

# Doubting the Resurrection

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Date: 16 April 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ] Another question might seem strange to us this morning, but really it's not a strange question. Jesus rose from the dead almost 2,000 years ago, and his resurrection still is controversial.

! We read in Matthew's Gospel that the chief priests gave money to the guards who were guarding Jesus when he arose from the dead and told them to say that his disciples came at night and stole the body away while they were asleep. And Matthew tells us that that story was spread from that day.

But more than that, Jesus' own disciples had a hard time believing that he had arisen from the dead. We read in Luke's account of the resurrection in Luke 24, how when the disciples were told that Jesus arose from the dead by the women who had gone to the grave and seen the empty tomb, they didn't believe the women.

Luke tells us that they believed that the women were telling an idle tale, and the word that was used, that they used for idle tale, was a word that was used in medicine for someone who was having delusions and disturbances in their mind because they were sick.

They thought that these women surely must be suffering from the trauma of the crucifixion, and what they were saying was not at all true. But soon after Jesus, Jesus appeared to his disciples.

[ 1 : 44 ] They saw him and they believed, but Thomas was not there. One of his disciples, Thomas, was not present. And when his fellow disciples told him, We have seen the Lord, Thomas refused to believe that Jesus arose.

So here we have a disciple of Jesus who walked with him for three years, saw his miracles firsthand, heard Jesus predict his death and resurrection numerous times, and still Thomas refused to believe.

And so it would not surprise me this morning if there would be some present in our gathering, those present in other gatherings in this country and around the world, who doubt that Jesus rose from the dead.

And in addition to that, and as I thought about it, this is even more startling to me, that there would be some who would say they believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but they truly don't believe it. Now, I know that sounds like a somewhat arrogant statement for me to make, but I think when we consider it, for a person to say, I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, I believe that the one who was crucified on the cross and laid in that grave from Friday until Sunday, I believe that he rose from the dead, and then not live for him, and then not submit your life to him, that's a contradiction.

[ 3 : 34 ] The witness of Scripture teaches us that when we meet the risen Christ, there is a transformation that takes place in our lives. The witness of Scripture teaches us that it is an impossibility to know the Christ of the resurrection and have a life that we live that's contrary to his teachings and to God's word.

And so the tragedy, I believe, this morning, beyond those who would doubt the resurrection, would be those who would say, I believe the resurrection, but in truth and in fact, they do not believe the resurrection.

It is something that has not come from their head down into their feet, where they are actually living it out. And I believe this morning, as we open God's word to a passage of Scripture that is familiar to some of you, and perhaps most of you, I believe that you would see that there is a truth about the reality that those who meet the risen Christ, those who come to that conviction that this one who died has been risen back to life.

A change, a transformation takes place. So if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John, chapter 20.

The Gospel of John, chapter 20. And our attention this morning will be confined to verses 24 through 31. But for context, I will begin reading at verse 19.

[ 5 : 25 ] So we begin in the Gospel of John, chapter 19, chapter 20, starting at verse 19.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked, where the disciples were forfear'd 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.

[ 6 : 44 ] 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 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?

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.

[ 8 : 12 ] 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.

Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful this morning for the freedoms we enjoy in this country, that we're able to gather in this place without any fear of persecution or consequence, and worship your name.

We thank you for your word that you have preserved for us down the ages. We thank you for this account of the disciple Thomas and his struggles to believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Well, we ask that in these moments that you would open our hearts and cause us to hear the truths of this passage, which you have preserved over the ages for our good.

We pray, O Lord, that those of us who know Christ will have our conviction about his resurrection deepened. We pray that those who do not know Jesus Christ would come to know him, the one who rose from the dead.

[ 9 : 40 ] And Father, we do pray for those who would ascend to the resurrection but truly have not met the risen Christ to come to a place of saving faith, that you would open their eyes to the truth of the gospel and that you would save as only you can.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. As we consider this account of John's concerning the initial disbelief of Thomas and his eventual belief in Christ's resurrection and his lordship, there's a critical point that I would like us to see from this passage, and the point is this.

When we truly believe the reality of the risen Christ, we will truly embrace the lordship of the risen Christ.

