

The Resurrection & Doubt

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning again. It's great to see you all. We praise God for the people who were just up here on the stage leading us in worship in wonderful ways.
- Can we just give thanks to the Lord for them and for the ability to gather? It's been two years, three years since we've been able to gather freely to worship in Easter like this.
- And so what a wonderful morning it is to do that. And, you know, as we gather, we serve, we come to proclaim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. It was the central theme of the early church.
- It was the thing that they proclaimed over and over again. And so we do celebrate it. But as we gather this morning, I want to recognize that it's not always an easy thing to believe, is it?
- That a man died and rose from the dead again. If you've grown up in church, you've been used to this familiar language.
- [1 : 0 3] And so it doesn't strike you as particularly challenging. But I think that if we sit back and step and look at it, we recognize it is challenging. And I recognize that some of you may be here this morning facing a crisis of belief of your own.
- You may be here exploring Christianity. You may be here having gone to church all your life. But, you know, the last couple of years have been hard in our world.
- We've been shaken by many things. So much of the fabric of our society feels like it's being rent and torn and pulled apart.
- I think it feels that way societally. I think it feels that way to us personally as well. Our world has been shaken quite a bit. And I think that it's very easy in that context for it to create for us a crisis of belief.
- Crisis of belief comes not just for Christians. It comes for all people. When different things happen in our lives, it makes us reexamine what we believe and why we believe it.
- [2 : 1 7] Whether you're religious or not, it makes us reexamine it. And a crisis of belief can come in many forms. It may be because something in your circumstances challenges the things that you've assumed to be true.
- So, a cancer diagnosis or an unexpected end to an engagement or a loss of a job makes you question, where am I going and what am I doing?
- Why am I doing it? Maybe the disappointment and failure of others you've trusted make you question yourself. Certainly for those of us in the church, we've struggled with the revelation of sin and church leadership in the last couple of years.
- If they fail, why would we continue to believe is a question that comes up in our hearts. Sometimes, as well, it's not major crises, but little things that wear away at our faith.
- The boredom of everyday life. The in and out of doing the same thing every day. Wondering why you've ever believed at all. This one sneaks up on us and then crystallizes in a moment.

[3 : 32] What am I doing with my life? My life is meaningless, worthless. You find yourself questioning all that you've lived for and all that you've hoped for. It may be that you have a crisis of belief this morning because someone's asked you a question that you don't know the answer to.

You wonder, can I still believe? Do I really believe? Sometimes, a crisis of belief happens when we encounter others who believe something that you don't.

I know this was true for me, growing up in church, but not really understanding or knowing the gospel at all, finding it pretty empty.

It wasn't until I met some friends in high school, had something else. I'll tell more of my story later. But it created a crisis of belief in me. So, as we look this morning at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as we think about this story and where it is, we recognize that it is a celebration, but it is also a great word of comfort and help to us.

The message of Easter speaks to us in the midst of our crisis of belief in ways that maybe we aren't aware of. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. We're going to look at John chapter 20, verses 24 through 29.

[4 : 56] And as we turn there in your pew Bibles, I forgot to look up the page number. Anyone want to? 853. There we go. 853, if you want to look it up in the pew Bible.

John chapter 20. John was one who knew a crisis of faith. Because John was one of the earliest disciples. He responded to Jesus' call three years earlier to lay down his life, his fishing boats, his nets, and to follow Jesus.

And he had put everything into this. And at this point in the story, John is remembering how he, the day that Jesus died, faced his own crisis of faith.

What in the world is happening? How could he be dead? What happens now? Did I misunderstand? Where do we go from here? Maybe these are questions you are asking as well.

What is my life about? What do I believe in? Where do I go from here? We're going to look not at the resurrection text itself, but the text that talks about one of his disciples who faced his own crisis of doubt.

[6 : 16] So, John chapter 20, verses 24 and following. Let's read this. Now Thomas, one of the twelve called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So, the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see his hands, see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, place my hand on 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.

And then he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

And Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me?

[7 : 27] Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. And 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.

