

Jesus: the Real Life

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[0 : 00] If you would please keep your Bibles open to that passage from John chapter 20 and page 110. You're going to be looking at this very well-known and famous story about Doubting Thomas, in which the risen Lord Jesus appears to the disciples, and Thomas doesn't want to have a lot to do with it.

But actually, it's not really about Thomas at all. It's about Jesus. It's about the reality of who Jesus is. The Jesus of Easter.

And at the heart of it all is this picture of Jesus standing before Thomas. The resurrected, glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

And then Thomas, with that statement that is as earth-shattering as it is simple. My Lord and my God. You know, there are a bewildering array of pictures and understandings of Jesus to which people hold on to.

For many, Jesus is little more than the babe of Christmas. For others, a great moral teacher. Often, Jesus is a great historical figure from the past, but little more than just a stained glass window to whom we pay homage now and again.

[1 : 16] But in this reading from John chapter 20, we reach a climax in the biblical picture of who Jesus is. We reach a high watermark in the biblical witness to the reality of Jesus.

The genuine article. The real Jesus. And the words of Thomas provide for us the most genuine, the most real, the most life-giving response to Him.

My Lord and my God. And what I want to do this morning, very quickly, is look at the picture of who Jesus is and consider how it is we might respond to Him in our own lives.

And the first thing I want to look at is the real Jesus. And then I want to look at the responses of Thomas. The me response and the Christ response. But first of all, the real Jesus.

And I'm following here in chapter 20 and verse 25. The first thing you need to note is which Jesus is in view here. Because as I said, there are such a startling array of views of Jesus floating around.

[2 : 32] Many people treat Jesus as little more than a swear word. Some regard Him as a great moral teacher along the lines of Muhammad or Gandhi. For many today, the teachings of Jesus form a nucleus, a philosophy of life involving brotherly love, tolerance, acceptance of others.

But at the heart of the presentation of Jesus here is in verse 25, the words of the disciples to Thomas. We have seen the Lord. Now that is important because if that is true, it means that Jesus is much more than a great moral teacher.

It means that Jesus is someone who demands the attention of our hearts. For in John chapter 19, Jesus was crucified. His body was taken down from the cross quite dead.

It was anointed and wrapped in a shroud and buried in a tomb. But in chapter 20, Jesus appears. First of all, to Mary Magdalene in verse 18.

She says, I have seen the Lord. And then Jesus appears to a group of the disciples in verse 19 and following. But Thomas is absent.

[3 : 47] And now Thomas comes on the scene. Verse 25. And the disciples who had encountered Jesus say, We have seen the Lord. They are talking about Jesus after His crucifixion and death.

They have seen Him. He is alive. He is present. He is tangible. This is not a ghost. Not a hallucination. This is not some vision or mass hysteria.

It is the risen Lord Jesus Christ standing amongst them. And that is the biblical New Testament view of Jesus. That is the teaching of the apostles about Jesus.

And it means that Jesus is much more than a great moral leader. He is not Muhammad or Gandhi. They both died. And neither of them provided a sure way to salvation.

It means you can't just reduce Jesus to His teachings alone. The teachings of Jesus are important. But they are not the focus of His mission.

[4 : 47] In the Gospels, the reason Jesus came, and He says it over and over again, is to die on a cross and so win salvation for the human race.

In John chapter 3, Jesus says, The Son of Man, talking about Himself, must be lifted up or crucified. So that whoever believes in Him, may have eternal life.

You see, that's the work Jesus came to do. Make no mistake about it. Any other understanding of Jesus, any other teaching about Jesus, is not complete. It's not the real Jesus.

And when the disciples say to Thomas, We have seen the Lord. See, they're preaching the Gospel to Him. They're preaching the good news to Him. They're saying He's done it.

He's done what He set out to do. He has won the victory. It is completed. That is the Christian Gospel which we teach today. That is the framework within which we need to understand Jesus.

[5 : 50] Anything less is not the real Jesus. Anything less is the departure from what Jesus taught about Himself, and what the disciples taught.

You see, it's what we call the apostolic witness, or the apostolic teaching. They were with Jesus. They witnessed Him. They experienced Him alive after His crucifixion.

And they taught the church, and we still reside in that teaching today. And I suggest that some of you here may need today to reconsider your view of Jesus in light of the biblical picture of Jesus.

