

The Blessing of Belief

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[0 : 00] Well, it will be good if you can turn to John 20, 24-31, which was read a little while ago because we had some baptisms in between.

And I want to assure Bethan Thomas that we did not purposely assign him the passage on doubting Thomas. But it's very good that he read so well, and with belief it sounded like.

But I also want to say how wonderful it is to have the families of those who are being baptized and their friends, and of course those who have been baptized as well.

It's a marvelous thing to see this age range of people coming to receive this sign of what Jesus has done for us. It is a real family event, as Neil said to us at the beginning of the service.

It's God calls all people to himself through the good news of Jesus Christ, and God is doing a powerful work in our church and in the world as well.

[1 : 02] And we should be thankful for that and be encouraged in our own faith. When I met with all the baptized, we always talk about what baptism means.

We talk a bit about what Jesus has done for them, that baptism talks about. And we mention why water is used. And it's a very good thing to ask that question.

Why do we use water in baptism? And there's three reasons, really. First, it's a sign of death. And some of us might not think of that at baptism, because there's not much.

They're not actually going underwater, unfortunately. We don't have a pool up front, but it is a sign of drowning, of dying to sin, to an old way of life, a life that was separated from God.

And secondly, it's a sign of cleansing as well. It is a sign of Jesus' forgiveness of our sins that cleanses us from unrighteousness.

[2 : 00] And then finally, it is a sign of life. And this is what we're going to talk about this morning. It is about the new life with Jesus. It is a life that begins when you believe.

It's a life where you have been freed by Jesus' forgiveness to live for God forever and to know him as your heavenly father. It is one in which we are Christ's own forever.

And everything changes with that new life. And the people who are standing there will be testament to that fact, testimony to that fact. Everything changes.

Almost five years ago, Catherine and I had our first baby. And when people asked us when Alexander was first born how things are going for us, the first thing that came to mind for us was that everything's changed.

Our life has been turned upside down. It's all different. Our points of reference are different. You put this little person before yourself.

[3 : 06] Your hopes and your dreams are different. Your many priorities are different. The frequency of dinner and a movie out are different. Your sleep patterns are different.

Things are more difficult in some ways. But there is this incredibly great joy at the change that has taken place.

And the new life in Christ is the same. Your points of reference change. You recognize that no longer am I in charge of my life, but Jesus Christ is.

Your life is in his hands. He gives you a very different hope. It is a living hope that is certain, kept in heaven as an inheritance for you.

The great description of this life is in Romans 6. And I always share this with the people being baptized. And that is that you consider yourself in this life to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 10] That's how different the new life is. And in our baptisms this morning, we saw that Jesus gives this life freely to all who believe in him. No matter what their background.

No matter what their age. We cannot earn this life. We can't earn God's love. That's what Chris was talking about in his testimony. Jesus loved us and gave himself for us while we were enemies of God.

And he died for us. So baptism is a sign that God gives us every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. And we do not contribute a thing.

That's what the Bible reading from John is all about. Jesus has revealed himself as the authority over death and over sin. And he has authority to give life.

And he calls Thomas, who has rejected this thought, to believe. Today we're beginning a new sermon series that's going to take place over the summer.

[5 : 14] And it's going to be in the Gospel of John. There are going to be seven signs that we're going to look at of Jesus. Signs that point to who he is. The feeding of 5,000.

Turning water into wine. Healing those who are sick and those who have died. And for Jesus himself rising from the dead forever. Now, there's a bit of a sobering thought here in that it means that there are only seven Sundays left in the summer after today.

And you may ask, why are you introducing that sermon series in the book of John by going to the very end of the book of John? Well, it's because in this account of Thomas, we see the theme of the whole Gospel laid out to us really clearly.

In a very straightforward way, John says, the reason I wrote this Gospel is that so you might believe. And that in believing that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, you will have life in his name.

And so I want to look briefly at Thomas here. Jesus has appeared to the ten of the eleven disciples on the evening of the Sunday that he rose from the dead. And if you look up at verse 20 of John chapter 20.

[6 : 34] And by the way, if you're having trouble finding that, it's on page 110 in the back part of this pew Bible. And in verse 20, it says that when Jesus had said this, he showed the disciples his hands and his side.

And the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. That translation is an understatement. They were absolutely overjoyed. Their world was turned upside down.

Life from that point on is completely different. Now, unfortunately for Thomas, he was not there. And we don't know why.

For some reason, he isolated himself from the community. It's a good reason for us to keep going to church, by the way. We might actually miss something. Thomas missed something here.

But in verse 25, what we do know is that during the week, the disciples told Thomas, we have seen the Lord. Now, Thomas didn't exactly give that statement an enthusiastic response.