Will you pray with me for a minute? Lord, we ask for your help as we look into your word for a minute this morning. Lord, help us. Help us to understand your word.

Lord, open our hearts and our minds to your truth this morning. I pray for your help that you may help me to speak your words as I ought, that we together would hear, receive, and rejoice in the good news of the resurrected Christ this morning.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So Thomas, one of the twelve, he'd walked with Jesus for three years. He was there when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount.

He was there when Jesus fed 5,000. He was there when he raised Lazarus from the dead. What we know about Thomas from the rest of the Bible is that he was loyal. In chapter 11 of John, he says, let us go to Jerusalem with him, even though we're going to die.

[8 : 45] Let's go and stay with him. Thomas was also honest. Jesus, in the night before he died, when he was teaching his disciples about where he was going, said, you know the way.

And Thomas said, uh, Jesus? I don't know. I don't know what you're talking about. We don't know the way. Thomas, in this passage, is facing a crisis of belief.

And this is what we see. We're going to walk through this. In three, he said, there's a crisis of belief, there's a challenge to believe, and there's a response of faith. So we're going to look through those things this morning.

Verse 24 and 25 describe the crisis of belief. And here's the thing. Thomas, as we've read about this, we didn't see it right before this, Jesus appeared to the rest of the disciples when Thomas wasn't there right after his resurrection.

So everybody else knew this, right? He had appeared to the women, he had appeared to the disciples, but Thomas somehow wasn't there. And so they came and told him about it, and he's like, maybe you guys saw a ghost, maybe you guys are hallucinating, I don't know what it is, but I don't believe it.

[9 : 58] No way. I'll need to touch him to know that this is really true. And look, before we criticize him, which is what we like to do in churches, we'll say, oh, look at him, he's so weak, what's wrong with him?

Before we criticize him, let's recognize how much it makes sense. Resurrection was not on the radar of anyone in the first century. No religious expectation, religious system, it created an expectation for resurrection.

As a matter of fact, in the Greek culture that was predominant in the, resurrection would have been a terrible thing because the death was freeing the body from this terrible, or freeing the soul from this terrible body that we have.

Who would want to be resurrected? That's a terrible thing. So the Greeks didn't want this, and even the Jewish faith, who might have had some inkling of a future corporate resurrection, would never have thought that somewhere in the middle of history, one person would be raised from the dead.

So nobody was expecting this. No one was looking for this. There was no cultural framework in which this made sense. So Thomas could be forgiven for not believing what seems like an unbelievable claim.

[11 : 18] Someone who is dead has now been raised again and is alive. Now what kind of belief was this? Was it merely rational skepticism?

Was he just an empiricist? I need to see it, touch it. I need to do scientific experiments to make sure it's true. Maybe, but maybe not. Maybe he was also a devastated follower of Jesus.

He'd put all his hope, followed him for three years. He didn't want to look foolish by continuing to hope when that hope had been crushed.

He didn't want to be disappointed again by putting his faith in something. That seems to have been robbed from him and taken out from under him. In his grief and his pain, holding on to belief that Jesus was raised from the dead would have just made it worse.

I think it's, to be sympathetic to Thomas, there are a lot of reasons, good reasons why he had this crisis of belief. Maybe he's a devastated devotee.

[12 : 35] Maybe he's a cynical rationalist. We don't know all of his heart. But certainly, if we imagine these things, we can stop and think about ourselves.

Is there anything that I've said about Thomas that rings true for you? Maybe you've grown up in the faith, but you're not sure if the evidence is there. Maybe you've not grown up in church and you're exploring why in the world people would believe such an incredible fairy tale.

Maybe you have honest questions about what the facts are. But maybe your questions aren't as intellectual. Maybe they're more spiritual.

Maybe you don't want to look foolish by hooking your wagon to the wrong thing. Maybe you've been religiously disappointed by the failures of the church and the scandals that have happened.

Maybe you've been so disillusioned by your experience of what others have claimed to be Christianity that you think, why would I want to do that?

[13 : 41] Why would I want to keep thinking this or believing it? And maybe you're here this morning and your world has just fallen apart and you don't know what you believe today.

