

Life in the King

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to be in church with you this morning. If you've just joined us, we have been working our way this year through John's Gospel and looking at the Christian faith in terms of it being reasonable, relevant, and it being good for us in this day and age. And so we're getting to that section in the last couple of weeks in that section of John's Gospel, which really is the centre, the whole building up of the main point of why Jesus came to live. There's a number of directions we could go on a message like this. I've got to say that passage in John's Gospel has to be one of my favourite.

As someone who likes to run, I think it's unique that John, talking about the resurrection of Jesus, he makes sure that four times in the first few verses, he makes it clear that he beat Peter to the tomb. And so for the rest of the next 2,000 years, everyone's going to know that John was a faster runner than Peter. I don't know why that's there, but he emphasises it. But we're not going to focus on that this morning. Maybe a sermon on humility might be useful. But each year, Easter time, which is what we're looking at around these central Easter events, mainstream newspapers across our country, publish an opinion piece on why it is that we're having this thing called a long weekend, an Easter long weekend. They try to either explain it or explain it away. The central events of Easter day, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death, they often tend to water it down to a sentimental level, if you like, a lesson about life beyond death or hardship or triumph over difficult circumstances, something like that, turned into something like a nice life lesson. And so I was surprised to read a couple of years ago in the Australian newspaper this in an opinion piece, which was not written by a

Christian. Easter provides hope because it shows us that death does not have the final victory. But this works for a person, helps them only if they understand something of the whole supernatural quality of human life. Modern Christians make a tremendous mistake if underplaying the essential supernatural claims of Christianity and of Jesus and the Christian tradition. It is understandable that modern Christians tend to emphasize Christianity's good works. It's hospitals, it's schools, it's shelters for the homeless. But if in truth, Christianity stripped of its supernatural claims is not just an attractive ethical system, it is literally nothing at all. Without its supernatural claims, it is at best delusional and really a system of lies. Nothing of lasting good can come from a system of lies.

As St. Paul says in Ephesians, if Christ is not risen, our preaching is useless, our faith is useless.

We are all, of all people, the most to be pitied. Christianity is a powerful good because it is true.

And if it's not true, it's not a power for anything. I may, I may, I'm pretty sure the guy wasn't a Christian who wrote that, but I'm prepared to be corrected.

[3 : 55] Because it's profoundly true what they've written. Very insightful. Christianity is not a powerful good unless it's true.

It is no power for anything unless it's true. And so the resurrection of Jesus raises two big questions for us.

Two big questions of Christianity. That is the truth question and the meaning question. The truth question is, you know, did it actually happen? And the meaning question, well, who cares if it did happen?

People will reject Christianity on both accounts. On the truth question and the meaning question. So both questions, the truth question and the so what question are important to address at the same time.

I'm going to do that fairly briefly. I want to say three things this morning. The truth question is a true.

The second one doesn't matter question. What's its relevance?

[4 : 59] And thirdly, what it might be to experience life, abundant life in King Jesus. So first of all, is it true? The great C.S. Lewis once wrote that in a world that was making rapid advancement like

ours in scientific knowledge, he said there was a danger of chronological snobbery.

Chronological snobbery is the assumption that people from generations past and particularly way past like around when Jesus was, they were just a bunch of gullible peasants who did not know how the world worked.

But this is not the picture that you get from John 20. Look at the first couple of verses with me. And so she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciples, the one whom Jesus loved.

That's John talking about himself again. And notice what she says here. They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him.

Now, Jesus had mentioned several times that he would come back to life after he was executed.

But Mary was in this moment not expecting an empty tomb.

[6 : 25] The first assumption she had with the stone rolled away, the first assumption was that the body of Jesus had been moved. It's the same in verse 13.

And the assumption was that the enemies of Jesus, most likely the Jewish leaders, had taken his body away. Even Peter and John, two of Jesus' key followers, did not automatically jump to the conclusion that Jesus had resurrected.

Verses 8 and 9, down a bit further. Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

The early followers of Jesus were not gullible people falling for any conspiracy theory that might come up.

