

# Doubts Dispersed at Christ's Appearing

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Matheson

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Welcome to our service this morning, especially those present and also welcoming those who are watching online this morning. The bulletin sheet is with you. The only real item that needs to be given special attention today is that there will be a congregational meeting on Wednesday the 18th.

That's a week on Wednesday at 7.30pm in the seminary, and that will be in relation to the congregation's vacancy. We're going to begin our worship this morning singing to God's praise in Psalm 103.

This is in the Scottish Psalter, the traditional version of the Psalms, page 369. We're going to sing verses 1 to 5 to God's praise.

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee.

We'll sing to God's praise, verses 1 to 5. We'll stand to sing, if you're able. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

[ 1 : 43 ] O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee.

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee. O thou my name, equities to the most gracious be forgave.

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace.

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace. O thou thy body, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all his tower, and all that in me is, be of all his gracious grace.

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

[ 4 : 19 ] CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS which far exceeds our wildest expectations.

And here we are after all of these years of existence. And we can today rejoice not only in the fact that you have created us and that you provide for us day by day, but that you have also provided a salvation in the person of Jesus.

A salvation for rebels who deserve your wrath and curse. So we rejoice today in your great grace. You are long-suffering, slow to wrath. You are abundant in mercy. And today we remember the resurrection of our Lord.

We remember his finished work. We give thanks that today he is enthroned in heaven, that he is at your right hand, and that all things that happen in our lives, every moment of our existence, is under his sovereign power.

[ 5 : 49 ] And so may we today rest and find peace in the person of Jesus. May we find him to be a worthy saviour, worthy of our hope and our faith, our trust.

Minister therefore to us today. Meet each one of us, we pray, at the point of our need. All of us come as sinners in need of cleansing, but we come, Lord, with particular burdens this day as well. And we ask that into each one of our lives and into each of our experiences, you would today minister with your great grace. We long, therefore, today to know the Holy Spirit's presence and

power working in us.

We pray, Father, for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to receive the gospel, to tend to the wounds that are found there, and to lead us with renewed courage and resolve into all that we must do in your service.

And so we pray, Father, for forgiveness for our sins. In Jesus' name. Amen. I was saying to Roddy as I was coming in this morning, you know I'm preaching today because I have something with me.

[ 7 : 00 ] And Roddy laughed and said, yes, it's a tape measure. Maybe your sermon will be quite long today. But those of you, your children, young people today, I wonder if you've used one of these to measure anything really important.

You can't quite use them to measure time, but you can use them to measure things that change over time. So I wonder if any of you got a measuring stick at home where you've been measuring your height as you've been growing up.

I know certainly in our house, well, actually not in our house, in my in-law's house, there is a stick. And the stick has lots of little marks on it that have been made over the years as all of their grandchildren have grown bigger.

And so there's lots of marks on that stick and there's dates on that stick that tell you how high someone was at that time. And you use a measuring tape for that.

So you get your measuring tape out and you'd say, how tall do you think we are? Well, you'll put yourself against the stick and you'll put a wee mark on the stick to see how tall you are. And then you'll measure from the ground up to where the mark is.

[ 8 : 12 ] And that'll tell you how tall somebody is. But you can use measuring rods and sticks for other things as well. There's other things you could measure, isn't there? Maybe you do it in school. What sort of things do you measure in school?

Have you measured ever the size of your desk? I tell you, that's a really important skill. I did that this week. I was measuring the size of desks. And we were rearranging an office.

And we wanted to be sure before we started that one wall would be able to fit two pieces of furniture as well as a big tall cupboard. And we weren't quite sure.

And so we thought, before we start, let's measure that wall just to make sure everything will fit. And thankfully it did. And it was just as well.

Because there was no room to spare. We didn't have to push it and wedge it in really hard. But it just fitted. And no more. Maybe you'd be really interested. You'd be thinking to yourself, I wonder how big the church is today.

[ 9 : 12 ] Do you think we could measure how big the church is? No. Maybe far too big to measure, isn't it? But, you know, scientists would measure and engineers would measure the size of the church.

And they'd measure how big the whole planet is. Do you think how big the whole earth is? If you were to get a measuring tape out, you could measure, well, this one's only, I think this one's about three metres long.

So, oh no, it's five metres. So that's a bit better. But it would still be a long time if we were going in five metre chunks, measuring the whole way round the whole earth. And then you'd think, well, I mean, the world, the universe is much bigger than that, isn't it?

How far away is the moon? The moon. And you'd want to measure how far away the moon is. And before too long, you start to ask really big questions.

How far away is God? Can you think about that? You ever thought, how far away is God? Do you think we could measure how far away heaven is? It's a difficult question.

[ 10 : 16 ] There's a man in the Bible, he's called Thomas. We're going to be thinking about him a wee bit in the sermon today. And Thomas, I think, was the kind of person who would be completely worried about measurements all the time.

He'd want exact measurements for things. He'd want the exact distance something is. Sometimes he wants to know exactly when something's going to happen. He wants to know exactly where Jesus is going to be.

Jesus says, I'm going to be with my father. And he says to the disciples not to worry about that because if he goes to be with his father, he's going to prepare a place for them and then he'll come back and so that they can come and be with him where he is.

