

Easter 2018

Redeemer City Campus

*For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.
(Hebrews 11:10 ESV)*

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

My Lord and My God

April 1st 2018

John 20:24-31

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Introduction:

Good morning!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our hope! If he had not risen – if the story had ended on Good Friday at the cross – then Christianity would be nothing more than a cult following of a mistreated and murdered moral teacher. Jesus would be numbered with the other revered teachers of the world – he would be one more in a long list of dead prophets.

But he is risen. He is risen indeed! And that changes everything.

I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John. As you do that, I'm going to begin our time together this morning a little differently than usual. On a day like today, I am aware that we likely have some extra guests in our presence. I suspect that you probably think it's a tad nonsensical that we are using the Bible to justify our belief in Jesus' resurrection. Isn't that the equivalent of using the Harry Potter books to justify your belief in Lord Voldemort?

If that's what you're thinking, I don't want you to tap out before we even begin. I want to just take five minutes as we begin today to answer two objections that might be rolling through your mind:

Objection 1: You can't trust the Bible! Do you know how many times that thing has been changed?

I can't tell you how many times I've heard that. It would be a crippling argument if it were true. But it's not. We have manuscripts – that is to say early copies – of the New Testament that go back to 150 AD. Those manuscripts attest that the words we have in front of us today are the words that were there 2000 years ago. Sir Frederic Kenyon is the director of the British Museum and he tells us:

In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament.¹

If you want to reject the New Testament as a historical document for lack of evidence then you will need to discard every other document ranging back to the third century. These are the words that the disciples wrote on their parchment and papyri two-thousand years ago.

This leads to the next objection:

Objection 2: Even if this is what the Apostles wrote, couldn't they have manufactured these stories to save face and gain power?

Well, here's the thing: Have you read the New Testament? Embarrassing stories about the Apostles are on every other page! If those guys were looking to gain for themselves a prestigious place in the eyes of the world then they would not have written a document like this. Let's also bear in mind that all but one of the Apostles were murdered horrifically for their faith. The one who survived, John – the author of the Gospel we are about to read – was boiled alive in tar but miraculously survived. He was then sent to prison on an island called Patmos where he died in isolation.

The Apostles were tortured and murdered for this story. They wrote what they wrote because this

¹ Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1901), 4.

story is true. If they had been telling lies, Christianity would have fallen apart right from the get-go. But it didn't. Because they weren't. The Apostle Peter wrote:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (1 Peter 1:16 ESV)

Praise the Lord! We are not considering a myth this morning! We are studying the most important event in human history. And we're not doing so with a blind, naïve faith. We are turning our attention to a historical eyewitness account of the resurrected Christ. If this is true, it changes everything. Hear now the word of the Lord:

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

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

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but 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 is the only Gospel writer to include this story. Which is fascinating because Thomas' confession in this story serves as the climax of his Gospel. John structured this account with a purpose in mind. He tells us:

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)

John says that the purpose of his gospel is so that you and I in this room might be confronted by the reality of the resurrected Christ. He wants us to believe because he wants us to live! It is with this intention that John provides us with this story of Thomas and his great confession.

The Great Confession: My Lord and My God!

I'm going to break this story into three parts this morning. First, I want you to see how wonderful it is that this confession comes from the mouth of a skeptic:

1. The Story of a Skeptic

John is the only gospel writer to spend to write about Thomas. He mentions him three times – twice leading up to this story and then of course the text that we have in front of us. I would argue that John included Thomas in his account for a reason: He wants us to see that this incredible confession was proclaimed by the most skeptical of the disciples.

Thomas comes across in John's gospel as a loyal yet a very practical man. Consider the stories that John includes that introduce us to Thomas. He first speaks in chapter 11. Jesus has determined that he will return to Judea to see his sick friend Lazarus, but the last time he was in Judea the Jews tried to kill him. The disciples attempt to talk Jesus out of the trip but are unsuccessful at which point we're told:

So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16 ESV)

Thomas is no coward. But he's no optimist either, 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)

Jesus has just told Thomas that he will know the way and Thomas asks: "Yeah, but how? How is this all going to work?" He wants to see the plan. These are the stories that John has included in his gospel to introduce us to Thomas – the man who will make the most important confession in all of the gospels. Now, consider the progression of chapter 20.

The chapter begins with the story of Peter and John discovering the empty tomb. They see the linen clothes that had been used to wrap Jesus' body folded up on the floor and so they run back to tell the others. In the next story, Jesus reveals himself to Mary Magdalene and she immediately runs to the disciples to tell them that he is alive. With all of these developments, the disciples come together in a meeting, likely to pray and to attempt to make sense of all that had taken place and, lo and behold, Jesus mysteriously appears in their locked room and reveals himself to them.

