

January 31, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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BELIEVE WHAT IS WRITTEN
John 20:19-31

I find it interesting that the title “People of the Book” is used frequently in the English translation of the Quran to refer to Jews who believe the Torah and Christians who accept both the Torah and the Gospels. In a way, I appreciate being characterized as someone who believes “the Book.” But I prefer to be known as one who believes the entire Book. Muslims claim to accept or believe the first five books of the Bible (the Torah) and the sayings of Jesus (the first four books of the New Testament, the Gospels).

However, that claim runs into an unresolvable conflict because the Quran contradicts clear claims of those sections of the Bible. For example, the Quran teaches that God’s blessing through Abraham was passed on through Ishmael, while the Bible clearly teaches that Isaac was the God-given, chosen son through whom the blessing passed to the Israelites, the nation of God’s choice.

Furthermore, Islam considers it blasphemy to say that Jesus claimed to be God. It also teaches that Jesus, being one of God’s most special prophets, did not actually die on the cross. That makes the resurrection a non-existing issue. That is no small matter since the entire message of the Bible rises and falls on Jesus Christ fulfilling His promise to exit the grave, meet with His disciples, and after several days, return to the Heavenly Father to intercede for us based on the blood He shed to redeem us because He is God the Son.

A great difficulty lies in the fact that it is very hard for humans to fully trust that the shed blood of the man Jesus is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin in all human history. Added to that is the need to believe that He who died for our sins had to rise from the dead to validate that sacrifice and prove victory over the sting of

death, which is sin. Third is the fact that having died for sin and having risen from the dead, Jesus proved that He is God the Son by returning to God the Father where He pleads the sacrifice of His blood on our behalf.

Honestly, it is asking a lot to expect common folks to trust these ideas. More than that, it is really asking a lot to expect people to trust these truths for eternal security. Real people generally find it a lot easier to trust whatever religious dedication and good works they can muster. That is why the vast majority of people in human history have confessed that they hope when they stand before the Eternal Judge, He will take into consideration their dedication, their attempts to do right while they were alive on earth, and, based on that assessment, will allow them into heaven.

Flying in the face of that common opinion is John’s conclusion. What he wrote while being born along by the Holy Spirit of God should hit common people like the blast from a trumpet. Having spelled out in detail nine of Jesus’ most obvious and illustrative miracles, and having recorded many of the perfect truths Jesus taught and how He taught them, John concluded: *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 (John 20:30-31).*

Thomas was one of those common people like us who found it hard to believe that Jesus was actually God the Son and, therefore, able to rise from the dead. He vowed that he would not believe until he saw actual, verifiable proof that Jesus was alive. Jesus condescended to Thomas and showed him the evidence of the nails and spear. Thomas believed. *Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).*

This text offers a very important, yea, a critical argument in the reasons for trusting God. God has graciously given us the Bible, the written revelation of His person and work. Therefore, God concluded that the Bible is all we need. We do not need physical evidence in order to believe Him. We do not need a message from an angel in order to believe. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God and co-equal of God, the only means for eternal life, because the Bible says so. And that is sufficient.

I Can't Believe It (vv.19-25).

Late in the day when Jesus rose from the grave, ten apostles were greatly blessed (vv.19-23). It is possible that there were other followers of Christ present in the room also based on Luke's statement (24:33). But the focus of Jesus' work was toward the men who would continue His ministry. They were glad to see the Lord, though at the outset they might have been a bit shocked. John, an eyewitness, wrote, *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you" (v.19).*

This record corresponds with the statements in Luke 24:36-49. We know that it was Sunday evening. It is likely that this meeting with Jesus which held so much significance (as we will see in the text) was commemorated from that moment by the Church meeting together on Sunday evening. The early Church met on Sunday mornings instead of the Saturday Sabbath in memory of the Lord's resurrection. The same people gathered again on Sunday evening to commemorate: 1) The Lord's supper which Jesus introduced at the evening meal. 2) This meeting with Jesus on Sunday evening. 3) To accommodate the many slaves and servants who were required to work during the day. There were no blue laws in Rome. In light of these reasons, it is possible that the Sunday evening meetings were better attended than the morning services.

In that setting, Jesus of Nazareth entered the room through locked doors. The disciples were behind locked doors because they feared the Jewish authorities would arrest and persecute (if not kill) them also. It seems reasonable that John's report refers to the ten disciples in that Judas was dead and Thomas was missing. God capitalized on the disciples' fear to show the nature of the glorified body. Paul described this kind of body, which all believers will have one day, as being similar to but unlike the human body we have now (1 Cor. 15:42-49). In this body, Jesus could escape grave clothes

without disturbing them, enter through locked doors, and yet eat food (Luke 24:42-43).