And Thomas says, how can we be with you where you are when we don't know the way? He says, Thomas was a detail guy. He wanted to know the exact details of how things worked and how far away things were, how you would get somewhere, what your route would be.

And so Thomas is the kind of guy who would want to measure things exactly. And that's what actually happened. After Jesus died, he rose again. We remember that. That's what we're doing on the first day of the week.

[ 11 : 27 ] We're remembering the resurrection of Jesus. But after he rose again, Jesus appeared to the disciples and they were amazed to see him risen and alive. But Thomas wasn't there.

And so when the disciples were talking about it afterwards, Thomas was like, I don't believe you and I'll only believe it if I can measure it for myself, if I can see the holes in his hands, the hole in his side where he was stabbed with a spear.

And so the following week, Jesus appeared again to the disciples and Thomas was there this time. And Thomas is amazed because the very things that he was asking about, Jesus knew about, the very questions he had, the very measurements that he wanted, the science, the data, the information that he wanted that was so important.

Jesus said to him, look Thomas, there's my hands. There's my side where the spear went in. And Thomas believed and said, my Lord and my God.

I want you to think today, maybe you're a wee bit like that, like Thomas. Maybe you're somebody who needs a measuring tape. You're somebody who really wants the information exact. Well, the amazing thing is we can ask God and he'll show us.

[ 12 : 47 ] He will tell us. He won't leave us alone. Let's pray just now. We're going to say the Lord's Prayer together. Amen. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

We're going to sing again just now to God's praise in Psalm 13. Young folk can go out to their Sunday school classes whilst this is happening. So we're going to sing Psalm 13 and let's sing Psalms page 14.

We're going to sing the whole Psalm. How long will you forget me, Lord? Will you forget always? How long, Lord, will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze? How long must I be sad each day in deep perplexity?

[ 13 : 54 ] How long will my opponents stand in triumph over me? You can sometimes feel like that. Just wondering how long is God going to leave us without the answers to our situation?

And yet, we know he will answer because he has this constant love that he has for his people. So let's sing from verse 1 through to the end of the Psalm. How long will you forget me, Lord?

We'll stand to sing for a while. How long will you forget me, Lord?

Will you forget always? How long will you forget me, Lord? How long will you forget me, Lord?

How long will you forget me, Lord? How long will you forget me, Lord? How long will you forget me, Lord? seeking your days? How long does it be a lifestyle and deeper and deeper and deeper my God Consider me and give me a revival.

[ 15 : 38 ] Light up my eyes, for I will sleep, I'll sleep on those who die.

Then would my enemy declare, At last I'd make it low, And so my hope would sing for joy, To see my hope are grown.

But still I trust your constant love, You say must set me free.

With joy I will extol the Lord, Who has been good to me.

I think we're maybe going to need longer psalms, With the number of kids that are going out to Sunday school, It's so encouraging to see that.

[ 17 : 11 ] And let's turn just now and read in God's word, In John's gospel, John chapter 20. We're going to read at verse 19, Through to the end of the chapter.

On the evening of that day, The first day of the week, The door's been locked where the disciples were For fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them, And said to them, Peace be with you.

And when he had said this, He showed them his hands on 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.

[18:39] And 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 out 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 me, And yet have believed.

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.

[19:58] Amen. And this is, God's word to us. Let's, Bow our heads in prayer, Once more.

Heavenly Father, How good it is, Oh Lord, For us to, Be able today, To spend time, Reading your word, Being able to spend time, Singing your praises, Being able to spend time, Learning of your ways, And of your character.

And, We need, Lord, To know, These things, We need to, Experience these things, Because, It's so easy for us, To get distracted, To find our faith, Lose a sight of its, Objective and goal.

We need these things, Lord, To be, Able to pray. We need these things, To pray with confidence, To pray with great expectation, On who you are, And of what you can do.

And so we would come to you today, Father, And we seek to intercede, For this congregation, For all those associated with it. We want to pray especially, For that mass of young people, Who have just gone out to, Sunday school classes today.

[21:19] We want to pray for their teachers, And pray for, Each one of those lives, That you would, Speak into their hearts, That in these days, You would, Be gracious to them, And fill them, Lord, With a sense of, Purpose, That what they are doing, Is not just an insignificant thing, On a Sunday morning, To take up a short time, Of the day, But help them to know, And to perceive, That the questions, That they are, Learning about, The things they are learning, The Bible stories, That they are, Coming to understand, That these things really matter, And that they make, A profound difference, In all of our lives.

I pray that you would, Stood up in them faith, That you would help them, To believe the gospel, That you would help them, To have confidence, In who Jesus is, And how he matters, In an incredibly, Diverse and challenging world, In which we now live.

We pray for wisdom, For their Sunday school teachers, Today, But more generally, We pray Father, For their parents, That you would give them, Wisdom in how they raise, Young people in these days, That you would help them, To see and understand, The truth of the gospel, More clearly in their own homes, That you would help them, To impart valuable, And lifelong lessons, Of faith and trust, That our kids would see, In our homes, Examples of faith in Jesus, In action.