But we learn in our text this morning that there was one notable absentee from that meeting: Thomas. We don't know why he missed that meeting but for whatever reason, Thomas missed this revealing of Christ. But his trusted friends witnessed Jesus, so surely Thomas can take them at their word, right? Thomas responds:

“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)

Thomas is not ready to simply take his friends at their word. He's not ready to place his faith in their experiences. Here is the portrait of a man who is simply unable to see past his skepticism.

I think it's interesting that he's so fixated on Jesus' wounds. He doesn't say: “I want to see his face and hear his voice,” or even: “I want to see him walk on water one more time.” No, he needs to see the wounds. It would seem that the crushing defeat of the cross was scarred into his mind. You can almost hear him say: “I saw his dead body! You're going to need more than visions and stories to persuade me. I won't go down this road with you again unless I see his broken and wounded body standing in front of me with my own eyes.”

Thomas had no interest in some mythological, sentimental idea of a risen Saviour. You other disciples can believe what you want, but unless I know that Jesus is alive I am done with this. The Apostle Paul said something very similar to the Corinthians:

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ 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 was just another teacher, then let's go home! Let's sleep in on Sundays and have as much

fun as we can because this life is all that there is! If Jesus stayed in the grave, then we're going to stay in the grave too. Christianity is a sham and Christians are the most pitiable people on the planet! If Christ never rose, then we are all victims of a horrible hoax.

I think this is the despair that Thomas was living in. He had left it all behind to follow the Messiah, and that Messiah had been murdered horrifically in front of a mocking crowd. He didn't want any more stories. He refused to be duped again.

But thankfully, the story doesn't end there. John wants us to see the skepticism of Thomas because it makes his confession all the more glorious:

2. The Great Confession

A week after Thomas' mini-argument with the other disciples they are gathered together again, only this time Thomas is present. I think there's something to be learned from that detail alone. Thomas was not yet ready to believe the claims of his peers, but he had enough faith to drag his despairing, doubting self out to their next meeting.

Perhaps there's some people here today who are in the same position as Thomas. You're looking around at all of these faith-filled people and you're thinking to yourself: "I just don't see it." But you recognize that these other folks see something and that's just enough to peak your curiosity. So, you drag yourself out, often wondering to yourself why you even bother.

I can't help but think that Thomas would have felt something like that in this meeting. At this point in time, everyone else in the room has seen the risen Christ. Everyone else has spoken with Jesus and they are filled with extraordinary faith. But Thomas is living on fumes. He's hanging on by a thread.

And it was in that vulnerable place that Jesus mercifully revealed himself to Thomas. In the same way that he had revealed himself to the other 10, Jesus mysteriously appeared in the locked room and he stood among them. Listen to the kindness of our Savior as he speaks with Thomas:

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)

If you're here today, and you feel like Thomas – like your hanging on by a thread and you know you need God to reveal Himself to you or you are going to crash and burn – if that's you this morning then I want to point you to the mercy of God. Jesus meets Thomas right in his doubt and despair and, in an instant, the man who had been overwhelmed with doubt became the man who overflowed with praise!

Thomas' confession in this text surpasses anything that any man had ever said about Christ up until this point. The man who didn't see what his friends saw was brought to a place where he saw more! If you haven't already, make sure that you highlight this verse:

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28 ESV)

This is a world-altering confession. Seeing the resurrected Jesus, Thomas knows two things beyond a shadow of a doubt.

First of all, he knows that **Jesus is his Lord!** He is the Messiah that the Old Testament pointed forward to. He is the Conquering King who will liberate his people. The disciples believed this before the crucifixion, but they had no category for a dead Messiah. When Jesus died on the cross, Thomas' view of Jesus as Lord would have taken a death blow. In his mind the Messiah was supposed to conquer, not suffer. But seeing Christ victorious over the grave confirmed beyond all doubts that Jesus is the Lord!

But what's truly remarkable about this proclamation was the second piece: My Lord **and my God!** The lightbulb had been turned on for Thomas. Jesus was dead, but now he is alive and he's miraculously appearing in locked rooms. Death cannot hold him! Ordinary men don't just walk out of their tombs. I can only imagine all of the thoughts that would have been rushing through his mind in this moment. He must have been remembering all of the times when Jesus had told the disciples that this would happen:

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31 ESV)

for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” (Mark 9:31 ESV)

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” (Mark 10:33-34 ESV)

None of that made any sense to Thomas before because people don't come back from the dead. But as he looked at the nail pierced hands and the pierced side of Jesus – as he looked at the man who conquered death – he finally knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is God!