And you don't want to hope against reason, but you also don't want to make yourself vulnerable to being disappointed again. Friends, the amazing news about Easter is that God and Jesus meets us in these questions and doubts.

This is what happens in verse 26 and 27. Having exposed the crisis of belief that Thomas is going through, now John continues to his account by saying, this is what happens.

Jesus shows up and he challenges Thomas to believe. So a week later, Thomas was still around, all the disciples were still there, and Thomas hadn't bailed and gone back to wherever he came from.

He was still around, but they're afraid. This is an echo of verse 19 of chapter 20, where it seems like they're afraid because their belief in Jesus had put them at odds with the Jewish leaders who had been a part of putting Jesus to death, and they didn't want to be publicly identified because they feared for their lives.

[15 : 00] So they're in a locked room, they're trying to protect themselves, and Jesus shows up. And look, friends, we don't know how the physics of this happened.

Maybe Jesus miraculously unlocked the door, and maybe he just walked through it. But somehow, in a room that a normal human being could not have walked into, Jesus walks in.

Jesus walks in, and in his graciousness, he meets Thomas in two ways. He meets him as a skeptic, and he meets him as one with a wounded heart.

He walks in, and he says, just like he did to the disciples back a few verses earlier, peace be with you. And then he looks at Thomas. Because he's the Lord of all, he knows what Thomas had already said.

He knows what Thomas' heart was like. And he looks at Thomas, and in love he says, Thomas, look. It's really true.

[16 : 08] Put your finger here. Put your hand here. And you know, when he talks about the side, this may sound crazy, but one of the thieves could have been raised from the dead, and he would have had holes in his hands and feet, and it could have been like, well, maybe you're just one of those other guys resurrected, and not Jesus.

But only Jesus had a wound in his side. Jesus looks at Thomas and says, you need help to believe here.

I will give you the evidence. I will give you the physical evidence that you need to believe that this is true. But he also looks at Thomas and he says, I know you're afraid.

I know you're afraid to believe. And he says, peace be with you. It's easy to overlook this, but this is Jesus wishing shalom upon Thomas and upon the disciples.

The peace with God. The peace that could not have been even imaginable for these disciples at this time. Jesus looks at them and says, I know that when I died, you thought the world had fallen apart, but it didn't.

[17 : 34] Actually, it was the best thing that ever happened. By my death, peace with God is now possible. By my death, the world that has been falling apart by sin is now going to live with a new hope that it can be held together.

Salvation is now possible because of that. So Jesus looks at Thomas and he says, Thomas, don't hide. Don't fear. Come out and believe.

He doesn't even rebuke Thomas. I think verse 29, there's some different ways you could formulate this sentence and the way that the ESV has it is more of a question.

Have you believed because you've seen me? Almost like a rebuke. But I think it's actually better read just as a statement. Jesus looks at Thomas and says, you've believed now because you've seen me.

And that's good. And he says, and there's going to be a blessing for those who will come who won't get to see you the way, see me the way you do. But they too will believe because what this is is just the beginning of what God has for this world.

[18 : 56] Jesus comes and he meets Thomas graciously, kindly. He says, I know your fears. I know your need for help in believing and I'm going to give you what you need.

Here's my evidence. See this. Here's my peace to be with you. So the resurrected Jesus meets Thomas and us on both of these levels with the questions that we ask and the things that we need.

And this, of course, is all that what John is doing. As John has written this entire gospel account, all 21 chapters of it, we see this in verses 30 and 31.

John says, this is why I wrote this book. Jesus did many things, many more things than I could even count in this one book.

But the things that have been written have been written so that you may understand who Jesus is and in understanding that you may believe and by believing that you may have life in his name.

[20 : 00] John has marshaled all sorts of arguments and if you're here this morning and you're like, I want to know what those things are. Here are a few of them. One, there were many witnesses to Jesus as a resurrected person walking the earth.

Some would still have been living at the writing of much of the New Testament. The disciples saw him. Women saw him.