[7 : 41] He said, in verse 25, Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not, and it's very emphatic.

You see, I will not ever believe. It's a hard response. It's a hard response. And it probably was because of his grief of coming to grips with the execution of Jesus Christ.

But there is, in his mind, a real determination not to believe ten of his closest friends, who are completely trustworthy in every other way.

And he's strongly implying that their belief is wishful thinking. It's something to make them feel better. And he's not going to have any part of it. And then what he does is he sets impossible conditions in order for him to believe.

And so really what Thomas gives us is a picture of the nature of unbelief. Because as with Thomas, unbelief happens for very real, personal reasons.

[8 : 45] Sometimes for tragic reasons. Faith in a living Jesus does not make sense. It is wishful thinking for many people. They can't believe the eyewitnesses who wrote the Bible.

And many will say with Thomas that all their questions need to be answered first before I will believe. They need absolute proof that Jesus rose from the dead and he is God.

And for many in Vancouver, what Jesus is and who Jesus is is nothing more than a great teacher and leader. And you know, that's exactly what Thomas is left with in his unbelief right now.

That Jesus was a great teacher and leader. And it is over. But eight days later, Thomas' life is turned upside down by belief.

So look at verse 26. It says there, the disciples were again in that same house and Thomas, thankfully, was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them.

[9 : 50] And what John is emphasizing here is that Jesus' body is different. Just as it passed through the grave cloths, it passes through walls and doors.

And he says to them in verse 26, peace be with you, as he stands among them. And then immediately we see that he turned to Jesus, to Thomas.

And we know that the purpose of the visit is to see Thomas and he alone, because immediately he does this. And he says to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side.

Do not be faithless, but believing. We've just heard something about unbelief. Well, here we see the wonder of belief.

Because Jesus is showing us that belief is very personal. God actually comes to people. As Chris mentioned, those who seek God will find him.

[10 : 53] And he singles out Thomas. He says, Thomas, I want you to put your finger here and see. And there is this direct conversation where he is being singled out and Jesus is showing himself to him.

God deals with us very personally when it comes to belief. And secondly, Jesus is showing us the content of faith. He is telling Thomas and us, as he is pointing to his own scars, that you must have faith in Jesus as the risen Lord, the giver of life, who still has the scars of his atoning sacrifice for sin, his atoning death.

The scars that Jesus has tells us that he died as a sacrifice for our sins, that he died in our place, and that he literally and bodily rose from the dead.

These scars that Jesus has are marks of love for us. It is marks of his forgiveness of us and his victory over sin and death. His scars are his glory.

And you may not know this, but when we see Jesus one day, what this passage is telling us is that we will see Jesus in glory, and that glorious Jesus will have the scars of the crucifixion on him.

[12 : 17] And we will know in looking at those scars that that is the reason why we are in heaven. That is the content of belief. It is in the one who died for us as an atoning sacrifice.

And that is the gift of eternal life that comes through it. Now, immediately, when Jesus shows himself to Thomas, he gives him a challenge. He says, Do not be faithless, but be believing. And that is the choice that everyone has when they see the risen Jesus. When you are reading through the book of Mark, or John, or wherever it is, or you hear about the risen Jesus, every person is faced with a choice.

Will you be faithless, or will you put your trust and faith in this crucified and risen Lord? And that is a call not only to Thomas, but to the whole world and every generation.

Jesus personally calls every person to renounce unbelief as we saw in the baptism, and instead trust that Jesus is the risen King who died for them.

[13 : 27] Now, in this account, we do not know whether Thomas actually went over to Jesus and put his finger in the scars of Jesus. He probably didn't.

I mean, he probably was so floored by what he was seeing, and the fact that Jesus knew his conditions for belief before he even told him, that he answered immediately this incredible thing that he says.

It's in verse 28. Thomas' answer is full of faith. In fact, this verse, 28, is the high point of the Gospel of John. It defines the Gospel of John.

It defines what faith is. It's a marvelous thing. It's a confession that's the foundation of Christianity. Very simply and powerfully, Thomas answers Jesus by saying, my Lord and my God.

That is what all Christians believe. That is the statement of great humility, and it is a statement of somebody who has a permanent living relationship with the ruler of the universe.

[14 : 32] That he is their heavenly Father who has saved them. And there are millions who are gathered today and throughout the week, throughout the world, who every day say with awe to Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God.

And that cuts across every culture, every age, every geographical location. That statement of faith, my Lord and my God. It is a living faith.

And this is what Kim and Chris and Lauren and Emma, as well as Oliver's parents, were saying today in their baptism. And Oliver will grow up knowing this confession that Jesus is his Lord and his God.