I love what commentator Arthur Pink has to say about this turn of events:

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!... Just as unfaithful Peter was the one whom Christ bade “Feed my sheep,” just as the prime persecutor of the early church became the Apostle to the Gentiles, so the skeptical Thomas was the one to say “My Lord and my God.” Where sin abounded, grace *did* much more abound!²

I believe with all of my heart that God is capable of turning your skeptical heart into a heart that is on fire for him. I believe that there are people in this room today who deny Jesus and who deny the resurrection but who will be brought to a place where they will see the truth and proclaim the truth in a powerful way. Thomas didn't anticipate this when he walked into the room for that meeting. He was the downer. He was the skeptic. But at the end of that meeting everything had changed. And God can do it again.

This leads finally to:

3. An Invitation to the Skeptic

² Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1113.

John has set the table for us in a remarkable way. Do you see? He knows that there will be people who are skeptical. He knows that there will be people who will, like Thomas, say: “I need to see him with my own eyes.” So, the crowning and culminating confession of John’s gospel comes from the mouth of the most skeptical of all the disciples. And in verses 30-31 John gives us the purpose statement for the arrangement of his Gospel. He writes:

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 20:30-31 ESV)

Do you hear that, church? This text is for you. God is calling you to turn your attention to the resurrected Christ. He’s inviting you to see and to believe and to live!

This is not a call to blind faith. This is not: “Try this out for a while and see if it makes you feel good,” No. We are being invited to see these historical truths and to follow them to their undeniable conclusion! Jesus is the Son of God. He was born in Bethlehem. He fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy and obeyed God’s law perfectly. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and put on trial by Pontius Pilate. His back was scourged with 39 lashes. He was murdered on a cross between two thieves. He was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. And three days later that tomb was empty! Praise the Lord! As the Apostle Paul wrote:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 ESV)

Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians in the mid 50’s. Meaning, most of the people who he refers to here as having seen the risen Christ would have still been alive! You can’t lie about 500 people seeing something while those 500 people are still around to refute your claim. Pastor and theologian Tim Keller notes:

Paul refers to a body of 500 eye-witnesses who saw the risen Christ at once. You can’t write that in a document designed for public reading unless there really were surviving

witnesses whose testimony agreed and who could confirm what the author said... For a highly altered, fictionalized account of an event to take hold in the public imagination it is necessary that the eyewitnesses (and their children and grandchildren) all be long dead.³

It would have only taken one person to come forward and say: “This is nonsense! Jesus never appeared to us!” and the whole Christian faith would have crumbled down. But there was no recanting and the Christian faith exploded into the history books. Because it was true. Jesus Christ died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. Three days later he rose from the grave and appeared to many.

The invitation to faith is not an invitation to leave your brain at the door and to succumb to your emotions. Thomas wasn't swayed by the feelings of his peers. He wanted to SEE JESUS! He wanted to KNOW! He's not rebuked for that desire and, in fact, Jesus satisfies that desire.

So, John turns his attention to us and he says in effect: “I've written all of these events down so that **you** can be assured of the historicity of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So that, even though you were not in the room with us that night, you can hear even from the mouth of the greatest skeptic among us that Jesus is who he says he is.” He wrote his gospel in the hopes that Peter's prayer for us might be answered:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9 ESV)

Friends, I want nothing more than for you to place your trust in our resurrected Savior. I have been praying all week long, asking God to bring you to the place where you could cry out with Thomas: “My Lord and my God!”

No one else can make that decision for you. I can only imagine how desperately the other disciples were pleading with Thomas to believe their story. They were convinced, but he was still unsure. I can't remove your doubts this morning, but God can. He said:

³ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 105.

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

As we conclude, my prayer for each of us this morning is that the testimony of this gospel would enable us to place our trust in Jesus Christ. I pray we would see Jesus' nail pierced hands and his wounded side. He was pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquity. We sing those words:

It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished.
But this I know with all my heart: His wounds have paid my ransom.⁴

We need to see that again. And I pray that we would know that he is risen! Death and sin are conquered! The grave will not hold the believer because it no longer has a claim on the believer. Death has no claim on the believer because the wages of **sin** is death, but Jesus **took** our sin and he **paid** our wage and then he rose from the grave. The curse of sin is broken!

Have you ever tried paying for something with your visa but the machine takes the longest time to show you that message: "Transaction approved"? That's what the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection are like. Jesus has offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for three days we wait. And on that glorious third day he rose, and the sign read "Transaction approved". And now death has no claim on anyone who has placed their trust in Jesus Christ. These bodies won't stay in the ground! We will be raised with Christ and we will spend an eternity with God enjoying Him and all that He has made.

You might be wondering: "Why do you care if I believe?" This is why. I want you to have life! John wrote this Gospel so that you might hear and believe and LIVE! God made you to be in relationship with Him and He has made a way for you to be in that relationship. Jesus is the way! Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Stop trusting in yourself. Place your trust in the one who conquered the grave. And live. Look to Christ and say: "My Lord and my God!"

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

⁴ Stuart Townend, *How Deep The Father's Love For Us*.