

John 20:19-29 “While You Were Out”

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Preacher: Derrick Harris

- [0 : 0 0] Amen. Thank you all. That's such a great tune.
- And it's perfect to set up the passage we get to talk about today where we get to hear from Doubting Thomas. He eventually says, my Lord and my God.
- He notices the God of wonders beyond our galaxy, the Holy One. Can I pray for us?
- God of wonders beyond our galaxy, we give you praise. You are holy. Would you speak through your spirit right now? By your word I pray in Christ's name. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. So, I read this article recently that someone sent to me kind of as a joke. And it was pretty out there.
- [1 : 0 5] So, there's a scientist who claims that the Great Pyramid of Giza is actually Mount Zion from the Bible. And that the Ark of the Covenant and even Jesus' bones are kept behind a chamber in there.
- And basically saying, right, if that's true, the resurrection never happened, right? If we have Jesus' bones. And, I mean, it works really hard to make the case in the article.
- And at first, at first I laughed, honestly. And I thought to myself, honest first thoughts, well, if that's true, then who, the bigger question is who's been answering my prayers?
- Because they're getting answered. So, I need to know more about that. But then just for a moment, when I thought about it, just for like a split little millisecond, I felt it.
- What if? What if Jesus really didn't raise from the dead? Right? That doubt didn't last long. But it was there.
- [2 : 1 2] This little tiny whisper of doubt. It's that small voice that just sneaks in through the back door of your soul sometimes and says, what if this isn't true? Okay?
- Doubt is something that you may have dealt with. Doubt is defined as a feeling of uncertainty. A lack of conviction.
- Sometimes it can be serious. Sometimes it can be silly. I'll give you an example. Pretty much by the time I leave my house and get to the stop sign, I doubt whether or not I close the garage door about four to five times a week.
- And so, I've installed a camera so that when I get to the stop sign, I will literally look at it like, you did not forget to do that. Maybe it's whether or not you wash your hair.
- Maybe it's not a problem. Someone told me, one of our elders, well, if you move the shampoo, it actually will help you remember you did wash your hair. Me, sometimes throughout the day, I might be like, did I put on deodorant this morning?
- [3 : 1 9] I think I did. But I doubt whether or not I did. But doubt doesn't always really pop into our lives in these predictable ways. Sometimes it will just sit with you too.
- Like at a stoplight. Or in the middle of a work day. Or a school day. Or while you're folding laundry. Or maybe you're going to take a test. You're listening to a teacher teach.
- Am I doing any of this right? God, are you here? Are you close? Do you care? I remember feeling that kind of doubt before I went on a mission trip to Havana, Cuba.

Our church had gone many times before. This was when I was serving in Washington, D.C. I was a young lad. There were over a thousand people that had become Christians on these trips. The Lord is really doing a movement in Cuba.

And I just knew in my gut that I was going to be the guy that messed it all up. And I told myself, you're going to mess this up. I doubt it. This will be the one where nothing happens because you're on that trip.

[4 : 26] And you know what actually happened? I'll tell you in a little bit. But first let's read one of the most famous stories of doubt ever written. It's from the book of John, chapter 20.

Let's read it all together for starters. Well, you don't have to read it out loud. I'll read it. Read along.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, 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. And then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here and see my hands.

[6 : 00] And put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas answered him, 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. This is an amazing passage. But just for starters, can you just imagine how Thomas must have felt?

Think about it. He wasn't there and he heard about it. He was the worst day.

Imagine you're someone like me. And you were invited to the staff lunch in the conference room at the church with Will. And you can work with him. You know that, right?

We have jobs available to work with Will. So I can't make church lunch that day. Staff lunch. For whatever reason. And so when I get back, I say, Hey, how was lunch today?

[7 : 08] And somebody says, Oh, by the way, while you were out, the resurrected Jesus showed up. He just came right through the locked doors. He didn't have an entry card or anything.

And he came to the middle of the room and he showed us his wounds in his hands and his side. And he talked to us. And then he went. And he gave us the Holy Spirit.