The diversity of people from various places in the world saw him. This was not one person's fantasy that was then expounded but many people got to see him.

And the account is written by John in a way that doesn't make any sense if it weren't a historically true account. It includes the testimony of women which would have been completely dismissed in the first century.

And yet John says, don't you see? God graciously gave these women the grace of testifying first to the good news of the resurrected Christ. And it's included.

[21 : 06] Some people have said that this whole account was constructed. But here's a question for you. Why would anyone say a group of disciples who are trying to build a religion out of their own heads write a story about how they didn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Why would Thomas have ever let this get through the editing process? Some people have wondered, well, isn't the Bible just a really old document?

Do we really have good evidence that the documentary, the actual papers are early enough that they haven't been edited and changed so many times over history?

Well, friends, these are all good questions. But the fact is the New Testament is one of the best attested documents in the entire ancient world. We have a book table.

I want to point you to it. It's going to be in the back afterwards if you want to grab some resources. Tim Keller is a great resource to look at to see some of those things.

[22 : 16] There's also some children's ministry resources there for if you have kids and want to help them understand the resurrection. We also have a book stall downstairs that if you really want to dive into the deep end, N.T. Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God is the pinnacle of good research on the historical evidence for why we should believe.

So John is writing this book recounting this story about how Jesus met Thomas and said, here's evidence. John is writing this book to say there's actually a lot more evidence for us to believe.

And so, Jesus says to us, do not disbelieve, but believe. This is the challenge for us this morning. And then we see in verses 28 and 29 the response.

Thomas responds with a striking response. He says, my Lord and my God. Now, if you're writing a play and this is the dialogue, your editor might come to you and say, why this?

This is a really weird response. How about something like, whoa, you're alive! I didn't expect that. How did that happen? There are a lot of other very normal responses to this where we would have, where it could, you know, maybe he would have fallen down on his feet in worship.

[23 : 43] Maybe he would have fallen backwards and faint. Maybe, you know, there are lots of responses we can imagine. But Thomas actually says this, he recognizes who Jesus is in a new and profound way.

The writer, John, had predicted this back in John 20. 12, 16, when he says this, as Jesus was talking about his coming crucifixion, says his disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, that is, when he was raised from the dead, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

And it made sense. And for Thomas, seeing Jesus was the crystallizing factor that brought everything that he had seen about Jesus together.

The resurrection of Jesus allowed Thomas to put together the miracles that he had seen, the ways that he had loved people, the forgiveness that he had offered to sinners and undeserving people, the way that he had called all people to himself and pointed them to God in a way that no one else had and kept pointing to himself as the center of it.

I am the one who's coming to save you. I am the one who's come to be your redeemer. I am the one who's come to do this. And so he looks, Thomas looks at Jesus and says, Now I understand.

[25 : 16] You are my Lord and my God. My Lord, the name that the Jews use for the sovereign God who rules over the world. God, recognizing his deity, which would have been blasphemous in the mouth of a Jew, and yet he recognizes this man standing before him with flesh and blood was God himself.

Thomas looks and says, My Lord and my God. And it wasn't just a theological affirmation. It was personal.

He repeated it. My Lord, my God. He felt the healing touch of seeing Jesus raised from the dead.

He reasserted his trust in and his love for and his submission to Jesus as the one who had come to save him. The things that he had hoped for when he saw Jesus ministering on earth, now he saw.

It's better than he could imagine. My Lord and my God. A complete turnaround. I will never believe to my Lord and my God.

[26 : 33] And if that seems sudden, friends, I want to encourage you, go back and read the New Testament. Go back and read the gospel accounts of people who encountered Jesus. Go back and read the book of Acts as people heard.

The preaching about Jesus Christ risen from the dead. The change happens. They go from belief to unbelief. And though many of us have a process by which we do this, there is often also a time where that change becomes very evident and very clear.

this is my own testimony of encountering Jesus. I said earlier, I grew up going to church, I knew the Bible stories, but I didn't know God and I didn't know Jesus.