We know Father, All of our families face, Difficult times, Challenging times, We face times of crisis, Times of upset, It's around the dinner table, Father, That so often, These things, Can be aired, And teased out, So we pray for your blessing, In these times of family fellowship, That our homes, Will be places, Where the gospel is at the center, And with an understanding, Of who Jesus is, And who God is, And how the Holy Spirit, Works in our lives, That these things, Would really make a difference, In how we explain the world, To young people, In this day, We pray today, Father, For your blessing, On the congregation, As a whole today, And we ask Father, That everyone present, Both those physically, Here in the building, And those at home, Watching on screens, We ask Father, That the blessing of God, Would be with us today, That we would hear the gospel, That we would hear your word, And that by hearing, We would believe, And we know Lord, That was the purpose, Why John wrote the gospels for us, And so we ask and pray today, For the Holy Spirit's working, And power in and through us,

As we worship, That all of this, Would be to your glory, That we would see, The magnificence of Jesus, In what we read, And that we would be encouraged Lord, The day in which we're living, It's a

day where we've seen the church, And decline, And retreat across our country, For many many years, But we cry to you Father, In these days, That you would be gracious to us, And that you would remember our land, We ask Father, That you would bless our nation, With wise gospel leaders, In our churches, We pray for those, Who minister today, We pray for all those Lord, This day who are, Ministering your word, In sometimes very difficult situations, Places where there is uncertainty, And fear, And places where, There are, Or perhaps little signs of growth, And yet, Your servants are still diligently, Going out with the word, And still preaching, And we ask today, For your blessing on them, And you would encourage them, That you would uphold them, We pray for those, Who are fearful preaching today, Those who have come,

[ 24 : 43 ] With a great sense of trepidation, Before congregations, Knowing that, What the message they have this day, Is a difficult thing, For people to hear, We ask that you would give them, Boldness as well, We pray Father, For those who are ministering, In congregations, Where there is, Real spiritual deadness, And we ask Father, That you would bring forth, A great awakening, A revival in the church, In these days, That you would remember, Our land, The need that our land has, It needs Christians, Who were commissioned, To go out, Just as you sent out, The first disciples, Into the world, After the resurrection, We need that same, Commissioning today, Across our nation, And so we pray Father, That you would raise up workers, We pray for our seminary, Those who are training, For gospel ministry, And those who are, Training in other institutions, Around our country as well, We pray Father, That you would bless, Those who are, Seeking to serve you, In the Christian ministry, That you would bless, And prosper them, We pray for the, Equipping of the church,

Therefore, And that, Those who are, Preparing for that ministry, Just now, Would see their, Their role, Not simply as, Being equipped and trained, To go out into, The highways and byways, Of our nation, As evangelists, But to feed the flock of God, That the flock of God itself, The whole church, May be equipped, To rise up as one, And to address, The spiritual needs, Of our nation at this time, We cry to you Lord, For our nation, We pray for our leaders, We pray for those, Who have responsibility over us, That you would bless them, And we thank Lord, Of the great, Challenges of our time, And we know Lord, That great wisdom is needed, In all those who lead, And so we do pray Father, For those in, Local authority and council, We pray for those, In our devolved government, In West, In Holyrood, And we pray for the government, In Westminster, That you would bless, And prosper them, As they seek to uphold righteousness, As they seek to do good, As they seek to alleviate, The great effects of sin, And the effects of, Abuse in our age, Lord, There are so many things, That the government, Is necessary for, They wield a sword, We know for a reason, And so we pray for your blessing, And prospering on them, As far as righteousness, Can be pursued, We pray today, For your blessing, On our nation, As it seeks to, Shine a light for, Hope and democracy, In the world, Lord, There are so many places, Where the privileges, And the good things, That we have, Are denied to so many people, And so we do pray Father, That as we seek to, Have a presence, On the world stage as well, That you would help us in that, May we be known above all, As a place of the gospel, And so we pray Father, For those who would, Limit the gospel, In our own nation, That you would, Change their hearts, That you would bring, Understanding to them, We think Lord, Of plans, Which have recently, Been scrapped here in Scotland, To bring in, Measures that would, Limit the ability, Of the church, To speak with clarity, On moral issues, Under a so called, Conversion therapy ban, We pray for our leaders, In Westminster, As they now consider, The same issues, And we ask and pray, That restraint would be shown, That wisdom would be understood, And received, We want to pray today Father, For the world in which we live, We know it's a broken place, We know it's full of, Great ills and disasters, We know it's full of, Violence, We know that there are, Schemes within schemes, Of violent men, And wicked men, Who would seek to have, Their own way, And we ask and pray Father, That in all of these places, You would bring relief, That you would bring help, We pray especially, For our friends who minister, In these difficult areas, We think especially, Of the work of Blytheswood today, As they minister, Particularly in Ukraine, We pray for Jeremy Ross, And for all of the team, That work in that charity, That you would bless, And prosper them, That you would help them, And encourage them, In the work they're doing, And we pray for, The partners that they work with, In places like Ukraine, Under incredibly difficult circumstances, Under great tension, And stress, And we ask that you would bring, Help and relief, There, We pray for an end, To that conflict, And

we pray that you would bring, About peace and justice, We pray the same Lord, For the, Terrible scenes, That we see continuing in Gaza, And we ask and pray Father, That across the world, You would teach us, As a race, As a people, That the only way, To true reconciliation, Is through the gospel, We know that Jesus came, To bring reconciliation, And we know that that fruit flows, Not merely into, The great reconciliation, Between God and sinners, But the reconciliation, That flows between sinful men and women, And we cry to you Father, In these days, That you would bring that to bear, In its fullness, And in light of, The great hope of Jesus, My peace I give to you, May that peace flow, Throughout our world, This day,