And he said he's sending us out. And after all that, it was pretty cool, Derek. It was the best lunch ever. But we really missed you. I mean, how would you feel?

Right? I know how I would feel. I would be mad as fire. I would be sad. I would start to question, Does God not care about me?

Why hasn't he appeared to me? There must be something wrong with me. Perhaps I would panic a little bit. I'd probably get a little bit anxious. Well, notice the beginning of the passage here, right?

[8 : 06] It says that the disciples, they were gathered in fear. They were anxious. Why were they anxious? Because before Jesus showed up, they knew, Hey, the Jews had taken out Jesus.

As it says, you're next. So they're scared. They think they're going to die. And they're afraid that they're going to get killed. So we don't know where Thomas is, though, at this time. But maybe he was in a similar position somewhere else.

Maybe he was scared as well. And then Jesus shows up and he shows them his wounds. Why do you think he shows them his wounds? Think about that for a second. Because sometimes wounds were shown in court as a legal proof.

But here it's not only proof that he's alive. But it's proof for them to know that, oh, this is really Jesus. This isn't somebody else coming in. This isn't somebody sneaking in who's going to try to kill you.

Do a trick-a-rooski on you. No, it's really Jesus. It's not a ghost. Not a different person. But the resurrected Jesus Christ. And so at their moment of fear, Jesus' presence shows up and changes everything.

[9 : 11] And it says in this passage that they were glad once they saw him. Literally, that means that they were in a state of happiness and well-being and rejoicing and joyful.

So imagine that. From the very beginning, we were made to know God like that. And we were made to walk with him in gladness.

But sin broke it all up. And then doubt started to slip in through all the cracks. So then Jesus does this most amazing thing here. He tells them that their existence has meaning.

And I hope you can take that as well. Your existence has meaning too. Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

So you know what's happening there? They're becoming apostles. Familiar with that word, apostles? We hear it a lot. They're being commissioned by Jesus.

[10 : 15] He's giving them his Holy Spirit. He's giving them his authority to tell people about how their sins are going to be forgiven. It can be translated, they have been forgiven.

So they will be sent out to proclaim that if you believe in Jesus, your sins have been forgiven. That makes them apostles. An apostle was a sent one, an apostello.

And to be an apostle meant two things. You were sent and commissioned by Jesus. And you actually saw the resurrected Jesus with your eyes. So the apostles, they were shown all the proof that you want.

They were taught all the things that you want to know. And they were given the power of the Holy Spirit. Why? So that others may believe and be forgiven.

So the disciples, they're locked in fear until Jesus shows up. But then he commissions them. He breathes on them his spirit, which echoes the breath of God from Genesis.

[11 : 22] And then he sends them out as witnesses. Jesus meets us in our fear before he sends us in faith. Okay?

Now you're going to see in verse 24 here, Thomas is called one of the 12. If he's one of the 12, and he hasn't seen the resurrected Jesus, and he hasn't been commissioned by him, and he hasn't been given the Holy Spirit because he didn't show up that day, then what does that mean?

He's not one of the 12 apostles right at that moment. So he would have been really, really upset. Think about that.

And how do we guard ourselves when we're upset sometimes? Maybe you dismiss it. Maybe you compartmentalize. Maybe you push it away. For me, I just try to guard.

And look at what Thomas does. In verses 24 and 25, it says, Right here, Thomas is laying down conditions for belief.

[12 : 51] You ever done that? You ever told God, I'll believe you when da-da-da-da? Well, you're not alone. I'm going to act like this never happened unless I see some proof.

I personally think what's going on with Thomas here is that he was trying to guard his heart. Okay? From being hurt further. Sure, he's doubting.

But I feel like he won't let himself go any further. He, imagine this, he loved Jesus so much. Imagine Mary Magdalene when she went to the tomb and was weeping. Their whole lives are gone.

I followed him. I gave my whole life to him. He's dead. I am not going to be hurt again. I will not be hurt again. Unless I see this, I will not believe.

Okay? He might be a little jealous too, right? Everybody else is talking about this thing. But I bet underneath it, he was hurt. This wasn't really a scientific skepticism.

