

# Easter Sunday 2024

*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 20:31 ESV)*

## **My Lord and My God!**

**March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

**John 20:24-31**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning, Redeemer and Simcoside! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

I am so thankful that you could be with us this Easter Sunday, and I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to John 20.

On Friday, we beheld Jesus on the cross and we were reminded that he died for our sin. At least, that was his claim. He claimed that he was paying the price for our sin, but when he breathed his last breath and gave up his spirit, there was really no way of knowing if he had accomplished what he had set out to accomplish.

Are we forgiven? Has our sin been atoned for? Has death been defeated? If Jesus stayed in his tomb, then we would have no reason for confidence. The Apostle Paul says exactly that in 1 Corinthians 15:

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17 ESV)

If the grave held Jesus, then the grave will hold you and me. If the grave held Jesus, then all his claims were ultimately false. If the grave held Jesus, then he LIED to us and everything he taught was simply the ramblings of a charlatan.

But – praise God – he DID rise! Today, we celebrate the most important event in human history – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus stepped out of that tomb some 2,000 years ago, the WORLD changed forever!

To be a Christian is to accept the eye witness accounts of the 500 disciples who saw the risen Jesus and who held to their testimony even as they were tortured and killed. Peter was crucified upside down. John was boiled in tar. Pascal once said:

I [believe] those witnesses that get their throat cut.<sup>1</sup>

Fire and sword and whip were used to try to silence the testimony of these men and women who claimed to have seen the risen Lord, but fire and sword and whip could not silence this group because this group NO LONGER FEARED DEATH! Because they were followers of the King who triumphed over the grave!

When Jesus stepped out of that tomb, he proved once and for all that death no longer has any claim on those who are united with him. If you have confessed your sin and placed your trust in Jesus, the power of sin has been broken and you no longer need to fear the grave.

Earlier in our service, I read John’s account of that first Easter Sunday. But I want to spend the rest of our time this morning focusing in on a story that took place one week after that first Easter Sunday. We’re going to turn our attention to a doubting disciple named Thomas.

Look with me now at John 20:24-31. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active Word to us today:

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

<sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 218.

him, “My Lord and my God!”<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> 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 20:24-31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

John was the only gospel writer to include this story. Not only did he include it, but he has positioned it to function as the CLIMAX of his Gospel. Clearly, he saw something powerful here. So, what do we learn from the story of doubting Thomas?

### **What Do We Learn From The Story Of Doubting Thomas?**

One of the first lessons that strikes me as I consider this story is that:

#### **1. Doubt is not a modern problem**

We often believe the myth that it is. We convince ourselves that mankind blindly believed everything until the enlightenment. But now – in our modern world – we are finally brave enough to ask the hard questions! That type of thinking is a form of chronological snobbery. It assumes that we are the first generation to experience doubt. But we see here that there were skeptics – there were people who struggled to believe – on day ONE after the resurrection. And that doubter was one of Jesus’ disciples!

Think about it: If John hadn’t included this story, then we might be tempted to walk away from this Gospel with the impression that the whole early church immediately and seamlessly accepted the testimony of the resurrection.

But we discover here that it was more complicated than that. Not everyone was so quick to believe. Thomas – by all accounts – was completely devastated by the events of Good Friday. When Easter Sunday came, and the disciples were gathered to pray and to consider the amazing reports that they were hearing, Thomas didn’t even show up! We see that in verse 24:

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, **was not with them when Jesus came.** (John 20:24 ESV)

He wasn't there. He wasn't ready to come together with the disciples. One commentator notes:

Some people, in times of great and desolating sorrow, find comfort in one another's company. Others prefer to creep into a corner and be alone with their grief. Thomas belonged to this latter category.<sup>2</sup>

By all accounts, Thomas was a man who had a hard time with hope. He is quoted two previous times in John's gospel, and he is always something of an "Eeyore" character. For example, back in chapter 11, Jesus told his disciples that they needed to return to Judea to tend to Lazarus. The leaders in the region had previously threatened to kill Jesus, but he assured his disciples that there was nothing to fear. To which Thomas replied:

Let us also go, **that we may die with him.** (John 11:16b ESV)

He's not exactly an optimist, is he? Or consider the story in John 14. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them. He assures them that *they will know the way* to get there at which point Thomas interjects:

"Lord, we do not know where you are going. **How can we know the way?"** (John 14:5 ESV)

This is the picture we have of Thomas. He is a man who is not inclined toward hope. He struggles to believe the amazing things that he has been told. And so, it should come as no surprise that when the rest of the disciples came to him and declared that they had SEEN JESUS, he responded:

"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 20:25b ESV)

Think about this: The people who shared this report with Thomas weren't strangers. These were his closest friends! He could see the excitement in their eyes! He could hear the sincerity in their voices! They truly BELIEVED what they were saying!

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<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 393.