Most important in this scene is that Jesus offered the shocked disciples peace. Granted the words "Peace be with you" was a common greeting. But more than simply saying "Hi" to the guys, Jesus offered what He had promised. Earlier He promised, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).* He also promised, *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).* Now Jesus gave what He promised to give.

Because He shouted, "It is finished," He was now able to offer the peace that passes understanding. Our Savior still has the authority to offer this peace. Paul described it as *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).* Do you know it? Do you believe it?

Jesus reassured the followers. *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord (v.20).* By showing the scars that were evident even in His glorified body, Jesus proved that He was not a ghost or a specter. His scars are the validation of His authority to offer peace. They also prove the right Jesus had to commission the disciples for the work of establishing the Church.

Having offered the frightened apostles peace, Jesus issued the great commission (vv.21-23). He gave this commission in connection with the peace He gave. *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (v.21).* That Jesus repeated the promise of peace might indicate that the disciples were quite frightened. The disciples knew full well the extent of the Father sending the Son. He had restated and explained this truth many times in the past three years. Because He laid claim to this truth is the reason the enemy finally grasped in order to justify killing Jesus.

God the Son came to earth, having been sent with the authority of the triune Godhead. He was God manifested on earth (Heb. 1:3). Now God the Son, representative of God the Father and Holy Spirit, commissioned these ten apostles with the same authority He had.

These ten mere men now possessed in a supernatural way all the authority necessary to do God's work.

It appears that Jesus would repeat this commission two more times. Matthew recorded that Jesus also said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20). Luke wrote that Jesus said the same kind of thing just before He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives. He told the disciples, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

By implication, God the Son issues this commission to every person who is born again. Our purpose is also to represent God on earth and tell the good news throughout our lifetime. And like Moses we complain and try to beg off. We explain to God that there are other people much better equipped and more qualified to do the work. No doubt some of the disciples at this point were overwhelmed by the commission and not quite sure what it entailed. Jesus gave them everything they needed to do the work. He gives us the same power and authority.

Not only did Jesus commission the apostles to go into all the world and preach the good news of salvation, but Jesus also prepared the apostles to serve. *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit"* (v.22). Someone is bound to wonder, "How do we reconcile this giving of the Holy Spirit with Pentecost in Acts 2?" If Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in the apostles at this point, then what happened on Pentecost? In our text, the Greek does not have the preposition "on" written specifically. It is implied by the English translation because it is part of the word "breathe." The precise wording in the Greek text states: "*Having said this, He breathed in, and is saying to them, 'Receive Spirit Holy.'*"

Therefore, it is likely that any significance of the breathing was symbolic of what was to come. The verb translated *receive* is in the aorist tense which often indicates past action or a point in time action. That would make this another promise Jesus gave much like His promise, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*"

(John 12:23). He said that to the disciples while the moment of crucifixion was a couple of days off yet. In similar fashion then, this was the promise of the Holy Spirit being sent after He returned to the Father.

That the apostles received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the fulfillment of Christ's promise, is critical. Only by receiving the Holy Spirit do God's servants have the ability and authority to serve Him. Paul taught, *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own* (1 Corinthians 6:19).

At the same time, Jesus also granted eternal authority to the apostles. "*If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld*" (v.23). This is not the authority for any person, no matter how important or gifted by God, including Peter, to absolve another person's sins. Only God can forgive sins and for eternity He retains that authority. But, on the authority of God's Word, any follower of Christ can declare the good news to sinners that God will forgive their sins when they confess them and trust Christ's sacrifice for them. At the same time, we have all authority on the basis of God's Word to warn that failure to confess sin and repent is to forfeit forgiveness.

The apostles who experienced this meeting had to be greatly encouraged. But one apostle was greatly confused (vv.24-25). Thomas wasn't at the meeting. When the other ten apostles told him what they experienced, Thomas rejected the faith of his friends. *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"* (vv.24-25a). The text clearly states that Thomas was not at this special meeting with Christ. No doubt the other ten apostles were delighted to tell him the good news that Jesus was alive. Thomas responded like most of us humans would: "Show me and I'll believe it."

We should not be too critical of Thomas because generally humans instinctively know that fellow humans do not come back from the dead. That is why Thomas demanded physical proof that it was indeed the real Jesus who met with the apostles. *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” (v.25b). At this point, the little faith of Thomas looked a lot like the lack of faith the hypocrites displayed who vowed they would believe if Jesus came off the cross. He sounded like one of the Pharisees who demanded a sign in the heavens before they would believe. He was like unbelievers today who demand personal, real-life proof of God’s work instead of accepting God’s testimony in creation and in His Word.