It's very easy. I think many people pick up on convenient aspects of Jesus and leave the truly challenging parts behind. It's quite convenient to see Jesus as little more than a stained glass window, someone to whom we pay homage once or twice a year.

It's quite convenient to see Jesus as a great moral teacher. I live a moral life. I live a life according to Christian standards and principles. I'm okay. But the biblical view of Jesus is not of a great moral teacher.

[7 : 03] The biblical view is of the divine Son of God, whose purpose it was to die on our behalf and win salvation, who rose again from the dead and defeated the power of sin and death over us.

In Acts chapter 2, in the very first Christian sermon, Peter says this, You crucified Jesus! But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death.

And that is the biblical view of Jesus. And that is the Jesus on view here, discussing with the disciples and with Thomas in chapter 20.

So we've seen now, we've established who the Jesus we're talking about is here. And now I want to consider how it is you might respond to that Jesus. And Thomas gives us a couple of options.

One is a me response, and the other is a Christ response. Look first of all at the me response. This is again verse 25 and following.

[8 : 04] The disciples say to Thomas, We have seen the Lord. And Thomas replies, verse 25, Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the marks of the nails and place my hands in his side, I will not believe.

Now this is quite important because what Thomas is actually saying is that without further evidence or proof to meet his satisfaction, he will not believe the good news.

He will not believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. He will not believe that the work that Jesus set out to do has been accomplished. And actually I think, Thomas, that's really understandable because, of course, he'd been with Jesus, journeyed with him, seen him crucified.

He must have been shattered by the events of the crucifixion. And this is just that much harder for him to believe. He just can't believe it. He can't do it. Now, of course, this is not to say that he didn't believe in Jesus because, of course, he did.

Because he was with Jesus. He heard the teaching. He saw the miracles. Yes, he believed in Jesus. But his faith in Jesus could not make this final leap to embrace the good news, to accept the salvation that Jesus offers.

[9 : 23] His eyes were not yet opened. There's a sense in the original, in the Greek, of Thomas leaning away from faith in Jesus. Yeah, he believes in Jesus, but he's not reaching forward to receive the good news, the reality of who Jesus is.

I think a lot of us are like that. We believe in Jesus. He existed. But which way are you leaning? Are you leaning away from faith in him or towards?

And if you look at what Thomas says here, the problem is with perspective. His is a me response. He needs to have his criteria for faith met. He needs to have proof.

That's understandable again. He wants something tangible. But ultimately, he has himself at the center. He needs to have Jesus come and prove himself to his satisfaction.

And I think many of us are like that. I think for a lot of us, there has to be a pretty dramatic development before you're going to take Jesus seriously. For example, you know we're busy people.

[10:26] You may be busy. I'm just too busy to think about this right now. I can't go to church. Work is so busy. I have so much going on. I can't think about that right now. Well, it's true.

You know, we are very busy people. There is a lot going on. My life became rather busier in the last couple of weeks with the onset of kindergarten, soccer, and swimming lessons. It's been a new phase in our lives, and I'm glad to say we're still speaking to each other.

And I'm also glad to say I haven't lost a child yet. And it's true, you know, we are busy people. But I think we mask a profound indifference to Jesus that really is a rejection of Him behind this busyness.

What does Jesus have to do to get your attention that He has not already done? What is it that would make you stop and consider the reality of who Jesus is and what it is He offers you? What? You want Him to ride up in your house on a horse and carriage? What more can He do? Or you say, Christians are all hypocrites.

[11:35] I don't have time for church right now because Christians are hypocrites. Look at them. Can't even get along. Well, maybe that's true. You know, we may be hypocrites, certainly I know people of my acquaintance think I'm stark raving mad.

Certainly at St. John's I would say we are sinners. We are. But we're not the Gospel. Jesus Christ is. It is He who offers you salvation.

It is He who offers you a relationship with God. And so, what you're doing is setting up your own criteria for faith in Jesus Christ. Criteria that you assume will never be met. But don't look at us. Look at Jesus. We have the biblical witness to Jesus. Look at Him. Or maybe, I would believe in God if He would just show up and prove Himself. That would be enough for me.

If God could prove Himself to me right here and now, then I'll follow Him. I'll become a Christian and start going to church. That's essentially what Thomas said, isn't it? I want proof. I want to know.