The fact remains, what they were confronted with on that morning was a bodiless tomb. One of the great historical evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was that the tomb where the Romans and the Jews put Jesus was empty on the third day.

[7 : 56] It's historical fact. The enemies of Jesus, they themselves could not produce the body of Jesus. And if they could have produced the body of Jesus, they would have killed this thing called the Christian movement, dead in its tracks, within three days.

Overnight, it would have been done. So what's the possible explanations for the empty tomb?

Some suggest that Jesus didn't really die.

Put him in the dark tomb and he revived in the coolness of the tomb. He then moved the stone away by himself. The stone that took four burly soldiers to put into place.

I mean, that's just incomprehensible. But it's been a view that's been circulated for some time. It's certainly a view that doesn't come to grips with the horrible realities of crucifixion.

Nor the rigorous steps that Pilate and the leaders themselves took to make sure that he was dead.

And the further steps that they took to make sure that no one got in or out of the tomb.

[9 : 14] Others have suggested that the disciples themselves stole the body. Which means that if they did, the same disciples gave themselves over to death for what is nothing more than an April Fool's joke.

Again, incomprehensible. What we do know about these disciples is that they were utterly dejected.

They were terrified of losing their own lives after the crucifixion of Jesus.

They were hiding in a secluded room and were unwilling to believe the first reports that Jesus had risen from the dead. And yet within weeks, the same disciples, overflowed with joy and courage, suffered for the resurrected Jesus.

This little band of ordinary believers changed the course of human history. They and those who came to believe through them loved and served their enemies across the Roman Empire in such a way that within three centuries, the world was changed.

What happened to them? Their own explanation was that they had seen Jesus alive after he was dead. Now there is a heap more historical evidence than just that.

[11 : 00] But doubting the resurrection is not uncommon. It is a worldview changer. The resurrection of Jesus.

John 20 is in fact a worldview changer and a step too far for many despite its evidence. And if that's you, that's okay.

After all, the first person to doubt the resurrection of Jesus was one of his closest supporters.

Thomas, we read there in chapter 20, is the most famous of doubters.

We even have a saying in our culture for the skeptic. We call them doubting Thomas. I mean, the poor guy. He's never let it down. I mean, John's known as the runner and Thomas is known as the

doubter forever since then.

And so for those who are struggling to understand or accept the resurrection, we have to wonder if Thomas can help us here. Thomas was absent, we are told, when Jesus first appeared to his followers after he'd risen from the dead.

[12:06] Verse 24, Notice Thomas says there, Hands, Hands, Hands, Side, All the marks of Jesus being fully, completely dead.

And I will only believe if God turns up, Jesus turns up and shows me himself. His response to the news is absolute.

He makes his demands in absolute terms. Unless I see and I place my hands, I will not believe. So what he demands here is what you might call exhaustive proof rather than sufficient evidence.

He rejects the witness of 10 or more of his trusted friends. And he dictates absolute terms to God about believing.

Now we don't know, because the text doesn't tell us, why it was that Thomas, of all of them, was particularly sceptical. There could be many reasons for that.

[13:25] Maybe his issue was an intellectual problem. You know, dead things don't come back to life again. You know, that sort of stuff. Or maybe it was more personal. Could have been much more personal.

Imagine, for instance, someone who is close to you. They are in the process of dying. This may not be imagination too hard for some of us gathered in the room or on screen this morning.

Maybe you've come to the point where you have accepted it. That all hope of recovery is lost. And your one is going to die.

You've been through the journey with them over a long time. And then all of a sudden, someone makes contact with you and says, I've just been reading online that there's a possible cure for your loved one's disease on the other side of the world, in some clinic.

And you hear that news and you go, there was a time when you had hope for recovery and you did everything you could to bring about that healing.

[14:44] However, your hopes have been dashed. And you've finally come to the point of realizing that your loved one is going to die. When you receive news like that, this brand new piece of information, very few people in that moment will go, fantastic, pull out all stops.

