is how Peter says it in 1 Peter 1, verses 8 and 9.

[38 : 22] He says, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible.

and full of glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Jesus says, those who have believed and haven't seen, said they're blessed.

blessed. I'm not trying to parse exactly what Jesus meant by that, but here's what I would say.

Jesus makes a distinction between those who beheld him, those who saw him and believed, versus those who have not seen him and they believed.

There's a blessing, there's a different kind of blessing, a special blessing that comes to those of us who have not literally seen Jesus, but we have come to believe. And how have we come to believe?

[39 : 33] The same way that Jesus made himself known to the first disciples and to Thomas and he revealed himself to them, he has revealed himself to us in the pages of Holy Scripture.

We get to see him in Holy Scripture and in seeing him and believing on him, we have eternal life.

And we are blessed beyond measure. And thank God that all of us who believe this morning, we believe because God has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

It's the only reason we believe. We don't believe because we're more moral than other people. We don't believe because we're smarter than other people and we take life seriously. We believe because God in mercy has revealed himself to us.

The God in mercy did for us what he did for Thomas. It was just how we go sometimes. We say, well, forget it. You don't believe, don't believe. No. He was patient with Thomas.

[40 : 38] And he went to Thomas. And he revealed himself to Thomas. And he said that with us. He did that with us. At the point that our eyes were opened, at the point that we came to faith, Jesus Christ, self-revealed himself to us, enabled us to believe in him, and in believing in him, we have eternal life.

If you're among that company and you believe this morning, you have much to rejoice about. God, but if you're not, if you have not yet come to believe in Jesus Christ, my prayer for you is that you, like the rest of us, will encounter him.

You will encounter him as the risen Lord. And that will be enough. That will be enough to encounter him in that way.

And what a better time, I know of no better time, if you have not trusted in Jesus Christ, than to do that today. Than to trust in him today, as he's revealed to us in the pages of Scripture.

Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful that you have revealed to us the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ.

[42 : 13] And you've enabled us to put our faith in him, that he is the Son of God, that he is the Savior of the world, and that in believing we have eternal life.

Lord, I pray for those who have not yet come to that conviction. Would you encourage their hearts, would you open their eyes, and may they behold the risen Christ, and that will be enough.

Father, do your work in all of our hearts this morning, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand for our closing song.