When we truly believe the reality of the risen Christ, we will truly embrace the lordship of the risen Christ. And I say this because when we truly believe that Jesus rose from the dead, we will accept him not just as the lord of life, but as the lord of our life.

And our lives will be transformed and we will live for him. That's the overarching point of the message this morning, and I pray that God would help us all to see it.

[ 11 : 17 ] To help you follow along, and also for those who wish to take notes, I've structured the sermon under two headings, and the first is Doubting Christ's Resurrection.

Doubting Christ's Resurrection. Why did Thomas not believe the reports of the women and of his fellow disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead?

Why didn't he believe? The problem was not with the women nor with his fellow disciples. The problem was with Thomas himself.

And I want to give three obvious reasons that Thomas doubted Christ's Resurrection. The first reason he doubted it is that Thomas discredited the witness of Christ.

Thomas discredited the witness of Christ because time and time again during his three years of ministry on the earth, Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection many, many times.

[ 12 : 23 ] The numerous references to these predictions in the four Gospels. For example, in Mark 10, 32 through 34, we read, and they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them, and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid, and taking the twelve, notice that word, again, again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him, and after three days, he will arrive. Jesus would have said these words days before the event of his crucifixion and the event of his resurrection would have taken place, and Mark tells us he did it again, yet Thomas did not believe. he discredited the witness of Jesus about his own death and his resurrection. Now, if you think about it, only a lunatic would repeatedly make such statements if they were not true.

But Jesus was no lunatic. He made these statements as part of his way of showing who he was and enabling us to believe in him.

Now, I think it's important for us to see what Thomas did not doubt because Thomas would be like many people today on this particular part of the issue. Notice, again, in verses 24 and 25, it reads, Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

[ 14 : 33 ] 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.

So what we know is that Thomas did not doubt the crucifixion. Thomas was certain that Jesus was crucified. He witnessed it. He knew that there would be nails in his hands.

He knew that there would be this hole in his side. And Thomas knew that Jesus was crucified, but he doubted the resurrection. The truth is, no one who is halfway sane would deny the historical Jesus Christ.

The records are clear. Historical records are clear, including from secular authors of this man, this man, Jesus Christ, who was a doer of good, a performer of miracles.

He lived. and he also died. He was crucified. But that's not in dispute. But what Thomas was doing by not believing the words of Jesus concerning his impending death and his resurrection three days later, by not believing these words of Jesus, here's what Thomas was actually saying.

[ 15 : 58 ] not verbally, but he was saying this by his unbelief. Jesus lied. Those are strong words, but those are, those words are the true implication of what Thomas' position of unbelief really meant.

He didn't believe the Lord's prediction that three days later he would arise, so Thomas, in essence, was saying Jesus lied. His resurrection, his death, sorry, yes, he believed that.

Resurrection, no, he did not believe that. And so here's a personal question for you this morning.

Do you believe the life and witness of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels?

Do you believe these words that we have recorded in the pages of this book that we hold this morning? But if you do, you are a part of a countless number of men, women, boys, and girls who over many centuries have believed and still believe.

And they can sing with heartfelt conviction, I know my Redeemer lives. But if you don't believe, then you are like Thomas. And essentially what you're saying is Jesus is not a credible witness.

[ 17 : 25 ] The second reason for the unbelief of Thomas is he rejected the testimony of others. He rejected the testimony of others.

He didn't believe Jesus' own words, his prediction, then he rejected the testimony of those who had seen the Lord. Again, look at verse 25. So the 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'll never believe.

In essence, Thomas was saying he didn't believe his fellow disciples. disciples. But then why would they lie to him? Why would they concoct a lie like that?

And is it possible that they were all hallucinating at the same time about the same issue? And when we consider this account, we should not think that it is sterile exactly as it was, that this is the verbatim, word-for-word account of what transpired in that conversation.

[ 18 : 37 ] I think it's more likely that they had an exchange and they were having this conversation, they were trying to persuade Thomas that Jesus really was alive and Thomas persisted in his unbelief.