I'm now buoyant again. Most people cannot, once they get to their hopes being dashed and come to the realization of that, most people cannot bear to get back out of that place again and to have their hopes up in order to be dashed again.

Most people in that scenario will be the skeptic on the new piece of news. We have no, and I think it's potential.

This is what's happening for Thomas. He loved Jesus just like all the other disciples. He would have been just as devastated as all the other disciples at the crucifixion of Jesus.

And now they come along and say, hey, Thomas, no worry. Good news. We've seen him. He's alive. Thomas is like the other disciples had put all their hope of a new future in Jesus.

[16:14] And those hopes were dashed when he saw Jesus nailed to a cross. And so with this new piece of news, maybe he is simply saying to them, don't you dare get my hopes up.

Maybe Thomas was afraid to hope again in the same way that many are afraid to hope nowadays in a glorious new future.

It might be a narrow, secular, materialistic worldview that says resurrection of Jesus just can't happen.

It might be a personality that needs a little bit more evidence. It might be a personality that needs a little bit more evidence. But it also might be a heart that is afraid to be drawn into something so good, so remarkable, so excellent, so brilliant, that you don't want to be disappointed.

In the end, Thomas was able to overcome his scepticism and believe in joy. Verse 26, A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

[17:40] And though 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. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.

Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God. That's a remarkable statement. My Lord and my God.

For a Jewish man to call another human being not just his Lord, but his God, is incomprehensible to Jewish culture.

There is, what we see here with Thomas, the movement from scepticism to a deep faith. In fact, I would probably argue that there is no greater confession of faith in Jesus Christ, in all of the Bible, than the words of Thomas, My Lord and my God.

The biggest doubter to the greatest trust and joy. Now that brings me to the who, you know, doesn't matter question, you know, the who cares question.

[18 : 55] Thomas' declaration is broadly the meaning of the resurrection. My Lord and my God. His first words, noticeably, when Jesus appears to him, were not about the facts of the resurrection, but what the resurrection meant.

My Lord and my God. The whole issue for Thomas was, I want to see him for myself, and I'm not going to believe unless I touch his wounds. Jesus shows up into the room, and Thomas doesn't even touch him.

Doesn't even touch him. You see, the wounds on Jesus were so much more than evidence of resurrection. They were evidence for Thomas of something significantly more, something much more powerful.

The evidence of Jesus' resurrection is that every single thing that Jesus said about himself is absolutely fundamentally true.

He is God. He is the king of the universe. He is the creator of all things. He is my lord, my king, my boss. He's my ruler.

[20 : 04] He is my God. He is my savior. He is my friend. It means that Jesus promises all of them have been delivered.

He is the one who guarantees my own resurrection. The wounds of the cross on Jesus, the things that Thomas thought had ruined his life, had in fact, in reality, saved his life.

The resurrection means everything Jesus said about himself is absolutely true. Jesus is the way for humanity to be reunited with our creator God.

The resurrection means human guilt and shame has been finally dealt with, fully, completely dealt with, totally satisfied in God's justice on the cross.

As I said last week, it is finished. The resurrection guarantees it's finished. Death has not only been confronted, death's been conquered.

[21 : 19] It means that new and true life can be experienced before death and eternal life after death. It means that there is a new heaven and a new earth where those who put their trust in Christ will live forever like he right now lives forever.

It's what Jesus offers us today. Several chapters earlier in John's account of the good news of Jesus, we have Jesus declaring the life-changing news of the resurrection and his own resurrection guarantees this for us.

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Something incredibly unique and life-changing and worldview-shaping has happened with the resurrection of Jesus.

And so here's the implication from that article a couple of years ago from the Australian newspaper. There is really no halfway house with Christianity.

[22 : 43] Either Jesus is God and we are immortal beings fueled with eternal destiny, moral choice, divine status, irreducible human dignity and moral responsibility and loved as though an only child of God.

It's either that or lies. And I'd rather be at the beach. There's no halfway house with the Christian faith.

So I want to ask you, is that how you treat it? Like a halfway house? Yes. We pick and choose the bits of the Bible that we want to believe and want to affirm in our life and bits that don't suit we don't. How do we discover full and complete life in the King? That's my final point. The first thing we need to do is it's so crucial to him that we listen to the eyewitness accounts.