And we pray that this will be his faith as well. This is a living faith that changes the lives of those who are baptized forever. forever.

And we witnessed the sign of that this morning. You know what happened in Thomas' life as well. What a marvelous, incredible change that has taken place from one who is hardened to the risen Jesus to one who gives the great confession of faith.

[15 : 41] And in the book of Acts, we see Thomas, not named, but with all the disciples, all of these eleven, together being involved in the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

Right in the middle of things. And there's a pretty reliable history and accounts that Thomas may have gone as far as India and died for his faith there.

Certainly there's a very ancient church with his name on it in India. He became a worldwide evangelist. What a change because of belief that Jesus gives.

And then in verse 29, a wonderful thing happens. Jesus brings you and I into the conversation with Thomas. He says to Thomas, Have you believed because you have seen me?

And here's us. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. And you see why this is us. All of us gathered here today have a faith that does not come by what is seen, but from what we hear and what we read of the eyewitnesses, which is what the Bible is.

[16 : 50] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. We are thankful today for John and for Thomas because it's on the basis of their eyewitness that we hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says that God will bless our hearing. He will bless our reading of his word by the Holy Spirit. And that Holy Spirit will give us faith in him.

In fact, if you talk to any of those who are baptized today, it is because of hearing the word of God, whether it's at Sunday school or through youth ministry or through Christianity Explored or through friends or through the sermons, they have heard the word of life.

And God has given to them faith. He has blessed them who have not seen with faith. This is the gift of God. And that's why John writes the purpose statement in verse 31.

He says at the beginning of verse 30, Therefore, Jesus did many other signs in this book that were not written, but these signs, verse 31, are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

[18 : 09] You see what John is saying here? He says, the purpose of this book is not academic. It is to bring people to a living faith. And the sign that tells who Jesus is, the signs that we're going to talk about all summer reveal who Jesus is.

They reveal God's own heart and his will. Jesus does them so people will believe that he is the Christ, which means the one who's sent by God, the anointed one, and that he is the Son of God, which in John means that he is one with God, that he is intimate with God.

He's actually come from God and is God. God sent his one and only Son. But the point of John is not so that you have that right belief.

That's not the end of it. At the end of verse 31 it says, that believing you may have life in his name. And this is how we end our sermon today because belief in Jesus is the way to life.

This is what John is saying. And you see his great and deep desire is that people would have life in his name. You know that today the meanings of names are not that important.

[19 : 23] When we named our children we had, you know, there was books with 10,000 names and you picked one that looked nice and you hope it doesn't have a bad meaning attached to it. But in the ancient world a name was incredibly important by what it said about the person.

The name said something about the whole personality of that one. Who the person is. And John is saying that as you believe Jesus will define your life.

He will save you so that you are alive to God. Without him we can have no spiritual life. And it is through Jesus and what he has done, what he is all about in his name that we have life.

And this is a great place for us to end because our mission as a church and as individual Christians is that we earnestly desire that people will have life in Jesus' name.

We had, on Tuesday, we had our monthly parish prayer night. And Ruth Flanagan shared with us Heather Bellamy's ministry.

[20 : 31] And Heather Bellamy is in a Muslim country. She is in Afghanistan. And she plants gardens. And what she does is she actually makes a better life for people so that they are eating fresh food.

Food that is good for them. But that is not the primary reason she is there. Her great hope, she says, is so that people will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that believing in him they might have life in his name. Real life that never ends. And this is what we are about as well.

The Bible says that life, eternal life with Jesus begins when one believes. And it grows no matter how difficult or how wonderful your life appears to be. Whether you are living in Afghanistan, whether you are living in Canada, 2 Corinthians 4 tells us that though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

This is the life of Christ. And I know that many of you have experienced how God renews your life through Jesus' name. That even in the dark times of grief or sickness or pain or broken or strained relationships, God actually strengthens his people through all the assaults of the world and the flesh and the devil as we prayed in the baptism service.

[21 : 56] He saves us through it. His life grows within us. And the life is wonderfully described and I wonder if you'd turn to your parish life notes and we're going to end the sermon with this verse.

But in the front cover there I've written in the letter at the very end a verse from 1 Peter 1 8-9. That verse describes the new life we have in Jesus Christ.

And it very much talks about what Thomas has experienced in coming to faith in the risen Lord. And I wonder if you'd say that verse with me. Though you have not seen Jesus Christ 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.

may we rejoice at the inexpressible and wonderful gift of life that is in Christ's name that he has given us through belief in the risen Lord Jesus.

[23 : 07] Amen. Amen.