[12:35] But what you may not understand is that Jesus actually has done that. He has shown up. In the beginning of John's Gospel, it says, we have seen His glory.

He's here. At the end of John's Gospel, it says, these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name.

We have the biblical witness. Read the New Testament. What more do you want Jesus to do than die on the cross? What more can He do for you before you will take Him seriously?

See, in the end, like Thomas here, what you want Jesus to do, if you think about Him at all, is come to grips with you before you will come to grips with Him. But we have the biblical witness.

We have the real Lord Jesus Christ. He is here, standing before you with an offer of eternal life and a relationship with God. It's for you.

[13:40] Second, though, the Christ response. That's verses 26 and following. For some eight days later, the disciples are gathered together again with the door shut. Thomas is amongst them. And yet we see Jesus was able to come and stand amongst them.

Please notice the detail here on both the supernaturalness of Jesus but also His physicality. He stands among them. He is present to them. This is not a myth.

This is not a mass hallucination or wishful thinking. And Jesus comes and He addresses Thomas directly and invites him to have His requirements for faith met by touching him, touching his wounds.

And He calls him to faith. Do not be faithless, but believing. The call He places in every one of our lives. Do not be faithless, but believing.

And the text suggests that Thomas needed no further prompt. They repent of his lack of faith in Jesus and out of his mouth comes the most complete statement of faith in the reality of Jesus in John's Gospel or anywhere.

[14:46] Verse 28, Thomas responds, My Lord and my God. That is true. That is a complete statement of faith in the reality of who Jesus is.

My Lord and my God. And that's who Jesus needs to be for you. Your Lord and your God. And then Jesus goes on in verse 29, Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Now just look at that. For out of the mouth of the doubter comes true faith. This statement is utterly true.

My Lord and my God. This is who Jesus is. I want you to freeze this picture in your mind of Jesus standing before Him and Thomas saying, My Lord and my God.

Of the resurrected Jesus standing, standing there with the offer of the good news, the offer of salvation, and Thomas, my Lord and my God.

[15:52] For that moment of dedication, that picture of Thomas in relation to Jesus, that is conversion. That is how Christian faith comes to you. For that is the moment when Thomas accepted the Gospel.

And that's what it needs to look like for you and for me. Getting ourselves in right relationship to Jesus. The real, genuine, biblical Jesus.

Your Lord and your God. That's the Christ response. Can you say that? It's the moment which comes in your life when confronted with the true picture of Jesus.

You stop. You get yourself out of the center of the perspective and you respond. You consider Jesus for who He is and you say, yes.

I think many of us live our lives with Jesus kept firmly out in left field. We allow ourselves to be kept very busy. We believe half-truths about Jesus which enable us to keep Him out of the daily round of our lives.

[17:00] But I want you to keep this picture in your mind of the resurrected Jesus standing before Thomas and Thomas responding, my Lord and my God.

That is Christian faith. That is salvation. That is what it needs to look like in your life. That is what you need to do to become a Christian and to know everlasting life.

Jesus stands before you with the offer of salvation in His name. He offers you a relationship with Him. The reality is that Jesus is alive and He is the center of God's salvation.

He is the Lord of the universe. He is unprecedented and without parallel and every human being will need to come to terms with Him. The Christ response is when you do that.

When you come to grips with Jesus. You say, oh, I believe in God. I am doing okay. But I need to tell you that belief in God apart from Jesus Christ is not adequate.

[18:07] For as we see in the story here and in the scriptures, salvation comes through belief in Jesus Christ. He says, blessed are you who believe. And you see, it is no different today as it was then when Jesus says, blessed are you who have not seen yet believe.

salvation comes to your life through belief in Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter, verse 8, the apostle Peter, writing to a group of Christians, says this, without having seen Jesus, you love Him.

Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. And the outcome of your faith is the salvation of your souls.

Jesus. And as I said from John chapter 3, Jesus says, the Son of Man must be lifted up, crucified, so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

And He goes on, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him may not perish, but have eternal life.

[19:17] And I suggest to you that you cannot avoid Jesus forever. You cannot avoid responding to Him one way or another.

And yet, He stands before you right now with an offer of salvation and of a relationship with Him. My Lord and my God.

That's salvation. I was trying to think of a fancy way of concluding, but I think Thomas has given that to us. My Lord and my God.

Those words are true. They are the words of eternal life. And those words are for you to say. Amen.