We are told that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. One week later, Jesus showed up again with Thomas present. During that week, during that week in between, we are told in verse 25 that the other disciples kept telling him that they had seen the Lord.

[24 : 24] What that means is that every single one of us on the face of the earth right now who are still breathing, we're in the same position as Thomas.

We have access to the same people who saw Jesus raised from the dead. And that's what we've been doing as we go through John's account.

His eyewitness account of Jesus. It's written down in the four Gospels of the New Testament. There is an enormous amount of scholarship that supports the Gospel accounts as having the marks of oral history and eyewitness testimony rather than being myths or fables.

John, who wrote this biography that we've been working through for months now, was one of those eyewitnesses. This is what he says about how we, in 2024, in Sydney, how we come to see and believe as Thomas came to see and believe.

Verse 30. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[26 : 03] He says that what is written in this biography of Jesus' life, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, by an eyewitness is absolutely everything that you need to have certainty of the hope of eternal life.

you need nothing more. All I'm suggesting is to operate with the news of the resurrection of Jesus in the same way you operate with the rest of your life.

I mean, think about this. How many of the things that you believe happened in history did you actually see? I mean, come on.

How many of them were you there as an eyewitness? We believe eyewitness a testimony that has been written down by historically reliable authors.

All I'm suggesting is you do the same with Jesus. It's as simple as that. Do the same with Jesus. We don't need to know anything more than what is written in John's gospel to see and believe.

[27 : 26] And so read John's gospel. Read one of the gospels. And just pray a simple prayer. God, if you are true, if you are real, if Jesus did rise from the dead, help me see and believe.

You see, the Christian faith is no mere philosophy, even though it is a philosophically viable worldview. It is not merely subjective, even though there are emotional, satisfying experiences for followers of Jesus.

The Christian faith is not merely sentimental. It's not just uplifting, like a piece of art, even though there is lots of beauty to behold in the Christian faith. faith. The Christian faith is absolutely nothing. It is nothing if Jesus Christ did not actually rise bodily from the dead. the truth of his resurrection is not based on experiential methods of natural science.

It's not verifiable by test tubes or empirical data, nor is it based only on the arguments of logic. It is based on history, on eyewitness accounts.

[28 : 47] And so read a gospel if you haven't done one yet. read it as if it is eyewitness account and think. The second thing to do, to see and believe here, to move from doubt to receiving certain hope, is to drop your conditions.

Every one of us, every single one of us is like Thomas in this. Every single one of us moves towards Jesus with a set of conditions.

they might be different for all of us, but none of us moves towards him without a set of conditions. No one just goes to him purely on his terms, because he's great and he's glorious and he's majestic.

No one ever moves towards him just for his sake. We always move towards him because we want something, which means we have conditions.

I've known of people who refused to move towards Jesus because it would mean that they would need to repair a relationship, it would mean that they would have to change a habit, it would mean that they wouldn't be able to go to the beach on a Sunday morning, for instance.

[30 : 07] we need to drop our conditions because every time we have a condition they say I will love you God and I will accept your hope if, if.

The great news of Christianity is that Jesus did not love for us, he has loved us unconditionally. the death of Jesus was no accident in history.

He said last week Jesus died and rose to redeem us and to reclaim us to God. It is a plan that is historically reliable and experientially satisfying as we navigate life.

And so friends, Jesus has brought you here this morning, he has tuned you in online for this message. for this little bit of the Bible, for this story of the resurrection of Jesus, for this eyewitness account of John so that you too might believe in Jesus and have certain hope, life forever with joy as Jesus himself is alive forever in the joy of his presence of his father.

Friends, I would encourage you if you are someone who is unsure or you're that person needs a little bit more evidence, I've got a couple of books called Is Easter Unbelievable?

[31 : 40] It's really short, really simple to read. I've got three of these, if you like one of these, if you're online, send us a message and we can post one to you as well. Sample the Let's see the