There have been times when I have shared the wonderful news of the gospel with people only to have them reply, “When I can understand this, I might think about accepting it.” That is to put human understanding over God’s truth. Because God’s character and work is so superior to human finiteness, it is impossible for anyone to comprehend all things about God. It truly is impossible to fully grasp God becoming one of us, being killed though innocent, paying sin’s penalty with His blood, and rising from the dead. None of that fits the human paradigm. Mark this truth well! Apart from the work of God’s amazing grace in a sinful heart, no one will ever truly believe in Jesus.

I Must Believe (vv.26-31).

These verses reveal again that Jesus is the Master of second chances (vv.26-29). In the case reported here, the Master invited Thomas to keep his vow. That means that Jesus had to show up again. He did, a week later. *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” (v.26).* “Eight days later” means the disciples were meeting the next Sunday (if the previous Sunday is included). Already these followers of Christ were in the habit of meeting on the first day of the week even as the Church was still doing some twenty-five years later when Paul instructed believers to bring their offering when they met on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). A week later, these apostles were still behind a locked door because of fear.

Apparently, this fear did not disappear until the apostles received the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to these fearful followers Jesus again announced peace. After Pentecost these men would experience that perfect peace, and also perfect love for Christ that caused their

fear to dissipate. *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love (1John 4:18).*

This time Thomas was present and Jesus challenged the doubter’s faith. *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” (v.27).* Jesus used Thomas’s own expression of doubt to rebuke him. Thomas had said that unless he saw the marks and put his fingers in the marks of the nails he refused to believe. Therefore, Jesus rebuked Thomas saying, *“Stop being an unbeliever, but be a believer.”*

That is our message to all men, women, and children. Failure or refusal to believe God is natural. It is our default mode because of sin. No one needs to convince us not to trust God. God gave us an astonishing display of creation in order to convince us to trust Him. God gave us the perfect expression of Himself in Jesus in order to convince us to trust Him. God has given us His completed Word, His self-revelation, the Bible, in order to convince us to trust Him.

Because we have all this evidence, we should boldly take the message to all the world: “God has provided salvation from sin through God the Son. Trust Him!” But if we really don’t trust God, why would we challenge others to that end? If we are attempting to win God’s approval by our good works, we are not trusting God. If we have simply given intellectual assent to the gospel message and have simply prayed a meaningless prayer, we do not trust God. We stop being an unbeliever and become a believer only when we give up on ourselves and cling wholly and only to Jesus Christ as our hope and Master.

Thomas proved that great faith is the conviction of things not seen. Jesus words struck Thomas down with conviction. *Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (v.28).* Contrary to the conclusion of fools, this is not a case of Thomas cursing. There is no evidence that Thomas bothered to put his finger in the scars. Having come face-to-face with Jesus, “Doubting Thomas” declared one of the first and great Christological confessions of the Church. He declared that Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord. The title means at least that Jesus is our superior. It means that Jesus of Nazareth who bought us by

dying for our sins is our Master. It means that He is the same as the Old Testament “Lord” who is God.

Thomas left no doubt by calling Jesus God. He used the term with all of its Old Testament meaning and nuance. Thomas was a Hebrew and understood completely what he declared. No doubt this too was a case of God Himself revealing truth to Thomas just as was the case when Peter declared that he and the other apostles believed that Jesus was the Christ (Matthew 16).

And, unlike Thomas, happy are we who are convinced by the unseen. *Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (v.29). Thomas saw and became a believer. We see Jesus revealed in the Scripture and become people who trust Him. The writer to the Hebrew Christians taught that *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). This means that we do not have to comprehend everything about Jesus in order to be born again. We simply have to trust what the Bible says about Jesus and God will do the miracle of regeneration.

Jesus’ person and work is affirmed by the Bible (vv.30-31). God the Son proved His divinity through many signs. *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book* (v.30). John picked out nine signs in particular (including the resurrection) to use as proof of Jesus’ divinity. God our creator is convinced that these miracles are sufficient to convince us to trust Him. To that end John argued that these are recorded so that you will believe. *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* (v.31).

The key issue in this argument is that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That means we must truly believe that Jesus the man from Nazareth is equal with God. That is the one point almost all false religions agree cannot be true. But the result of believing this truth is that, by believing you may have life in His name. What do you believe? What do you believe about the name of Jesus? The name of Jesus encompasses His full character, person, and work. Therefore, salvation from the penalty and the power of sin comes only through Jesus Christ. Trust Him and He will save you. Disbelieve Him and He will be your judge.

The Gospel of John is a microcosm of the whole Bible. God gave us the Bible to tell us about His amazing plan of offering salvation through God the Son from start to finish. These are written that you might believe. The Bible has been attacked, maligned, lied about, misinterpreted, and the target of evil men’s attacks for centuries. But its message has never changed and will remain changeless for eternity. When all the unbelieving people of history stand before Jesus one day claiming that they should be allowed to enjoy eternal life because of what they have done, Jesus will simply need to look at the Bible sitting on the corner of the judgment bar and ask, “What did you believe about this book?”