[13 : 53] It was more of a sorrow, I think. He wasn't really testing Jesus more than he was aching. And verse 25 says that the disciples, they tell him what had happened. And that's a present progressive verb, which means they kept on telling him.

So he didn't really doubt that they saw something, but he didn't believe it was Jesus yet. And he threw down some conditions for that belief.

I think he locked some doors in his own heart. He was standing behind those doors in fear. There's a song that was made popular by Steve Winwood, but the lyrics are by this guy named Will Jennings.

And I think they capture so perfectly where Thomas may have been and maybe where you have been. When there's no one left to leave you, even you don't quite believe you, that's when nothing can deceive you.

That low moment where you're like, I got nothing else left, but I'll tell you what, nothing else is going to fool me because I got nothing else to go for here.

[14 : 57] I think he was kind of there. He loved Jesus so much, he just didn't know if he's still part of the story and he's scared. And I mean, imagine how he must have felt. Eight days of hearing about this from everybody.

And you think that just one year living in the fact that like your team lost the iron bowl is bad. Eight days. We saw Jesus. He was resurrected.

He gave us the Holy Spirit. Why don't you believe us? Why don't you believe us? Why don't you believe us? That's a tough place to be. And then it happens, right? Jesus shows up.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them and he said, peace be with you.

And 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. Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God.

[15 : 58] So Jesus shows up again in the same way. But this time, Thomas is there. See? He really is an apostle.

God really does care. It just wasn't on his timeline. God doesn't schedule appointments through Google. He shows up when and where he wants to and exactly how he's supposed to.

And this wasn't just about evidence. It was about God's presence. Jesus shows up in the very place where Thomas was hurting the most. And that means that doubt isn't a deal breaker.

It's a doorway. And Jesus answers not with an argument here but with his wounds. The truth of the resurrection. And if you doubt, that's also what you need to see.

Thomas' doubt didn't disqualify him. It brought him closer. Have you ever thought that your doubt disqualifies you from God's love? Oh, I doubted this week or I did this.

[17 : 08] God doesn't love me as much. Frederick Buechner says this, that doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving. And what does Jesus do when he shows up here?

He gives him peace. All right? What about the Holy Spirit? We know that in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit's going to come. Right? And they're going to receive it there. So he gives him peace though.

And he lets him know that he's been listening in the most special way. And how? He responds to Thomas' conditions. Every single one of them. He shows the proof to Thomas exactly as he had asked.

Hmm. Maybe God is there when I think he's not. Maybe he does love us those times when we think he doesn't.

Maybe he does hear us when we think he's far away and not listening. And then Jesus says, Do not disbelieve, but believe.

[18 : 16] Think about this for a minute. Who do you think he's telling him to believe? It's certainly not less than Jesus, right?

But if you really think about it, who did Thomas not believe for eight days? The apostles. The apostles. The apostles. His friends.

Their words. The ones who were given the proof. The ones who were taught all the things. The ones who saw everything. The ones who were taught all the things. The ones who were taught all the things.

The ones who were taught all the things. So how does Thomas respond to Jesus then? Verse 28. It actually doesn't say that he touched his wounds. And a lot of scholars say that they don't even think he did. He had the opportunity.

We don't really know. Right? But we do know that Thomas is the first person in this book to look at Jesus and address him directly as God. He bows down to him and he says, My Lord and my God.

[19 : 15] And I'm sure just like the apostles, he was glad when he saw Jesus. And then Jesus responds by saying something very interesting.

Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Who's he talking about here?

You and me and anyone who believes in Jesus after this point. And where do we hear about Jesus?

The apostles' words. And where are they recorded? In the Bible. Do you believe him? Are you doubting? When it seems like no one else can leave you.

Even you don't quite believe you. Maybe you're doubting, doubting, doubting. He calls us to believe the words of the apostles. To confront our doubts with the truth of the words.

[20 : 17] The truth of the resurrection. And if the resurrection is true, I don't know exactly how. But it's all going to be okay. It's all going to be okay. And it is true.

So to confront our doubts with the truth of the resurrection, we need someone else's words. The words that are recorded where? In the Bible. And when we doubt, God doesn't push us away.

