

Holy Week 2018

*When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished,"
and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

(John 19:30 ESV)

*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!"

(John 20:27–28 ESV)

My Lord And My God!

Easter Sunday

April 1st 2018

John 20:1-31

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Introduction:

I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to John 20. We'll read the whole chapter and then we will focus in on Thomas' climactic confession in verse 28. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1.

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

19 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." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven

them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 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.”

26 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.” 27 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.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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 20:1–31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Christianity is a faith based upon a fact and that fact is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That fact changed the world and it changed the disciples. D.A. Carson puts it this way:

For John, as for all the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus was the immutable fact upon which their faith was based; and their faith in large part depended on the testimony and transformed behaviour of those who had actually seen the resurrected Jesus. Their Master was not in God’s eyes a condemned criminal; the resurrection proved that he was vindicated by God, and therefore none less than the Messiah, the Son of God he claimed to be. The culminating faith that brings the disciples out of the era of the Mosaic covenant and into the era of the saving sovereignty of God mediated through the Son is based on the sheer facticity of the resurrection¹

I’m not sure I’ve heard the word “facticity” before but I like it. And I think I understand what it means. It means that SEEING JESUS RISEN FROM THE DEAD changed the world. That is the foundational fact to which all subsequent Christian teaching is logically tethered. The Apostle Paul said that. He said:

if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:17–19 ESV)

If Jesus Christ did not in fact rise from the dead then Christianity isn’t just illogical it is stupid and unsaving – that’s what Paul said.

But thanks be to God – he did rise from the dead! And therefore the FACT of his resurrection became the foundational evidence for the truth and efficacy of his works and claims.

The empty tomb changes everything!

¹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 631–632.

That's the essential logic of Christianity and here we see the force of that logic acting upon the most empirical of the Lord's disciples. The word "empirical" just means "convinced by evidence". Thomas is called Doubting Thomas for a reason. He supplies the reason. He says:

"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." (John 20:25 ESV)

Thomas says that he will ONLY be convinced by the evidence – he is a stubbornly empirical man. And obviously in the mysteries of Providence, God intended that to be the case.

Matthew Henry says usefully here:

His slowness and backwardness to believe may help to strengthen our faith; for hereby it appears that the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, who attested it to the world, and pawned their lives upon it, were not easy credulous men, but cautious enough, and suspended their belief of it till they saw the utmost evidence of it they could desire.²

That's why John uses this story as the climax of his Gospel. John is saying that even the most empirical of Christ's disciples was fully convinced of his bodily resurrection and therefore you can trust our testimony. We have seen the evidence – John himself was one of the 3 eye witnesses to the empty tomb – Peter, John and Mary – were all INSIDE the empty tomb and saw the grave cloths and the head cloth folded neatly on the side. To state the obvious that proves that this was a resurrection not a robbery. Robbers take things – not bodies. But here the valuable things were left and the body was gone. And of course robbers snatch and grab – they don't stay and do laundry – so why was the head cloth FOLDED? These facts made an impression on the first three eye-witnesses – John says of himself:

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed (John 20:8 ESV)

John was convinced by the evidence he saw – and here Thomas is convinced by the evidence he saw.

²Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 36865.

He saw and he believed and believing he uttered the most exalted and comprehensive Christological confession in all the Gospels. Seeing the wounds on Jesus' hands and side he declared finally:

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28 ESV)

And that is the climax of John's Gospel. That is where he has been leading us all along. We know that because of what John says next:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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 ESV)

John wrote – John selected stories and assembled evidence and testimony so that you could eventually make the exact same confession as Doubting Thomas. John has arranged the evidence to help you say what this brother was helped to say.

My Lord and my God!

That is where you need to get to and that is the entire reason why John wrote his Gospel. He wants you to say what Thomas said – even though you haven't seen what Thomas has seen. We don't get to put our hands in Jesus' side – we don't get to touch the nail marks on his hand. And yet we can believe and be eternally blessed of God – Jesus says that. He says:

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. (John 20:29 ESV)

The first disciples SAW and believed – but then Jesus ascended into heaven and we see him no more – that's why the Bible says now:

faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

Faith comes now by reading and hearing what these witnesses said about Jesus Christ. They wrote down his words – we're reading them today VIA THE APOSTLE JOHN. So these witnesses wrote down the words of Jesus and then they wrote books and letters explaining the

words of Jesus – that’s what the New Testament is. And it is now by hearing those words that faith is born and nurtured in the human heart.