[ 29 : 48 ] And therefore bless the church, In all of these places, Bless those who are seeking, To bring the light of the gospel, Into people's lives, And may our nation, Our world, And our own hearts today, Be transformed, With this great good news, That Jesus has come, We ask then your blessing, In all of these things, And we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

And we're going to continue, Singing to God's praise, Again, And sing, Psalms, In Psalm 29, And this is page, 34, Of the blue book, Really love this psalm, It's a picture of a, Of a storm, Passing through, The land of Israel, From the north, All the way down, Into the south, And David, As he reflects on this, Magnificent experience, This awe-inspiring experience, He relates it, To the word of God, The law of the Lord, And God's voice, Speaking into, The lives of his people, And it's that same, Earth-shattering significance, That David longs for, As the storm, Sweeps through the land, And shakes the, The trees, And the very earth, We would long for the same experience, That our hearts, Would be today moved, By the power of God's word, As well, So we're going to sing, The whole of this psalm, You mighty ones, Give to the Lord, As his right, Ascribe to the Lord God, Both glory and might, To the Lord's name, Due glory and honour accord, In beauty of holiness, Worship the Lord.

We'll stand to sing, If we're ready. You mighty ones, Give to the Lord, As his right, Ascribe to the Lord God, Both glory and might, Till the Lord's name, Till the Lord's name, Till the Lord's name, To glory and honour accord, In beauty of holiness, Worship the Lord.

The Lord's name, The Lord's voice is like, There have been one of our Should■■ pillars, The Lord's name stand about, O Lord, the glorious Lord, upon all the waters cross under its earth, Hath the word, O voices, the voice of the Lord.

[ 32 : 42 ] The voice of the Lord is majestic and loud. By the voice of the Lord the great cedars are loud.

Yes, even the cedars of heaven adore. The Lord brings in pieces and shatters them all. Like the leaf of a camp he shakes when the looms go. And silly unskills like the startled white hoax. The voice of the Lord causes lightning to flash. The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness cash. The Lord makes the desert of man is to shave. The Lord causes hopes of the forest to quake.

[ 34 : 07 ] The trees of the forest, the streets of their reams. And he in this temple great glory receives.

The Lord overflows, sits as monarch alone. The Lord sits forever as king on his throne.

The Lord makes the strength of his people in peace. The Lord gives his people the blessing of peace.

The Lord makes the earth.

Would you turn with me and your Bibles, please, back to John's Gospel? John chapter 20. We've read that passage, Jesus appearing to the disciples, verse 19, and then Thomas being with them the following week once again. Let's bow in prayer before we stop and study God's Word. Heavenly Father, as we come for a short time just now to your Word, we do pray that you would give us both hearing ears but also hearing hearts. We pray that our hearts today would be laid open by the Holy Spirit, that we would see ourselves and our great need in these verses, that we would see our own experience reflected in what is before us, and above all that we would today see Jesus. It's the entry of Jesus into the closed, barred darkness of our own hearts that really makes the difference, that transforms us. And so we pray today that Christ would come in, that in your own powerful working way that the Holy Spirit would be here bringing home to us these truths. And we ask this then in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 36 : 26 ] I wonder how much uncertainty and doubt preoccupies you. I don't say that just to those of you today who are not believers. That may well be the case. There may be many, many questions that you have about the gospel. There may be many questions you have about the person and the work of Jesus. There may be many questions you have about the way the gospel

changes our hearts and understanding what's actually going on in your own life just now as perhaps the Holy Spirit is working with you.

We have great means in the congregation to try and help you with these things. The group that meets on Thursday nights, for example, to handle big questions. That's a great place to go and explore some of these things. But if I can just for a moment just address that same question to believers.

You know, you're a Christian today who struggles at times with periods of doubt and uncertainty. I think we'd be liars if we said that never happened to us. We'd be liars if we said that that never came to us. And I think Thomas is recorded in John's gospel for that reason. He's a great example of somebody who needed what I would almost call empirical certainty. He's one of these people who just wants evidence.

He wants something to persuade him of the truth, the whole truth about Jesus. And so he's asked that question previously, for example. You know, John tells us that in John 14 when Jesus says, in my father's house there are many mansions, that famous passage. It's at the end of that as he says, I'm going to prepare a place for you. Thomas is the one who pipes up and says, how can we know?

How do we know that we don't even know the way? How do we get there? And that's where Jesus responds with that wonderful passage where he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So Thomas is somebody who's filled with doubt. But I would suggest, actually, that before we get to Thomas, the rest of the disciples are in the same boat.

[ 38 : 15 ] The rest of the disciples are filled, quaking with fear. And fear is the experience of the disciples. We've already read in John's gospel how, you know, Jesus has appeared to Mary Magdalene.