He walks into the room and he gives us space and peace. And if you believe in Jesus, you have been given the gift of faith. Okay? It's not something you did on your own.

So the assurance of the things that he says are true are a gift from him. So when you doubt, that's also where you need to go. Back to the one who gave it to you to begin with. Because if you're in Christ, if you believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is in you.

He's the one who gave you that ability to believe in the first place. Because dead people don't get up. They have to be resurrected. They have to be brought to life. Right? And you're dead in your transgressions and sins until Jesus wakes you up and gives you the ability to believe in him.

[21 : 21] And that's where you go when you doubt too. And he welcomes it. And Christ is with you. Jesus, though, gave them sight so that we could have faith.

That's why 2 Corinthians 5, 7 says that we walk by faith, not by sight. So Paul had a similar experience.

Right? Think about it. He had to not see to be able to see Jesus. And Jesus let the apostles' eyes here confirm what our hearts are clinging to that we can't see.

And he says, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus calls us blessed. Blessed means happy. Blessed means glad.

And here's why it matters. Your doubt doesn't disqualify you. It might just be where Jesus meets you. Your friends who are doubting, they're not disqualified.

[22 : 21] Your family members who are doubting, they're not disqualified. Don't run away from this stuff. It might be the biggest doorway for Jesus to show up in your life and their life to give them his peace and his Holy Spirit.

Doubt is often a part of how we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, as Philippians 2, 12 says. It's often the very place that Jesus meets us with his unimaginable grace.

And that was true for Thomas. And Jesus didn't shame him. He showed him his wounds. And he gave him direction. God welcomes doubt, y'all.

He can handle your doubt. He can handle your messes. But then Jesus also looked ahead beyond Thomas to us. And he said, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Like, we haven't seen Jesus with our eyes. I don't think. But we have received the apostolic witness. And just like Thomas, we're invited to believe their words.

[23 : 24] Not just over eight days, but every day. Not just information, but the resurrected Son of God. God who was wounded for our sins and whose scars bear witness to the fact that if we look to him as our Savior, we are eternally forgiven.

Invited not just to believe in a moment, but in the Messiah who gave himself for us. He still shows us his wounds through the word, through the table.

Today, we'll get to take and eat. You get to see his wounds there as represented in tangible ways. He still calls you and me to trust, not what we see, but what they saw.

The cross, the scars, the resurrection. And in that way, their witness becomes our confidence in our times of doubt. So if you've ever doubted, take heart.

And know that Jesus is right there with you. And the God that showed them his scars is present with us in power. And he sends us out the same way to bear witness about that power.

[24 : 28] So if you're doubting today, you don't have to run away from it, okay? And you don't have to stay in it forever either. That's a whole other discussion. How do I know when I'm doubting too much? That's another discussion.

We can't get into all that today. But you can take your doubts to people here. But even more, you can take your doubts straight to Jesus. Straight to Jesus.

And when you don't think he's listening, he's right there. Just like he was with Thomas. So back to that mission trip in Cuba. There were so many people who wanted to become Christians that they would make appointments for you to come to your house and share the gospel.

So we had a translator. And we had an appointment to share the gospel with a young man. And when we got there, he wasn't home. But there was a man with no shirt on who was older and was scary looking who walked around like jaws.

And then there was another, his younger brother was there, the guy who wasn't there, watching TV. And he didn't really want to talk to us. So we just sat there waiting. And watching this awkward show about dolphins in the second floor of somebody's house in Havana, Cuba.

[25 : 39] And I'm like, this is it. This is that moment. Here we are, Derek. And I just prayed.

And then after a lot of awkward minutes there, the guy in there just turns off the TV, throws down the remote, and he looks over and he says, all right, I'll hear what you have to say.

And so we shared the gospel. And right there in that living room, he gave his life to Jesus. And then something more incredible happened. It was very unexpected.

He got up. He walked into the back of the house. He brings out these other people that are there. And guess what? His brother came home too. And we shared the gospel with them. And they want to know Jesus.