And so he refused to believe the testimony of others that they had seen the risen Lord. And again, I ask this morning, what about you? Do you believe the testimony of others that they saw the risen Lord?

Matthew, John, and many other eyewitnesses in Scripture tell us that they have seen the risen Lord. They tell us they saw him, that he was worshipped, that he was held.

And he continued his ministry on earth 40 days after he arose, and then he went back and ascended into heaven. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, and remember Paul himself, we saw this in Galatians as we have been working our way through the letter of Galatians, that Paul saw the Lord in a vision, the risen Christ, on the road to Damascus.

But Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that after Christ arose from the dead, he appeared to more than 500 persons at one time. and Paul, when he was writing 1 Corinthians 15, he said, and the majority of them are alive right now.

[ 20 : 11 ] So it's not likely that Paul was going to be writing something that was untrue, some random story, because there were people right there alive who were able to be a witness to what he was saying.

So here's what you're saying. if you refuse to believe the eyewitness account of the risen Christ. Like Thomas, you're calling them liars or hallucinators, or at best you're saying they were seriously mistaken.

But you know, it's quite amazing to hear people, and now, you know, with all kinds of news going on, and the things that people believe, and the things that they don't believe, it's sometimes amusing to see what they would believe versus what they would not believe.

but, you know, people would, there would be some who would reject the witness of scripture concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and then they would believe what they read about historical ancient figures like Julius Caesar, and like Plato, and like Aristotle.

people. But do you realize that there are only a handful, just a handful of copies of documents that contain information and writings of Julius Caesar, of Plato, of Aristotle?

[ 21 : 39 ] There's a handful. For example, in the case of Julius Caesar, and Julius Caesar was born like a hundred years before Jesus Christ, Julius Caesar, what we have in the world that we know about are ten manuscripts that contain information and writings about him as a historical figure.

Now, a manuscript is a handwritten copy of the original document that would have been written because there were no typewriters or printers in those days, copiers, so you'd write it out, and the person who would have written the original, that was called an autograph, and when you wanted a copy of that, a scribe would manuscript it out by hand.

So we have ten manuscripts that provide information about Julius Caesar. And the earliest date of one of those manuscripts is 900 A.D., which makes it about roughly a thousand years later than the date that it was originally, than the original document, the autograph.

But in the case of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there are approximately 5,200 manuscripts!

And pieces of manuscripts that we have, available to us in different places around the world, and the date of the earliest copy is 130 A.D.

[ 23 : 24 ] I mean, written very, very close to the birth and the death of Jesus Christ. Copied, really, less than a hundred years after the originals would have been written.

And so today, we have this, this is a stark contrast of a manuscript of the Gospel that is dated 130 A.D., while the earliest manuscript of anything related to Julius Caesar is 900 A.D.

Yet many people who would reject the historical Christ would accept the historical accuracy of Julius Caesar.

And so my question this morning is, what about you? Do you believe the eyewitness accounts contained in the Gospels and the witness of the Apostle Paul?

And if you don't, I wonder if you do believe the accounts we have about Caesar and Plato and Aristotle. And if you do believe those accounts of those men and not the account of Jesus Christ, I encourage you to think long and hard about why that is.

[ 24 : 36 ] why would you place faith in those much older or more recently written histories than in the historical account of Jesus Christ that we have contained in the Gospels?

Jesus. So the first reason that Thomas didn't believe the resurrection is he discredited the witness of Christ. The second reason is he rejected the testimony of others. And the third reason I'll give, and there are others that we can give, but the third reason I will give is Thomas didn't believe the resurrection because he ignored the reality of the empty tomb.

Notice again the response of Thomas in verse 25. he said the only way he would believe is if he could physically put his finger in the mark, if he could physically put his hand into the wound in Christ's eye.

That was the only way that he was going to believe. Now Thomas was obviously told the tomb is empty, Christ is not there. But he ignored the reality of the empty tomb.

That tomb was sealed. sealed. We have the accounts. It was sealed, and not only was it sealed, it was guarded by a squad of Roman soldiers.

[ 25 : 53 ] These were highly trained soldiers. These were not your typical securities we see running around the place, or even the police officers, like those at Central Police Station, where they're supposed to be guarding prisons, and prisoners can escape without consequence.