And still, he couldn't accept their testimony. He simply could not overcome his doubt.

I suspect that John included this story to remind us that there will always be people like this in our midst. There are probably some of you with us even this morning. You see the excitement in your loved ones' eyes. You know that they're not trying to scam you. They really, truly believe this!

But – like Thomas – you're just not there. You have doubts, and you can't simply push a button to make those doubts disappear. Let this story remind you that unbelief is not a modern problem.

If that's you, or if that is someone that you love, take comfort in the second lesson that we learn in this story:

## **2. Doubt is met with mercy**

Thomas refused to live off of the faith of his friends. Perhaps they had just hallucinated. Perhaps they had misidentified a stranger as Jesus. Grief messes with people. Whatever they had seen – or thought that they had seen – Thomas needed more.

If he was going to believe, then he needed to *touch* the wounds of Jesus. He needed to know that this wasn't his mind playing tricks on him. He needed to know that this wasn't an impersonator or an illusion.

Thomas sat in his doubts for an entire week after the resurrection. Just think about that: For an entire week, he watched as the rest of the group prayed and worshiped and celebrated the amazing news! I find it interesting that Thomas kept showing up! Whether it was his love for his friends, or his hope that one day his doubts would be resolved, or his desire for community – we don't know – all we know is that Thomas kept coming. He sat there in his doubt and watched as everyone around him rested in a faith that he just couldn't seem to obtain. But then, in verse 26, we read:

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."  
(John 20:26 ESV)

Can I make one practical observation here? It's a good thing that Thomas kept coming! He missed Jesus the first time because he was wallowing by himself, but this time, he positioned himself in the place where he could witness the miracle. If you're struggling with doubt, put yourself in the right place. Keep coming. Keep reading. Keep worshiping. Jesus will meet you there. He met Thomas, and we read in verse 27:

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, (John 20:27a ESV)

Pause there. Imagine that you had never heard this story before. What would you expect Jesus to say in this moment? "Thomas! You faithless fool! Where were you last Sunday? How dare you doubt me!" That's what WE often say to people when they are wrestling with doubt. But look here at what Jesus says:

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." (John 20:27 ESV)

Jesus met Thomas in his doubt, and he answered the *exact* objection that was keeping him from believing.

Because Jesus deals mercifully with our doubt.

That said, I want to clarify here that there is a difference between doubters and scoffers. Scoffers have questions too, but scoffers don't actually care to have their questions answered. In fact, if you settled their objections, they would just scramble to find more objections because they don't want to believe! We find an example of this in Matthew 16 where we read:

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. (Matthew 16:1 ESV)

"We WANT to believe you, Jesus, but we simply need more signs. Show us a sign from heaven!" These men are like the biblical equivalent to the co-worker who objects, "If God REALLY wanted me to believe, then He would write a message for me in the clouds. THEN I would believe!" No, you wouldn't! He coded your DNA with more information than the encyclopedia Britannica and you ascribe THAT to time and chance. This beautiful, intricate, FINE-TUNED world that you are

living in is crying out to you day after day that there is a God, but you ignore all of the evidence. If there were a message in the clouds, you'd blame it on bird migration patterns! Jesus deals mercifully with the doubter, but he responds to these scoffers:

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but **no sign will be given to it**  
(Matthew 16:4a ESV)

That's a very different response than the response that Thomas received, isn't it?

What we learn in the contrast of these two stories is that there is a type of doubt that Jesus delights to answer, and there is another type of doubt that Jesus condemns to hell. The difference lies in the heart. In Jeremiah 29, God said:

You will seek me and find me, **when you seek me with all your heart.** (Jeremiah 29:13  
ESV)

God is not hiding from you. If you earnestly want to find Him, He will show Himself to you. Now, it may take some time. Thomas came to faith a week later than the rest of his friends, and no doubt a week later than he wanted. But Jesus met him in his doubt.

For many – like the Pharisees and the Sadducees – doubt is just an excuse. You have doubts alright, but you LOVE those doubts, because they allow you to ignore God and to live life however you please. Jesus isn't meeting you in those doubts because you don't want him to. God doesn't suffer a fool.

But for those who truly want to see – for those who say like the man with the demon-possessed son:

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24b ESV)

Doubt is met with mercy.

So, ask those questions. Pick up your Bible and search for those answers. Pray. And watch with great expectation, because we are reminded in this story that:

### 3. Doubt can give way to profound faith

I am so thankful for this story! I am so thankful that John took the time in this Gospel to introduce us to Thomas and to give us a glimpse into his disposition. Because we all know someone like this. Some of us see him staring back at us in the mirror. Thomas is quoted four times in this gospel and the first three times we catch a glimpse of a sulking, sullen man with no hope. Just listen to him again:

Let us also go, that we may die with him. (John 11:16b ESV)

“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (John 14:5 ESV)

“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 20:25b ESV)

This is who Thomas is. This is who he’s always been. The glass has always been half empty. The plan has always seemed hopeless. Skepticism and doubt have always been his native tongue.