And everything that I was taught, it just didn't make sense to me. I knew some of the facts, but I didn't believe them. Then in high school, I met some friends who started talking about a personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus. And honestly, I scorned them. I made fun of them. But I also saw in them something about their life that I couldn't explain.

[27 : 38] But the further on I saw it and the more I interacted with them, I said, whatever they have, there's something that I want. They loved me well and prayed and talked to me about Jesus and the Bible.

They gave me Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. And I saw the facts come together. And I was confronted with the trilemma that C.S. Lewis presents to all of us, which is that if the account of the Bible has any historical reliability, then Jesus presents to us a number of options.

Right? But He can't be just a good teacher. He can't be just a good guy for us to listen to when we want to. He has to speak to us with the fullness of all He does.

And either He's a liar, that is, He claims to be what He's not, or He's a lunatic, which means He's a crazy man who believes in His head something that is just outside of reality, or He really is who He says He is because He claims to be the risen one.

He receives Thomas' affirmation, my Lord and my God. He says, yes, Thomas, that's right. That's what I am to you. I am your Lord and your God.

[28 : 58] And I was confronted with this dilemma and I wrestled with it because I knew that to believe this would change my life. I'd seen my friends. They lived differently. There was a joy and a love and a devotion and a reorientation of their lives.

And I knew it would be costly, but it also was compelling to me. And when I became convinced of who Jesus was and specifically when I realized Jesus was risen from the dead and I can't ignore Him anymore, I have to decide what do I believe about Him?

Either He did or He didn't. Either He was or He wasn't who He said He was. And this is what Jesus does with Thomas. And this is what He does with us.

He calls us to believe. Do you want to clarify that biblical belief is not merely wishful thinking or hopeful optimism about some vague future?

It's not believing something against reason or plain evidence. It's not merely agreeing to facts or sent to the reality that facts portray.

[30 : 10] It is trust. It is entrusting yourself into a belief system whereby you reorient your life around God because you've trusted that His death and His resurrection make all the difference in the world.

Why do we believe that, though? Why do we believe that the resurrection is such good news that if we are convinced of its truth that we would want to embrace it? Friends, because, just like Thomas, the resurrection heals our wounded hearts.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means our salvation. The greatest enemy of our souls, that is, the sinfulness that is in us and in our world because of humanity, has been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus.

Our greatest need as humanity to be reconciled to our Creator God has been met by what makes it possible for us to know a God whom we have in our sinfulness rejected Him in independence and pride.

Jesus, by His resurrection, shows us that the God of love who has come to die for us is now a living Savior who is able to save us.

[31 : 32] A resurrection, a resurrected Jesus also means for us hope that the worst of today will not last and the best of today will be eclipsed by the goodness that is to come.

The evil of this day will not win even when it looks like it. The sorrow and the suffering we face in this world, the loss of a loved one, the disappointment of dashed dreams and hopes, the grinding difficulty of daily life, the confusion, doubt, and fear that we face in uncertain times.

A resurrected Jesus means that we have hope in the midst of these things. He is a living God who is able to walk with us through these trials.

He is a living Savior who has saved us and will never let us go. He is a loving Savior who will love us forever.

And friends, when we look at the end of the Bible, we are reminded of these amazing words. As the Apostle John near the end of his life had a vision of what would happen at the end of times when Jesus would return and establish His kingdom forever, the risen Jesus who is not dead in His grave but who is risen and coming again, this is what will happen when He returns.

[33 : 02] John writes, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the heavenly city in New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people. and God Himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

And He who is seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Friends, this is the good news of the resurrected Jesus.

He is a living Savior today and one day He will come and He will make all things new for us. Do not disbelieve, but believe today and rejoice.

[34 : 06] Christ is risen from the dead. He is risen indeed. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You. We thank You as we remember these truths and we see the gracious way in which You meet us.

Lord, that the story of the resurrection is an incredible, towering truth and a wonderful balm for our soul.

God, be our help today. Help us, Lord. We believe. Help us in our unbelief. Lord, will You today fill us with the joy, the joy of knowing that You are a resurrected and a living Savior for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.