The other apostles have gone to the tomb. They've seen the empty grave. They've been confronted by the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. But by the end of the first day of the week, they are still uncertain. And so they have gathered probably back in the upper room again.

That seems to be the location that they've maybe retreated to for some days since the death of Jesus. And the doors are bolted and the disciples are gathered inside. The reality of the joyful hope of the resurrection just hasn't come home to them yet. The penny hasn't dropped. It's a bit like a Coke machine. You know, you put a coin into a Coke machine and there's a minute, maybe not a minute, if there's a minute, there's something wrong. But, you know, you're waiting for the can to drop out the bottom. It's like that. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus has gone in there. They know what's happened. But the reality of it has not yet hit home to them. And so I think doubt and uncertainty is for them very, very real. These final chapters of John's gospel, these last couple of chapters in particular after the death and the resurrection of Jesus, John is very deliberately weaving together a series of images that are meant to confirm what we know. And that is that it's that although our faith is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and although the foundation of our hope as believers is in the work of Christ, the growth that we experience as believers, the way forward for us as believers is through fellowship. It's through the gathering together of the church.

And it's interesting that here it's in fellowship that the solution to their problems appears. As the disciples are gathered together in fellowship, Jesus comes into their midst. And through that, and through the presence of Jesus and the gathering of the disciples, great blessing is received.

And Thomas is an example of someone on the outside of that who needs to come in, who needs to be re-engaged in the fellowship of the church and built up and strengthened through it.

[ 41 : 01 ] And so it's really through that experience of fellowship that we see so much of the blessing of what follows.

I don't think today we should see ourselves as being any different. John had been pastor of the church in Ephesus. And it's to an ordinary church that he writes this gospel. It's for an ordinary set of Christians.

And the ordinary experience of Christians is that we go through phases where sometimes doubt and uncertainty becomes greater and more experienced. We go through phases where our experience of fellowship maybe wanes and where we need to be re-engaged and brought back in to that experience.

So I want to think about the experience of the disciples, first of all, then the experience of Thomas, and then just finally come back to our own experience as well. As I say, the disciples, they're gathered in the upper room and they're filled with uncertainty and they are almost waiting for what's next because they just don't know.

They don't know what happens next. The angels certainly have told them, Jesus has gone ahead and he'll meet you in Galilee. That somewhere lies ahead of them. But at this moment, they're still not sure quite what to do.

[ 42 : 30 ] And it's into that doubt-filled reality that Jesus appears. There's a question, I suppose, is how did he appear? Have you ever stopped and thought about it in this passage?

It's interesting to think about. Did Jesus come with a locksmith? Did he come and unlock the door somehow and walk in through the door? Or was it sort of like Star Trek and he just materialized? Right in the middle of the room? Did he just kind of fade in through the wall? Who knows? You can speculate on it, but we're not told what the answer is. What we're told is that he simply appeared there.

Nor are we told where he appeared from. Where has he been? I think it's likely that he's been with the Father. That he has been, we could say, in heaven. And that's during these 40 or so days between his death and his resurrection and his final ascension.

That he is between heaven and earth. And so in this moment, he appears among the disciples. And he is in the right place. And this is the important thing.

[ 43 : 36 ] At the right time. So for us, that's one of the key things to remember. Into our doubt and uncertainty. Into the times where we have lots of questions.

Jesus already knows. And is fully prepared to come at that moment. Into our experience. Into our doubts and into our uncertainties.

To come with answers to the questions that we have. And it's part of the glory of Jesus. Because remember, John has already told us. John's introduction.

The first chapter of John's gospel that we have. Is so important for grasping the themes that John is building as he goes through this gospel. And one of the things that John says. Probably the pivotal thing that John says is.

We have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father. Full of grace and truth. And that idea of grace and truth. The Old Testament ideas. God's loving kindness.

[ 44 : 34 ] God's covenant faithfulness. His chesed. And God's faithfulness. The fact that God will never abandon his people. He's utterly trustworthy. He's a covenant keeping God.

We may fail him. But he will never fail us. And part of the glory of Jesus. Is the fact that he does things like this. He appears at the right moment. Ministering to his people.

He appears with the right words. The right things we need to hear. He appears in the right place. In the place of our darkest fears. He appears.

And he comes with us. And he ministers to us in that. And we should never lose sight of that character. That is on display for us. So Jesus appears in the right place at the right time.

And he brings to them peace. The disciples are probably alarmed. Someone's just appeared right in their midst. And Jesus says to them. My peace.

[ 45 : 36 ] I give to you. Peace be with you. The word peace that's used there. Is the idea of shalom. It's not just the absence. We tend to think of peace very much as the absence of war and stress.

If someone's at peace. They're pretty chill. But the idea of peace in the Bible. And the peace of the gospel. Is the good news that sinners are liberated in and through Christ.

And have full peace with God. Complete fellowship. There is a full functioning operational. Perfect harmonious relationship.

Created. And it comes through Jesus. Through his blood shed at the cross. Through his finished work. Through us believing in him.

Trusting in the sufficiency of what he has done. He brings us peace. And Jesus announces this to the disciples. He says peace be with you. I give you this shalom. It's the common greeting thereafter of the whole New Testament.

[ 46 : 38 ] Grace and peace. Almost every one of Paul's letters. Begins with that. It's that shalom of God. And the disciples are glad. Because Jesus has presented himself with them.