But one way or the other we all have to end up at the same place in order to be saved. To be saved – to be a Christian – you need to be able to say as Thomas said:

My Lord and my God!

So let’s spend some time today thinking about those words – let’s make sure we understand the essential Christian confession.

The Essential Christian Confession: My Lord And My God!

Let’s first of all ask the question:

1. What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to call Jesus of Nazareth your Lord and your God?

Well I don’t think that is TWO ENTIRELY distinct designations – the two ideas here are intertwined and overlapping. Roy Ciampa for example says:

The declaration “*Jesus is Lord*” was the most fundamental of all Christian statements of faith. In it the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, is identified with or as Yahweh. ... Of course, this was also a politically loaded affirmation in the context of the Roman Empire where that title was expected to be attributed to Caesar. *Jesus is Lord* is not merely a statement of theological conviction but of personal allegiance.³

So I think this statement in Thomas’ mouth meant roughly that Jesus is Our Divine Master and is therefore worthy of our worship and allegiance over and above every other competing claim or interest.

I think that’s what it means.

³Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 566.

It means Jesus is God – therefore everything he says is true and authoritative and binding.

It means Jesus is Master – what he says goes. What he demands must be given.

And I think it means he is those things in a way that forbids us to treat any other person or institution as Sovereign and Absolute.

If Jesus is Lord and God than obviously there can be no other competing claims upon us.

We belong to him.

I think that's what it means and I think that leads us to a fairly obvious follow up question: what will this confession cost us?

2. What Will It Cost You?

Even in Thomas' day this sort of confession was bound to get you into trouble. We mentioned last week that in Jesus' day – which was obviously also Thomas' day – the denarius coin had the face of Tiberius Caesar engraved upon it and around it was written the inscription:

Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus.

So even in Jesus' day the Caesars were claiming to be Lord and God – and one can't imagine that they would be willing to share that title and the allegiance it implies with anyone else. And of course as history reveals they were not.

In the year AD 112 Pliny the Younger was sent by the Emperor Trajan to investigate a bunch of alleged Christians in the Province of Pontus – in modern day Turkey. He immediately rounded up the members of the local church. Robert Louis Wilken writes that:

“Pliny first asked each person if he were a Christian while at the same time warning him that if he answered yes he would be executed. After asking him the first time he put the same question a second time, and then a third. When he had received a definite yes from some members of the group, Pliny sent them off to be executed.”⁴

Later he began to worry that some Christians might be tricking him and saying that they were not Christians when in fact they were. Wilken says:

“He solved his dilemma by a “test” designed to determine who was and was not a Christian. He had statues of the emperor Trajan and of the Capitoline gods – Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva – brought into the room. Those who had already admitted that they were Christians he sent off to be executed, as he had done with the first group. Those who denied the charge he asked to repeat after him a “formula of invocation to the gods” and “to make an offering of wine and incense” to Trajan’s statue. He also ordered them to “revile the name of Christ”.⁵

By the way it is entirely possible that he learned of this method of exposing Christians from the Jewish synagogue leaders. Many scholars believe that this was the method used in the early Jewish persecution of Christians – meaning that this was how people like Paul – before he was the Apostle Paul – separated out the Christians from among a local synagogue. Do you remember in 1 Corinthians 12 when Paul says:

I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3 ESV)

What is he saying there? Many scholars believe that he is referring to his prior work as an Inquisitor. Saul Paul was one of the first persecutors of the Christians – the Bible says:

Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 8:3 ESV)

Saul was ravaging the early church – going synagogue by synagogue and even house by house and he may well have been using this very technique. Imagine right now that a man with the full authority of the state burst into this room backed no doubt by a row of well armed policeman. Imagine if he came to the front and addressed the congregation with these words:

“Today we are going to conduct a little test. I will point at you – each in your turn – and you will stand. And you will say: “Jesus is cursed”. You will say that or you will die. These men will take you into custody, your testimony will be recorded and you will be stoned for blasphemy.”

⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians As The Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*; 25.

Imagine that – because that is almost certainly what happened. Paul said that was what happened.

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women (Acts 22:4 ESV)

So Paul said this happened and he seems to be saying in 1 Corinthians 12 how it happened. There was a simple test. And he says in 1 Corinthians 12 – now himself a born again believer – now himself – a preacher of the faith – that no one could possibly stand up under those conditions and say: JESUS IS LORD – unless he truly was filled with the Holy Spirit. Because as soon as those words passed his lips he would be taken out and imprisoned and executed. You could only say that if you were truly saved and filled with the Spirit.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine if they came in here and pointed at you and all you had to say to go home was: “Jesus is cursed”. But instead of that – knowing what it would cost – you stood and you said: JESUS IS LORD! My Lord and My God!

Can you imagine that?

Can you imagine that people did that?

Because that’s what Paul says happened and church history say that it happened again and again and again. Again and again this statement of faith has been uttered in unimaginable circumstances. Because again and again and again the state has been confused and then irritated and then threatened by our unswerving allegiance to Jesus Christ.

So they test it.

And discovering it they punish it.

Now of course, the price is different in every generation. How much you pay depends on when and where you live.

Hear those words – when and WHERE you live.

This is not just something that happened in the past – it still happens in other parts of the world today. In May of 2017 28 Christians were executed by ISIS when their bus was stopped on the side of the road. I want to read to you one paragraph from the NY Times; this is what they say happened:

“Claiming to be security officers, the gunmen ordered the passengers to get out. They separated the men from the women and children, and instructed them to surrender their mobile phones. They told the men to recite the shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith. When the men refused, the gunmen opened fire.”⁶

One after another they were asked to make the essential Islamic confession – they knew - like Saul knew - that there were some things no true believer could ever say – and so they used that test and everyone who failed it – or passed it depending on your perspective - was executed on the spot.

That happened last year.

But not here.

Here the price is lower. It costs us funding for summer interns. It costs some of us here standing in our professional societies. For some doctors and lawyers it may soon cost them their jobs. But it does not cost us our lives. Not here. Not yet.

And so I can't tell you precisely what it will cost you to utter the essential Christian confession. But I can give you the range. It will cost you something between cultural discomfort and capital punishment.

We've been enjoying the low end of that range for a long time and we have just started to nudge our way towards the middle. In days to come the cost could go up or it could go down – only God knows.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/world/middleeast/egypt-coptic-christian-attack.html>

But this we can say for sure. It is never free. In every generation it will be viewed as weird to some and threatening to others. It will mean that you won't get to swim along with the current of culture. Jesus never goes that way. He always cuts across the grain. He said that:

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:19 ESV)

In every generation – in every time and place – that is true. Jesus cuts across the grain. Jesus judges the world. He says that its deeds are evil. He says that its loyalties are misplaced. So if you say as he says then they will hate you as they hated him.

That I know for sure.

That is the minimum price that must always be paid.

And that leaves us with just one final question and it is reasonably easy to answer: where will this confession of faith lead us?

3. Where Will It Lead You?

If we make it, where will it take us?

There are two answers to that question and they need to be given in sequence.

The first answer is “into trouble”. As we've just said this confession is always threatening to the world. Jesus said:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

So if you follow Jesus, if you make this confession it will lead you into trouble.

But then, according to the Apostle John it will lead you out of trouble and into eternal life. That's where he ends his Gospel. Having told us of Thomas' confession he goes on to share his own transparent motivation for doing so; he says I have written these things:

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 20:31 ESV)

If you make this confession – knowing what it means and believing it in your heart – it will lead you into trouble – there will be a cost and after that a crown.

Response:

So the question of course is this:

Will you say it?

Can you say it? Believing it in your heart – can you say it?

Then let's do. Stand right now and be counted.

Stand with me and with Thomas and with a long line of faithful others around the world and across the ages.

Stand and believing in your heart - say with me these 5 words:

My Lord And My God!

Blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed.

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.