No, these soldiers, soldiers, these soldiers knew that their lives were on the line if they allowed whoever was entrusted to them, or whatever was entrusted to them, to be lost.

They lost their lives. They were stripped naked, and they were burned alive. That was the punishment that they would have faced. Now I want you to imagine for a moment, just imagine with me, those of you who have great imaginations, imagine that you are a jury in the Supreme Court in the city of Jerusalem.

And you are sitting on this case that's trying to determine what happened to the body of Jesus Christ, this missing body of Jesus Christ.

I believe that as you consider all the evidence that's in front of you, the first piece of evidence you'd have to consider is what we read earlier in John 20, verse 19.

[ 27 : 16 ] It says, 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. So here, these disciples of Jesus, on the night that he rose from the dead, are locked away in this room, and they are terrified of the Jews.

That doesn't sound like that's not a picture of disciples who would have stolen their Lord's body hours earlier. So that's the first bit of evidence I think you'd have to consider.

And then the second is, we're told, we didn't read this, but this is over in John 20, that in the tomb, there were linen strips that Jesus was wrapped in, and there was also the face cloth that Jesus was wrapped in, and they found them there, and actually the face cloth was neatly folded.

You're going to steal a body, it doesn't seem likely that you're going to take the time to unwrap that body, leave the cloth there, and then take a naked body out of the tomb.

It seems more logical that you take the whole body out, wrapped up, it would be easier to carry, and then you would make your escape. So I know that you are reasonable people, so I have no doubt that if you sat on that jury, your verdict would most likely be no.

[ 28 : 37 ] The tomb is empty, not because his disciples stole him away, but it points more in the direction that something supernatural must have happened.

Well, that's my first point. Doubting Christ's resurrection. Now come to the second and final point. believing Christ's resurrection. We read in John 20, 26 through 29 that eight days later, Thomas was with the rest of the disciples, and Jesus appeared to them.

Look with me again at verse 26. 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.

[ 29 : 50 ] Then Thomas answered, my Lord and my God. And Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me? blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

I think this account is very instructive for us because it reminds us that we must not reject people who do not believe.

believe. I mean, when you think about it, when you really think about it, I don't believe that we can fairly say that there has been a greater disbeliever in Jesus and his resurrection than Thomas that

we would have recorded in this particular way.

A person today who says, well, no, I don't believe in the resurrection, you wouldn't really hold that against the person as much as you would to Thomas because Thomas was there.

Thomas walked with Jesus, heard his predictions. Thomas had the opportunity to believe the eyewitness account of the disciples, his ten other disciples who saw the Lord.

[ 31 : 06 ] And Thomas said, no, unless I could touch him and handle him, I will not believe. And Thomas came around and Thomas believed.

And I think this should instruct us and encourage us to not write people off who do not believe. Some of our friends perhaps, some of our family members perhaps, who for whatever reason don't believe in the resurrection.

This should be reason for us to be more patient with them, to engage them, and to continue conversations with them. And no doubt that's what the other disciples did.

They didn't dismiss Thomas. They allowed him to be in the midst, even though he had told them, wouldn't believe it unless I can handle him, unless I can touch him. No doubt they prayed for him. And then there's no evidence as we consider this account that the Lord himself was harsh with Thomas. He simply invites Thomas to do what Thomas said he needed to do.

[ 32 : 09 ] what he must do in order to believe. He tells Thomas, come. Put your finger here. Put your hand here.

I notice Thomas' response again in verse 20, my Lord and my God. His response was one of utter belief. He didn't need to do what he said he would do.

He had to do. He didn't have to put his finger in the mark. He didn't have to put his hand in the Lord's side. And in his response, something happens for Thomas.

And the witness of Scripture tells us that Thomas didn't just get smart in a moment. Thomas didn't just catch his sense in a moment.

What the witness of Scripture teaches us is that the eyes of Thomas were open to who Jesus Christ really is. And we see that from the words that Thomas exclaims.

[ 33 : 13 ] When Thomas says, my Lord and my God, Thomas was recognizing Jesus to be God, our very God.