So Jesus comes in. And offers them this reassurance. Of the shalom of God. That flows from the cross. That flows from his finished work.

That flows from the fact that he's now risen from the dead. They can say with confidence. We have now got peace with God. Because of what Jesus has done.

The same thing that we can say today. Because the resurrection confirms for us. Christ's sacrifice was acceptable. So nothing more is needed on God's side.

God says it's done. It's finished. I'm satisfied with what my son has done. It's there for you. And it's fullness and completeness. Peace is available to us today. Peace is available to us in the brokenness of our lives.

[ 47 : 39 ] Spilling out into every aspect of our lives in fact. I mean certainly peace is available in your relationship with God. If you're laboring under the guilt of sin today.

Peace is available to you. For that guilt to be taken away. If today you're struggling though. Through the realities of the brokenness of life. Perhaps in a series of broken realities in your own experience. Maybe substance abuse. Maybe parts of your character that are just not right. An angry temperament.

Perhaps a broken and messy marriage. It's into all of this that God says peace be with you. Because the fullness of the gospel and the reconciliation that flows from the grace of God with himself.

Overflowing into all of our human relationships with other people. And ultimately in the fullness of time. And in the new heavens and the new earth. Into the fullness of the whole of creation. Being placed under that peace of God.

[ 48 : 47 ] All of it is available to us today. Through Christ himself. And so the disciples were glad. They have every reason to be.

And then Jesus though doesn't just leave them there. I mean sometimes we tend to think that's what discipleship is about isn't it? We'd love it if discipleship was about being brought to a place of peace and harmony. Where everything is still.

But that isn't what Jesus says. It's interesting if you read it. Jesus appears and says to them peace be with you. As my father or as the father rather has sent me. Even so I am sending you.

As I've been sent. I'm sending you. What Jesus is doing there is commissioning the disciples. It's a commission that he gives to the disciples specifically.

But it's one which extends from the disciples to the whole church. Because as we'll see. The point Jesus has already prayed this. If you remember in John's gospel. Back in John 17 you've got the high priestly prayer of Jesus.

[ 49 : 52 ] He prays for himself first of all. And what he has to endure. He prays for the disciples. The 12 or the 11 as they are then. Who are going to be sent out in his name. And what they have to endure as a specific bearers of that responsibility.

But then he prays for the rest of the church. All those who believe in him because of what the disciples have said. And so the commission that's given to the disciples here. Being sent out. Is a commission that today extends. To all those who have believed in the gospel.

Because of what they have said. So it's like a chain that flows from the disciples to us. It's not a chain that flows from the apostle Peter. All the way down to the current Pope of Rome for example. It's not an individual thing. It's a collective commission that is given to the whole church. Every single believer. Not just ministers and elders. But every single believer. Shares in this commission. Where Jesus says as the father sent me. So I am sending you. It's interesting to note as well. Who's doing the work here. The whole trinity is involved in this.

[ 50 : 50 ] As the father has sent me. So I am sending you. And then Jesus breathes on the apostles. And he says receive the Holy Spirit. So you have the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. Triune God. All working together.

Combined together in the same mission. And objective and goal. Of this great work of the father. Into which he sent the son. And the son.

Engaged in that work himself. Then sends and commissions the disciples. And all of this empowered by the working. And the presence. And the transformation of the Holy Spirit.

In their lives. So the whole of the triune God. Is involved in this. The characteristic of God himself. As a missionary is very clear.

That God himself is involved. In this great work. Of going into the darkness of the world. And saving sinners. Of his son. Coming into the darkness of this world. And revealing the father's glory.

[ 51 : 49 ] The glory of the only son. From the father. Full of grace and truth. And so we ask ourselves today. What are the characteristics then. Of this mission. That Jesus is commissioning the disciples into. It's the same thing.

Revealing the character of the father. Revealing the character of Jesus. Revealing grace. And truth. Going to people with an undeserved message.

Of salvation. Reminding people. Everyone here today. Ought to be reminded of this. That your salvation is not your own. It's not your own work. It's not your own effort.

It's not your own intentionality. It's not your own righteousness. It's gracious. It's a gift. It's a salvation that's given to you.

Because you could never do it yourself. That's the commission that we have. To tell people. Salvation is free. It's a gift. And it's to be done faithfully.

[ 52 : 48 ] How often is it that we give up on people? How often is it that we get frustrated. And we say. Oh no. I'm not going on with trying to persuade you of this. It's just pearls. We use that phrase.

The pearls before swine. The faithfulness of God. Persists. Until God and his sovereignty. Ends things.

People on mercy's ground. People that we've been praying for. People that we want to see saved. That we've been longing to see. Come to salvation for years upon years.

Those of you who are parents know this. You never stop. The faithfulness of God. The characteristic of the faithfulness of God.

Which characterizes Christ's mission. Characterizes ours. And we go on in that constant hope. It's interesting the way Jesus states this as well.

[ 53 : 45 ] As the Father has sent me. That's a perfect tense in Greek. So it's complete. It's done. The Father has sent me. I have done the work that the Father sent me to do. The work of Jesus is finished.