But what I LOVE about this passage is that John shows us here that there is hope for the Thomases of the world! Jesus doesn’t just save the optimists! He saves the pessimists too, and so he came to Thomas, and he knocked down all of his excuses! He gave Thomas a new heart and new eyes, and suddenly Thomas had a new voice! The fourth and final time that he speaks in this gospel he sounds like an entirely NEW MAN! Doubting Thomas declares:

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

This is THE CLIMACTIC ANNOUNCEMENT in the Gospel of John. The book began with the statement:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.**  
(John 1:1 ESV)



And now, it comes to a close with the most skeptical of the disciples looking at the resurrected Jesus and declaring: “My LORD and my GOD!” One commentator observes:

How marvellous are the ways of Divine grace. Doubting Thomas was the one who gave the strongest and most conclusive testimony to the absolute Deity of the Saviour which ever came from the lips of a man!... Where sin abounded, grace *did* much more abound!<sup>3</sup>

Thomas saw Jesus and everything changed.

He was able to declare that Jesus is Lord. He is the Messiah King that the prophets foretold. He is the child of promise who came to crush the serpent’s head – the true seed of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed – the descendent of David who will usher in true and lasting peace! Jesus is LORD!

And not only that, Thomas declared Jesus is MY LORD! He is the one who came to save ME from my sin. He is the one who came to settle my debt, and to suffer my condemnation so that I could become a child of God – and that is what I am! If I have confessed my sin and sworn my allegiance to him then Jesus is MY LORD!

More amazing still, Thomas looked at the resurrected Jesus and said, “He is MY GOD!” A man doesn’t have the power to lay down his life and then take it back up again. A man doesn’t have the power to turn water into wine, or to heal the sick with a word, or to multiply loaves and fish, or to walk on water, or to call dead men out of their tombs! But Jesus did all of that and more! Because Jesus is not just another moral leader or influential teacher – Jesus is GOD! And it is only because he is God that he was able to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Only God could pay for the sins of the world! Only God could do it, and God has done it, because that’s who Jesus is:

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

That confession was made by Thomas. From the skeptic – the pessimist – the doubter – overflowed the clearest expression of Jesus’ divinity in all of Scripture. As God said to Isaiah:

I will open rivers on the bare heights,  
and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1113.

I will make the wilderness a pool of water,  
and the dry land springs of water. (Isaiah 41:18 ESV)

God brings water from the desert. God brings dead bones to life! And God makes great skeptics into even greater witnesses! Doubt can give way to profound faith!

## Conclusion

As we conclude, I want to draw your attention to the closing verses of our passage this morning. Look with me one last time at verses 29-31:

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> **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 20:29-31 ESV)

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

This story was written for people like you and me. We don't have the benefit of putting our fingers into the wounds in his hands. We have not seen, and we will not see on this side of glory. At least, not physically. We are called to see with the eyes of faith. We are called to listen to this announcement, and to believe. As Paul wrote:

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

I can't claim this with any certainty, but I suspect that John included this story because he knew that there would be many Thomases in the years and decades and centuries to follow. I suspect that John was touched by the mercy that Jesus showed to his good friend Thomas, and – inspired by the Holy Spirit – he wanted to encourage the doubters of future generations.

Doubt isn't new. Jesus isn't surprised that you have questions.

If you are here this morning and you have doubts, we're glad you're here. God can handle your doubt. Ask your hard questions. Pick up the Bible and read it for yourself. Is this true? Did Jesus of Nazareth really rise from the dead? You need to answer that question for yourself.

If he didn't, then eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow we will die. As Paul wrote:

if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:14 ESV)

But if he did rise then that changes everything. If he rose, then he is God, and if he is God then we need to LISTEN TO HIM! When men teach, you're free to tune in and out, but when God speaks you need to LOCK IN! If he rose – if he is God – then there is one thing in particular that he said that I want you to take very seriously this morning. He said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.** (John 14:6 ESV)

If he rose, then he is the only way home.

Now, you need to decide whether or not this is reality or a fairytale, and then you need to respond accordingly. Do you have questions? Are you wondering where to start? Why don't you go home today and read John's gospel? Because, as he said:

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 20:31 ESV)

If you find yourself stirred – if you find that the doubts are getting smaller and the faith is growing larger – if you find yourself realizing that you are a sinner who needs a saviour – here is all that you need to know to: Confess your sin. Turn away from it. And then believe in Jesus. Believe that he is God. Believe that he lived the life that you couldn't live. Believe that he died on that cross to bear your sin. Believe that he stepped out of that tomb proving that death no longer has a hold on those who are united to him. Repent. Believe. And have life in his name.

Because he is risen! He is risen indeed! Let's pray together.