He was recognizing Jesus to have divine attributes that only God himself has. And this, brothers and sisters, is one of the clearest and simplest confessions of the deity of Christ that we have in the New Testament.

The word Lord is the equivalent of Yahweh in the Old Testament. And God, and joining them together, he recognizes the divine nature of Jesus Christ.

In that moment, God himself opened his eyes to see and to believe. Jesus said to Thomas, have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not yet seen, not seen, and have yet believed. The Apostle Peter echoes these words later when he writes in 1 Peter 1, 8 through 9.

[ 34 : 25 ] He writes, 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 filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Jesus said, those who don't see and believe are blessed. this morning, we can't see. We weren't there to see the way Thomas would have seen.

But Jesus predicts in these words that there would be those who would be able to believe even though they haven't seen. It's a marvelous thing what he predicts by saying that when he says blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Every single one of us who believes this morning was in view of those words of Jesus Christ when he said you're blessed that you have not seen and you are able to believe.

And why are we blessed? Why are those of us who are able to see blessed? We're blessed because the only way to truly believe believe.

[ 35 : 51 ] Whether like Thomas who saw or like others like us who would not have seen. The only way to see either way and to believe is because of divine intervention.

Because of the mercy of God to open our eyes to enable us to see and to give us faith to believe in Jesus Christ Christ and who he is.

Left to ourselves we would be like Thomas or worse than Thomas. And we wouldn't believe. But Jesus tells us of the blessedness of this reality that there would be those who have not seen the

risen Christ but will believe in the risen Christ.

And if you believe this morning you are counted among the company of those who are blessed. We read in John 20 verses 30 and 31. 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.

[ 37 : 28 ] In these two verses this is John's purpose statement for his gospel. He tells us ultimately the reason he was writing.

He wasn't writing just to give us some historical information. He was writing so that what was written would enable us to believe and that through believing we would have eternal life.

When Thomas was confronted with the risen Christ when he saw the risen Christ and recognized him for who he was he said my Lord and my God. The purpose of John's gospel the purpose of what we have read this morning is to bring us all to that conviction.

A heartfelt conviction where we can see the Lord and say my Lord and my God. God. It's not just to enable us to adopt some good habits like attending church.

But no, it is to enable us to have a transformed life based on seeing the Lord as he really is. if you've lived long enough, I think you would know that we all have different constitutions.

[ 38 : 54 ] We're different. And some of us, by nature, tend to doubt more easily than others.

And then some of us, by experience, we've come to be doubtful. And sometimes we may doubt and sometimes we may wonder about the resurrection and this could easily lead to despair.

And that's you this morning. I say to you, don't despair. You can change, just like Thomas. Christian tradition tells us that Thomas was truly transformed and he became a great missionary to India.

where he died as a martyr. Thomas died for that which he initially refused to believe. Thomas died in the hope of a resurrection that he initially refused to believe concerning Christ.

And may all of us this morning who have trusted in Christ, however we die, may we die well and may we die in certain hope of a future resurrection.

[ 40 : 18 ] I trust that you're able to see as we consider this account of Thomas' unbelief and then his eventual belief that really it does take more than the witness of others to cause us to believe the reality of Jesus Christ risen as Savior and Lord.

And I hope you're able to see that the only way that that can translate into saving faith is through God himself because only God can save, only God can move on a hardened heart and bring us to accept the truths of Scripture and believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners.

The one who came into the world who gave his life as a ransom for many, only God can move on the hardened heart and cause us to believe.

And so if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior and maybe things about the resurrection and just swirling around in your head and you're back and forth on it, you're not really sure where you stand on it.

You need God's help to bring you to the place where Thomas came, where he was able to say with heartfelt conviction, my Lord and my God, and he did not need to handle the risen Christ.

[ 41 : 47 ] He needed no further evidence that Christ had been risen from the dead. Well, we're going to dismiss shortly and if that's you this morning and maybe you have questions about the message or about other aspects of Christianity and if you'd like someone to talk to or to pray with, I'd be happy to make myself available to do that.

So let's just close in prayer with the worship team return. chewing