Nothing more needs to be added to it. There's nothing extra needs to be done. The grace of salvation. The gift of salvation. It has been fully purchased. It is a self-contained thing now.

The work is done. And Jesus' ongoing work now is for the church. As its head. As the Lamb of God. Who continues to pray and intercede for the people. We've been hearing about that recently.

What's Jesus doing right now? It's a great sermon. So. How does he send us? Does he send us in the same way? No. He says. Now.

The present tense is used. I am sending you. He's sending us. In an ongoing sense. We are to go on with this great commission.

[ 54 : 39 ] Continuing to work. As the Father has sent him. So we are to be sent. That means the key characteristic for us. Has to be. The heart for the lost.

And that's what the really confusing bit in verse 23 is about. As you look at verse 23. Jesus says. I. If you forgive the sins of any. So this is as the. The church of God is sent out into the world. Commissioned by Jesus. Empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus then says. If you forgive the sins of any. They are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any. It is withheld. And that is a profoundly difficult verse.

Perhaps wisdom would have said. Don't preach on that today Gordon. One sensible thing to do. Would have been to avoid it. But this is an important verse for us. Because if we're to understand. The commission of Jesus. If it's to be in the same terms. As Jesus was sent into the world. As the Father sent him. And he is to reveal the character of the Father. And our commission by Jesus. Is to go into the world.

[ 55 : 37 ] Fulfilling the same mission. Showing the character of the Father. Then that means. What happens here today. Is the fulfillment of verse 23. If I don't preach to you today.

That sins can be forgiven. You will not know that sin can be forgiven. And if you don't know your sins can be forgiven. Your sins won't be. If I don't preach the gospel faithfully.

You won't have your sins forgiven. You can't. Because sins can't be forgiven. In the absence of faithful preaching of the gospel. And that is a really solemn thought.

The lost outside. Can never know the salvation of Jesus. Unless they have a preacher. Unless someone goes to them.

With the word. Unless we go to them. With the word. Unless we share with people. The good news of the gospel.

[ 56 : 45 ] If we don't do it. Our friends. Our neighbors. Our workmates. Will be lost. To hell. Because the gospel.

Has to be proclaimed. And that's what verse 23 is saying. The only way sin can be forgiven. Is in the context of the faithful ministry of Christ's people. And if we as a congregation. Want to see our town saved. That's a good thing. That's a good desire. The only way. To that salvation. For those around us. Is if someone goes faithfully. With the gospel. So preaching is key. But remember. The outcome doesn't rest with us. Because Jesus says. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. We don't have the power to forgive sins. I mean. You can't. You can't go to that version. Verse 23. And say. Well that means we have the power to forgive sins. And we just say to people.

[ 57 : 46 ] Your sins are forgiven. They're forgiven. They're not. You can't forgive people's sins. You're not the judge. What you need. Is the Holy Spirit's power. To do what the Holy Spirit does.

And the Holy Spirit's work. Is one of shining a light. The Spirit shines a light. On the person of Jesus. And that's what he'll do.

Through your witness as well. So if we go out. And we pray. That the Lord will bless our witness. Day by day. The Holy Spirit. Will shine a light on Jesus.

Through your witness. And Christ will be eliminated. Illuminated. Sorry. Shown on. Shown to be clear.

And the church. Faithfully going out. Will make Christ known. I would say it's costly. As well. And the reason I say it's costly.

[ 58 : 44 ] Is because. For Jesus. The sending of the Father. Was costly. Jesus coming into the world. Came. And. We remember that verse.

We were looking at it actually. On Wednesday night. In the Bible study. It's that downward trajectory. In Philippians 2. He came into a sinful world. He came into a place of slavery. He came into. Despised and rejected of men.

He went to the cross. Not just any death in fact. But the death of the cross. The cursed death. Of being hung in a tree. And then he was buried. And you kind of think. That was God who did this. God the son. Who went through that. Downward trajectory. All the way to the cross. That path of suffering. And cost. Is what it means. To be sent by God. Into a sinful world.

And I have to be honest with you today. There's a great danger. In showing people. Cheap discipleship. Become a Christian. And you know. It's just a little bit of a. You know.

[ 59 : 38 ] It's a little thing. It's not. Being a disciple of Jesus. Is profoundly costly. It's not without profound reward.

There's not profound hope. In the resurrection. And eternal life. There's not profound comfort. In the presence of the Holy Spirit. With us. And the comfort of Jesus. Being present. As I said. In his fullness.

Of his grace. And truth. Coming in. To meet us. At our point of need. And comforting us. And assuring us. And helping us. But it's not cost free. People will hate you.

People will despise you. Because you are a follower of Christ. People will reject you. Because they rejected him. And yet we go on. With confidence. And so we preach.

With power. Knowing there's a price. And the peace of God. Will flow. From us. Then on to others. Thomas.

[ 60 : 33 ] Time's nearly away. So let me very briefly. Just mention Thomas. Thomas was absent. When all of this happened. And so it's really interesting. To just pause. And remember. What happens there.

The importance of fellowship. And getting this right. Thomas has. For reasons. Which are probably lengthy. And tricky to get into. But Thomas is one of these people.

Who needs evidence. When he's. So you know. Certainly we thought on that. But he's also probably someone. Who needs a bit of time by himself. There's nothing wrong with that. Sometimes taking a bit of time out. To reflect.