And to the best of my knowledge, they received Jesus too. Again, there's a language barrier. But they're so excited and they started giving me gifts. And they gave me this little Cuba cup that I still have today. And we're leaving and hugging.

[26 : 39] And everybody's excited. And there was gladness and joy because Jesus had showed up. And as I was leaving, I'm walking out and someone calls to me and they're speaking another language.

And I was like, what are they saying? The translator says, he wants to know if you'll come back and play him in a game of chess. Okay. Now, what you may not know is that that, I love chess.

And that was God's way of giving me a wink and saying, I have you right here, right now. Stop doubting. I'm the one who's working.

And he gave me this huge hug of saying, I mean, what are the chances of that? I mean, they're astronomical. Just trust me, Derek.

Just trust me. And that night, he showed up at church for the first time in his life. And I got to look at one of the Cuban believers and say, take care of him.

[27 : 43] I'll never see you again until heaven. He's your brother now. He was the one holding the Bible in the other picture. I think he figured that out.

So here's why I tell you that story. Jesus showed up in my doubts and they became a doorway for me to see him work. That's what he does. He walks into rooms of our lives where we're hiding in fear.

That's what he did for the disciples. That's what he did for Thomas. And that's what he's still doing today because that's who he is. Where do you need to see him today? You know, what locked doors are you hiding behind right now that you need to welcome him into?

Maybe it's that you need to bow to him for the first time and say, my Lord and my God. I don't know where you are. But he does. And your doubt doesn't disqualify you.

It became the doorway where he saw Jesus more clearly. Thomas did. And then Jesus looked beyond Thomas to you, which means it can become the doorway where you see Jesus more clearly. He gave the apostles sight so we could walk by faith.

[28 : 48] He gave them scars to see so that we can trust what they told. And one day that faith is going to turn into sight where we don't have to wonder. We don't have to wait.

And we get to see him just as he is. No more locked doors. No more trembling prayers. Now we see as in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face Jesus himself forever.

So when you're in that space where faith feels fragile and broken, where the door is locked, where your doubt's turning to more than just fear, maybe it's more than a whisper. It's just yelling at you. Jesus is already there. You just might not see him yet. He just might not see him yet.

He's there through his word, through his spirit, and through the witness of those who saw him with their own eyes and wrote it down for us. And he welcomes our doubt and he works in us through them.

[29 : 48] So I want to do something right now to close. If there's any doubt that you've been carrying, whatever it is, you have to say it out loud.

I'm just kidding. So I just had to. But any doubt that you have at all about your place in the story, anything at all, you know in your heart.

Let's take it to him right now. So I'm going to ask you to kind of bow your heads. Trust me for just a second or two. I'll guide us.

And let's go to Jesus with our doubts. Father, we come to you now. Just take a deep breath.

Breathe in. Pause at the top. Breathe out. I want you to listen to your breath.

[30 : 48] The Holy Spirit is the breath and the wind of God. When you hear yourself breathe, wherever you're afraid, imagine his Holy Spirit.

When you see the wind, imagine his Holy Spirit rushing over you. Now I want you to think of something peaceful.

Whatever the picture is that makes you feel peace. For me, it's looking at a beach. Just focus on that picture for a minute.

Now I want you to stay there. And I want you to hear Jesus' words. Peace be with you.

Peace be with you. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened. And I'll give you rest for your souls.

[31 : 51] My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Peace be with you. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed. We love you, Jesus.

May we rest in your grace. God bless you. God bless all of you in the name of Jesus. Lord Jesus, be with us in our doubts. And may we come to you with all of them.

Lay them at your feet. Feel the breath of your spirit. And hear the words of peace. Thank you, Lord. Bless these dear people. Bless us all by the power of your spirit in Christ's holy name.

Amen. Amen. We get a chance now to actually see his wounds in this meal.

[32 : 53] Father, I'm going to take a moment to just focus on this. Father, I pray that you would set apart these elements that we're about to use from their common use to their sacred holy purposes.

I pray that we would feel your presence. I pray that we would feel your presence. I pray that we would feel your presence. I pray that you would renew our spirits. We do these things in remembrance of you.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.