And chill. Is good. What's wrong is. Making that habitual. Stepping back. And saying. Well I'm not. You know. I'm giving up in the prayer meeting.

I'm giving up in Christian fellowship. I'm giving up in meeting with other Christians. Because they're hypocrites. And it's awful. There's no place for that. And so. The cure to that. Position of.

[ 61 : 27 ] Outside. Taking yourself outside. Is. What happens to Thomas. Where he's brought back in. But what's really interesting. Is when Thomas is brought back in. And he comes. And he meets with the disciples.

And he's got. You know. He's got his empirical questions. I want to see them. I want to see the nail prints. I want to see the wound in his side. When he does come back in. There's real blessing is found.

And what's really interesting. Is Jesus ministers to him. At the point of his need as well. What does Jesus say. To Thomas. He says. Here Thomas. Look at my hands. You want to put your hand. On my side. There is. Jesus. Knows. Exactly. What Thomas's questions were. And he answers them. He ministers to Thomas.

At the point. Of his need. And so we have a gracious. And kind. And faithful. Savior. In Jesus. He shows the father's glory.

[ 62 : 21 ] In how he speaks to Thomas. But then. He also. Ministers to Thomas. In the same way that he ministers. To the rest of the disciples. He doesn't leave him where he is. He says. Now it's time to move forward.

And Thomas. Is commissioned. In the same way. Do you believe these things. Thomas says. Jesus says to him. And Thomas's response. Is really fascinating. He says. My Lord. And my God. He recognizes.

That Jesus. Is. The. The. The word in Greek. Is kurios. The. The. The Lord. The master. The word's probably closer to master. Than it is Lord. Actually. A slave master relationship.

And so Thomas is recognizing. That his life. From this point on. Is under the same authority. As the other disciples. Have just been placed under. As the father has sent me. So I am sending you.

Thomas. Recognizing the lordship of Jesus. Acknowledges. That. The commission. That the disciples had. Is his. And I often think. That's perhaps. The biggest cure. To.

[ 63 : 19 ] Times of doubt. Perhaps even times. Of backsliding. It's to recognize. That Jesus. Wants you back. Because he has a commission. For you. He wants you to go on.

In his service. He wants to recommission. You with a purpose. To continue the work. That he's given you. And so Thomas. Has the same commission. From the same Christ.

And the point is. So do we. Because that's where. John really tells us. That little. Comment that he gives us. At the end of this chapter. Thomas is telling us.

These things are written. So that you may believe. All of this. Is for us. Thomas was not just. Giving us a historical account. Of what happened. After Jesus rose again.

And spoke to the disciples. He's saying. This is what's still going on. Just now. If you believe. Jesus is the Christ. You will have life. You'll have life.

[ 64 : 16 ] Because. Believers accept. That Jesus is the one. Who can commission us. Who can send us. And give us peace. And shalom. Jesus is the one. Who sends us. On our way. And today. That's what he's doing with you.

With me as well. He's sending us. Commissioning us. In the work of the gospel. Sending us out. Into Stornoway. To be his witnesses. Literally.

The ends of the earth. To be here. Showing. The light of Christ. His grace and glory. Fully revealed. For sinners. Like us. These things are written. So that you may believe. That Jesus is the Christ.

And that believing.

You may have life. In his name. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

[ 65 : 15 ] As we. Bow in. Conclusion of our service today. We ask and pray. That you would bless us. Bless us with that peace. That comes. From Christ's appearing. May we know. The shalom of God.

In our experience. May we know this. Because these things. Have been passed to us. And are worthy of believing. And help us therefore. To have faith. In the risen Christ. We ask this in his name.

For his sake. Amen. And we're going to sing.

In conclusion. In Psalm 77. In Sing Psalms. John.

John. If it's all right. I think maybe. I'm seeing the time. So let's maybe just finish up. Verse 10.

Through to verse 14. So. In this Psalm. The thought has been. In these watches of the night.

[ 66 : 19 ] At verse 6. There's these distressing. Deep. Ponderous thoughts. That are coming. They're the thoughts of someone like Thomas. The doubting thoughts. The questioning thoughts.

The wondering. But then verse 10.

Then to my heart there. Came this thought. On this I will rely. The years of the right hand of power. Of him that is most high. I will recall the Lord's great deeds. Your works of long ago. I'll meditate on all your acts. Your mighty works. Your mighty deeds. Sorry. I'll show. O God. Most holy are your ways. What God compares with you. You are the God of miracles. Whose power the nations view.

So we'll sing these three verses. Verses 10 to 14. To God's praise. Then to my heart there came this thought. We'll stand a second. To my heart there came this thought.

For this I will rely. The years of the right hand of power.

[ 67 : 26 ] Of him is most high. I will recall the Lord's redeemed.

Your words of long ago. I'll meditate on all your acts.

Your mighty deeds I'll show. O God. O God.

What soul we are your ways. O God. How much with you.

You are the Lord. O God. How much with you. How much with you. How much with you. How much with you. What soul we are your ways. How much with you.

[ 68 : 32 ] How much with you. How much with you. Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit.

Be with each one of us. Now and always. Amen. So. Thank you.